Gender-Based Violence on

Women Informal Workers in India

Identifying Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Global Partnership Network

ActionAid Association (India)

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FOREWORD

The Gender Snapshot 2022 Report on the Progress of the Sustainable Development Goals outlined that at the current rate of progress, it will take 286 years to remove discriminatory laws and close prevailing gaps in legal protection for women and girls. Among these, fighting gender-based violence in all its forms remains a significant challenge for achieving gender equality. Not only does gender-based violence at the workplace negatively impact individuals, families, and organizations but it equally impacts their dignity, health, and well-being. In the first-ever global survey of people's experience of violence and harassment at work undertaken by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2022, it was found that women were particularly exposed to sexual violence and harassment at the workplace all across the globe. While these trends are worrisome, equally stressing is the invisibilization of women workers engaged in the ever-expanding informal economy across the globe, where they continue to work at low wages without any social security. The plight of these women workers is particularly distressing as they not only work in precarious conditions, but they also continue to face multiple forms of violence in their workplaces and beyond.

It is crucial to flag three trends which place this report at a crucial juncture- firstly, a large number of workers are employed in the informal sector, which various estimates have put around 90 percent, a majority of whom are women in India. While there is a persistent gender bias in the informal sector, we have witnessed decreased participation of women in the workforce. The adverse impact of the pandemic on informal workers is not debatable, yet it is not an exaggeration to state that women workers in particular have borne the brunt of this pandemic. Under these challenging circumstances, we have official data from NFHS-5 reporting that nearly 30 percent women in India in the age group of 15-49 years have experienced physical violence since the age of 15. These trends not only highlight the dismal condition of women workers but also make note of the widespread prevalence of gender-based violence at the workplace.

Women workers in the informal sector are engaged in a range of occupations, from domestic work to street vending, construction to agriculture, and various other informal enterprises. While their contributions are vital to the economy, their rights and well-being often go unrecognized and unaddressed. Building on ActionAid Association's past efforts and engagement with the informal workers, the present report is an attempt to shed light on the stark reality faced by informal women workers, revealing the alarming prevalence of gender-based violence in their work environments. The experiences documented in this report speak volumes about the various forms of violence experienced by these women, including physical, sexual, verbal, and psychological abuse. Further, the report examines the root causes and systemic factors that perpetuate such violence, including caste, class, and gender inequalities, lack of legal protection, and societal norms that perpetuate discrimination and marginalization.

The repercussions of gender-based violence extend far beyond the immediate physical and psychological harm inflicted on individuals. They have far-reaching consequences on the socioeconomic fabric of society. Violence against women not only perpetuates gender inequalities it also hampers women's ability to access decent work, economic opportunities, and essential services, further entrenching the cycle of poverty and exclusion.

This report also highlights the inspiring resilience and strength of the informal women workers who continue to fight against all odds to earn a livelihood and support their families. It underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and multi-faceted interventions for addressing gender-based violence, protecting the rights of informal women workers, and creating an enabling environment where they can thrive and contribute to sustainable development. It is informed by ActionAid Association's decades of experience of working with the most vulnerable and marginalized women.

To achieve meaningful change, it is imperative that we engage in collaborative efforts, involving government agencies, civil society organizations, trade unions, employers, and the wider community. By prioritizing the elimination of gender-based violence and ensuring the empowerment of informal women workers, we can lay the foundation for a more just and equitable society.

We hope that this report will be a catalyst for transformative action, inspiring all stakeholders to work collectively towards a future where gender-based violence is eradicated, and the rights and dignity of all women, including informal women workers, are fully respected and protected. Together, let us strive for a society where every woman can live and work free from violence and discrimination, where her contributions are recognized, valued, and celebrated. Only then can we truly claim to have achieved equality and justice for all..

Sandeep Chachra
Executive Director
ActionAid Association

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The report benefitted immensely from the discussions at the three state consultations held in Kolkata, Patna, and Delhi along with the national consultation. We would like to thank all the participants for their critical inputs and discussions in the state and national consultations that have enriched this study.

The report, in its present form, stands on the valuable contributions of Anannya Chatterjee, whose dedicated efforts shaped it into its current version.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

ActionAid Association and Gender Justice

ActionAid Association (AAA) has engaged with the question of gender through intensive work with women and girls from marginalized communities to further their rights through initiatives such as women's rights' awareness campaigns, forming women's collectives, awareness building on sexual and reproductive health, and advocacy for laws that affect these women. Its approach has always been to develop the agency of women from marginalized communities that promotes intersectional feminist movements for resolving the issues that they face and the injustices that they suffer. AAA's theory of change is based on the belief that social justice, gender equality, and poverty eradication can be achieved through purposeful conscientization of women regarding their unequal situation and enabling them to analyse the forces perpetrating this; collectivizing them in rights groups to take collective action that shifts power in favour of the marginalized; and influencing decision makers to ensure effective program implementation and policy in favour of women.

As women from marginalized communities increasingly take leadership in all their work across the country, AAA has also addressed the question of violence against women in its myriad forms such as domestic violence, acid attacks, witch hunting, sexual harassment, child marriages, and female genital mutilation. Over the years, it has scaled up its engagement with various state governments on the setting up of One Stop Crisis Centres (OSCC) to address issues of violence against women. Along with the OSCC – Gauravi - set up with the Government of Madhya Pradesh, ActionAid Association has also worked with the Government of Uttar Pradesh for setting up Asha Jyoti Kendras in 11 districts. Its allied organization, Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA) has continued its mission of asserting citizenship rights for Muslims, especially Muslim women through various activities and a campaign to codify the Muslim Personal Law. BMMA did a study on the regressive divorce practice of triple talaq and challenged efforts to ban women from entering a Sufi shrine in Mumbai.

In 2020-2022, ActionAid Association did a project to promote gender justice and legal literacy through engaging grassroots organizations and youth in Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand to prevent gender-based violence against women, which has supported around 240 survivors of gender-based violence and allowed young women from the community to become leaders in resisting and preventing violence against women and girls. Young women from Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand were trained as paralegals to accelerate community engagement with legal recourse against violence and be visible as change agents in their communities. The project identified gaps in the implementation of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) in Uttar Pradesh and sexual harassment of women at the workplace in Jharkhand that informs future advocacy attempts and policy recommendations.

ActionAid Association's campaign, Beti Zindabad, educates women on issues such as violence against women, child marriages, declining girl child ratio, and girl-child trafficking all aimed at changing mindsets.

Our work in rural areas is centred on building alternatives as well as contributing to biodiversity in the form of climate resistant sustainable farming (CRSA). In the last five years, 50,000 farmers — 51 percent of whom were women — across 15 states have been trained in CRSA practices, improving productivity, food security, nutrition, and increasing their incomes. Efforts at bringing women farmers to the forefront and building collectives for farming and non-farm based livelihoods has also been a major focus.

Alongside its work on gender and sexual violence, ActionAid Association has consistently highlighted how the non-recognition of the disproportionately higher burden of care work on women within households remains a significant barrier to their access to education and decent livelihood opportunities, raising this issue through various projects. ActionAid Association has been running a national campaign to create awareness on the issue of the unpaid and care work burden on women and making them aware of their

rights to get equal opportunities. For this, we are promoting several strategies for recognition, redistribution, and reduction of the unpaid and care work burden on women. An important strategy is sensitizing men and boys within households and communities to recognize the work of girls and women, and to ensure equal opportunities by encouraging the fair sharing of responsibilities.

In marginalized settlements women also have to spend a lot of time in fetching water, accessing community toilets, and taking care of children; it is assumed that public provisioning of facilities lessen their responsibilities and save time. We have been advocating for better provisioning of what is called Gender Responsive Public Services.

ActionAid Association did research titled, 'Witch Branding in India – A Study of Indigenous and Rural Societies,' on the various forms of violence experienced by indigenous and rural women in five states in India due to the patriarchal and superstitious practice of witch branding.

ActionAid Association's pursuit of gender related issues is inspired by a feminist response that focuses on the oppressed and the excluded on the lines of caste, class, gender, and other dimensions of discrimination. Women, migrant workers, and informal workers are highly prioritized in the work, which aims to amplify their voices and strengthen their agency by placing their demands in front of government agencies and strengthening their groups. ActionAid Association has been awarded the, 'Assertion of Women's and Girls Rights as Human Rights,' by CauseBecause as the most promising social program to complement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Women and the World of Work

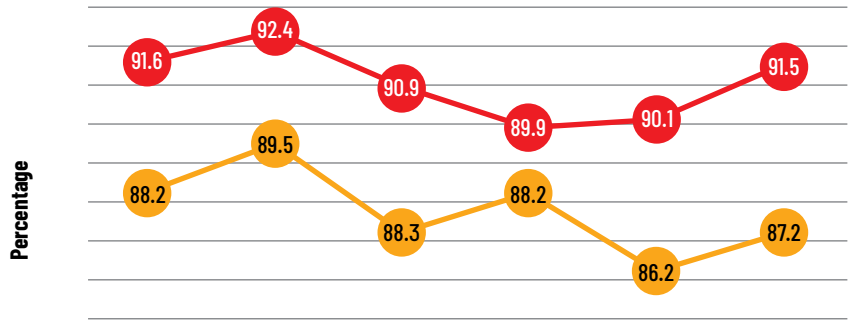
Women's association with the labour market is fraught with complexities, disadvantages, and barriers generated by a socio-political and hierarchical gendered structure. While women in all societies, more so in developing nations, are involved in some form of labour, much of their (re)productive labour is invisibilized in terms of the market dominant criteria of what constitutes 'work.' Cultural norms and social mandates of catering to the domestic sphere significantly inhibit women's participation in the labour force. The World Bank (2022) reported rather deplorable numbers of women engaged in paid work: a mere 52.4 percent against 80 percent men's participation in the labour market. The strict division of productive versus reproductive labour that leads to the non-recognition of the latter as well as the additional responsibilities of care and reproductive work in the household and family, create complex conditions for women's participation in the labour force, and therefore a simplistic definition and estimate of women's labour force participation will not serve the purpose of understanding the magnitude of women's labour in the market and beyond it. The concept of workforce participation of women, thus, is qualitatively different from that of men (Ghosh, 2004), and requires a thorough understanding of the socio-political as well as the socioeconomic factors in the country at the macro, micro, and household levels (Chaudhary and Verick, 2014).

Albeit considerably less, women's global labour force participation has remained stable at around 52 percent for the last three decades (ILO). India, however, paints a different picture. The Periodic Labour Force Survey report (2021-2022) reported a stagnation, in fact a dip, in women's labour force participation from 2020-2021 (25.1 percent) to 2021-2022 (24.8 percent) among all ages. It is significant that the labour force participation in urban areas was dismally low at 18.8 percent in 2021-2022, while rural women's labour force participation was 27.2 percent (PLFS, 2021-2022).

What is of particular importance is the fact that when women engage in paid work, they are concentrated in labour intensive but less skilled jobs and are grossly paid less that largely aligns with the culturally dominant notions of femininity and feminine vocations. India reports a high consolidation of economically active women in the informal sector engaging in low skilled and low paid jobs such as street vending, domestic work, and home-based work; ILO reports that 91.6 percent of employed women are engaged in the informal sector. (Figure 1.1)

The informal sector is characterized by the lack of legal and social protection and employment benefits such as paid annual and sick leave, precisely because of the nature of work being casual, or for a short duration, or within private enterprises or households (ILO, 2020). Jayati Ghosh (2004) notes the argument about how the informality and casual nature of the work allows most of the women who are not educated

Figure 1.1 Proportion of Informal Employment in Total Employment by Sex (Percentage)



	2021	2020	2019	2018	2012	2010
Male	88.2	89.5	88.3	88.2	86.2	87.2
Female	91.6	92.4	90.9	89.9	90.1	91.5

Year

enough to adjust such paid work with domestic labour demands, hence the larger concentration of employed women in the informal sector. Chen (2001) notes the other side of the argument that states that women's time and mobility are constrained by social and cultural norms that assign the responsibility for social reproduction to women and discourage investment in women's education and training. However, it is the informal structure of the work that marginalizes these women further, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of their employers and middlemen. This creates a system of precarity that exposes women in the informal sector to different forms of discrimination, exploitation, and most often, gender-based violence, along the lines of caste, class, religion, and marital status.

Gender-based violence is understood as a serious threat to the life and integrity of its victim. While not limited to women and girls, WHO reported that, on average, 736 million women aged 15 years and above had experienced gender-based violence (GBV) in the form of sexual assault from an intimate partner or a non-partner (WHO, 2018). In India, crime against women (understood as a sub-category under GBV) saw an increase of 15.3 percent in 2021 from the previous year (NCRB, 2021). At the workplace, violence and harassment along the lines of gender has attracted social, political as well as legal attention, creating much needed legislative changes that aim to protect women from gender-based violence. Despite the legal provisions available in the existing legislation to protect women workers from gender-based violence at the workplace, informal women workers face various challenges due to the precarity of the informal economy and hence are particularly vulnerable to different forms of violence like physical, verbal, psychological, sexual abuse, economic deprivation, and prohibition on access to resources (WEIGO, 2018). The heterogeneity of the informal sector, involving both the public and the private space, alongside a diverse set of perpetrators in the form of employers and agents, make the violence complex and difficult to grasp simplistically.

There is no official data on the percentage of informal women workers in India who have faced gender-based violence in the workplace. However, it is estimated that a significant proportion of women in the informal sector, including domestic workers and street vendors, experience violence and harassment at the workplace. The COVID-19 pandemic clearly brought to light the miserable situation of women in the informal economy. While many women were left without any livelihood during the lockdown, many others experienced an increased vulnerability to different forms of violence (ActionAid Association, 2020; United Nations, 2020). This 'shadow' pandemic highlighted how an upsurge in cases of gender-based violence against women is one of the persistent barriers in women's participation in the formal economy. Research also suggests that gender-based violence not only acts as a barrier for women to participate in formal working spaces but it also has a severe negative impact on their physical as well as psychological health (ILO, 2018).

Further, a study by Oxfam India found that 77 percent of the female street vendors in India had experienced some form of sexual harassment while working. A study titled "Eliminating Violence Against Women at Work" reported that over 60% of women in Bangalore's garment factories have been intimidated or threatened with violence, and between 40-50% have experienced humiliation and verbal abuse. (Sisters for Change, 2016) Another study found that over 29% of women domestic workers reported sexual harassment at work,

with over 65.6 per cent respondents stating stalking as the most common one (Indian Express, 2018). These statistics indicate that the issue of gender-based violence against women in the informal sector in India is widespread and requires urgent action.

Background to this Study

The Global Partnership Network-funded project, 'Gender-Based Violence on Women Workers in the Informal Sector of India: Identifying Barriers and Mitigation Strategies,' focused on gender-based violence (GBV) prevalent among women working in different sectors of the informal economy in three states in India --- home-based workers in Delhi, domestic workers in West Bengal, and agricultural workers in Bihar. While limited progress has been made to identify various forms of violence experienced by women living at the margins and working in the informal sector, this study envisages filling this gap by highlighting the different forms of violence that affect informal women workers on a day-to-day basis.

Objectives of the Study

For identifying the barriers and mitigation strategies against gender-based violence against informal women workers, this project addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the various forms of gender-based violence faced by informal women workers in the workplace, as well as in women's access to rights and protection?

2. How do civic actors, organizations, and movements help contribute to changing the norms that underpin violence in all its forms against women in the workplace?

3. What are the strategies, approaches, laws, and policies that have proven effective in changing unequal gendered norms, attitudes, and behaviours regarding violence against women in the workplace?

Methodology

This project builds its methodological framework on a feminist position that locates gender-based violence on the intersection of economical inequalities and patriarchal subordination of women. The basic understanding that underscores the project is that gender inequalities are structured in the organization of social relations, which create the possibilities for violence to occur. The feminist standpoint that the project takes adopts a Marxian epistemological tool that looks at women workers' material realities as dictated by the socioeconomic relations in the informal economy and the patriarchal, male-dominant structure of the family and household, and how oppression plays out in multiple layers along the lines of class, caste, and gender, and looking at subordination of women and their vulnerabilities to violence at the critical juncture of productive and reproductive labour located specifically within the context of the rise of globalization and neo-liberalism.

The methodological framework also underscores the importance of the subjective experiences of the participants as women and as workers in the knowledge production of gender-based violence and centres the project around their lived realities of experiencing and mitigating the everyday violence of and within the informal sector. Through a qualitative approach, the project seeks to amplify the voices of women and to understand and highlight the different forms of violence as experienced by them through their own vocabularies and grammar of everyday life. The feminist praxis adopted in the project insists on the plurality of women's voices and experiences and therefore attempts to understand gender-based violence in the informal economy through a plural, narrative-based lens. For this, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used as a part of the feminist methodological framework to grasp the nuances of a multitude of voices that the women workers presented of their negotiations of the domestic and the public spaces. Such a commitment to insisting on a collaborative knowledge production along with the participants of the study, as well as towards an intersectional feminist politics creates necessary feminist methodological interventions in understanding violence as a manifestation of different forms of oppression and subordination that these women face due to their socio-political locations.

Sample Selection and Rationale

Using an ethnographic approach, the study investigated the life histories of women working in three different sections of the informal sector: domestic workers, home-based workers, and farm workers or migrant workers in the states of Delhi, West Bengal, and Bihar respectively. The study further engaged with myriad responses from women survivors, representatives from the community, CSOs, CBOs, women's collectives, and traditional social organizations, Government officials, employers in the informal sector, policymakers, and local authorities were also engaged with to capture the essence of the 'everyday' violence against women and the gendered spaces in which this violence happens.

The study used various tools such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to highlight the experiences of violence on the self in different public and private spaces and at distinct stages in the women's lives. One of the key methodological interventions of the study was that it attempted to identify not only the 'kind' of violence experienced but also how and when 'violence' was located along the registers of violation of one's autonomy, and was therefore acknowledged as violence, or it was simply invisibilized through a normalization of its occurrence.

Data Collection

Data was collected primarily through FGDs and interviews with women domestic workers in Kolkata, West Bengal; agricultural workers in Gaya, Bihar; and home-based workers in Madanpur Khadar, Delhi. In Kolkata, the study was conducted with the support of Pashchimbanga Griha Paricharika Samiti (PGPS) which included 15 in-depth interviews and five focus group discussions at multiple locations in South Kolkata. PGPS is a Kolkata-based women's collective that was granted the trade union certificate by the Bengal government in 2018. PGPS was set up in 2015 with support from Sristy for Human Society and the ActionAid Association West Bengal Office. Its demands include a minimum hourly wage, four days off work each month, paid maternity leave, pension, proper employment contracts, a welfare board, and crèches for children. Currently, PGPS is the only domestic workers' collective in West Bengal that has been recognized as a trade union by the government. However, various other women's collectives are working to organize domestic workers while striving for union status.

For informal women workers engaged in the agriculture sector, focus group discussions and interviews were conducted in five villages in Fathepur block near Gaya (Bihar). The focus group discussions were attended by nearly 165 women. In Delhi, the data for the study was collected through 12 in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion in Madanpur Khadar area with support from EFRAH, which is working with home-based workers to collectivize them. Additionally, key interviews were conducted with ActionAid Association staff and other individuals working with women informal workers. Key interviews were also conducted with members of the local committees who provided crucial insights into the working of the local committees at the district level.

National and State Consultations

In a follow-up to the study, three state consultations were organized in Kolkata, Patna, and Delhi to share the findings of the study and deliberate on the issues of other informal women workers who were not part of the study due to methodological limitations. These state consultations were attended by community representatives, representatives from various NGOs, CSOs, women's collectives, and government officials. In the follow-up to the state consultations held in each state, a national consultation was organized in New Delhi to share the findings of the study and bring together relevant stakeholders to discuss and deliberate on the issue of gender-based violence against informal women workers and to find ways to tackle it at the community and institutional levels.

The national consultation had representation from the community representatives of domestic workers, home-based workers, construction workers, agricultural workers, street vendors, sanitation workers, and rag pickers; representatives from the National Human Rights Commission; representatives from the United Nations Population Fund India, Jagori, FXB India Suraksha; Along with activists and key individuals working on gender-based violence against informal women workers. The key recommendations are attached in Annexure 1 and the press release for the event in Annexure 2.

Limitations of the Study

While the methodology of this study did not hinge on a large sample size, in the future researchers could consider conducting a similar study using a larger sample size. During some interviews and focus group discussions, while native speakers from the ActionAid Association staff were present, some experiences may have been lost in translation.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Understanding Gender-based Violence against Women

The definition and understanding of gender-based violence has been dynamic and has evolved over time. UNHCR (2020), defines gender-based violence as, 'harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender.' The term GBV has evolved as a replacement for definitions that focused exclusively on (male) violence against women. Instead, GBV refers to violence related to gender-based social expectations/ positions and deviating from them. The term includes all acts of violence rooted in a patriarchal ideology that aims to maintain power for heterosexual men. Some scholars have criticized the use of GBV as it suggests — contrary to contemporary feminist understandings — that violence is not necessarily gendered (Leach and Humphreys, 2007: 108). However, as GBV is widely used in the international development community this report also uses this term, albeit critically and keeping in mind its drawbacks.

Violence against women (VAW) is generally seen a sub-category in GBV. The 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defined it as, 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life' (UN, 1993). According to the Declaration such violence includes but is not limited to physical, sexual, and psychological violence within the household, dowry related violence, violence related to other pernicious traditional practices, non-spousal and exploitation related violence, violence in the community, at work and in educational institutions, trafficking, and violence 'perpetuated' or condoned by the State (UN, 1993). The Fourth World Conference on Women held in 1995 added three more categories of violence to this list: forced sterilization and abortions, female infanticide and prenatal sex selection, and the violation of women's human rights in contexts of armed conflict (UN Women, 1995). According to UNHCR violence against women can, 'include sexual, physical, mental and economic harm inflicted in public or private' (UNCHR, 2020). In the Indian context, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) includes four categories of violence in its ambit: physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and emotional abuse, and economic abuse (PWDVA, 2005). While keeping these various definitions in mind this study also relies on data emerging from primary research for constructing its definition of VAW.

Feminist scholars have argued that GBV against women is rooted in the interaction of personal and state-structural factors. The former refers to physical violence enacted by an identifiable perpetrator while the latter is 'institutional and discursive' (Flessenkämper, 2020: 24). Contemporary scholars also strive to study GBV through an intersectional lens that recognizes the 'interlocking systems of oppression' which frame women's experiences (Collins, 2022). This approach recognizes that categories of social differences such as religion, ethnicity, caste, class, and sexual orientation are crucial for understanding how GBV operates and affects different women. In the Introduction to *Gender and Violence in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives: Situating India,* historian Jyoti Atwal identifies several features that structure GBV against women in the Indian context such as the linking of women with community honour, 'politics of class and space' and furor against inter-caste and other deviant relationships (Atwal, 2020: 5). Underlying these different instances of violence is the social perception of the female body as a representative of 'group, community or nation' (Flessenkämper, 2020: 31).

Violence against women, thus, must be understood as an instrument used for structuring relations not only between genders but also 'between religious and ethnic groups, between majority and minority communities, between castes and social strata [and] between one's "own" and a "foreign" culture.'

National surveys indicate that a large proportion of Indian women experience GBV. According to NFHS-5 (2019-2020) nearly one-third of Indian women between 18-49 years have experienced physical or sexual violence. The survey showed that factors like geographical location, schooling, and prosperity influence vulnerability to GBV (NFHS-5), indicating the relationship between socioeconomic status and GBV. Smaller

studies also highlight the caste dimension of GBV. For example, a 2006 study of 500 Dalit women across four states revealed that more than half the participants had faced some form of GBV; 54 percent had been physically assaulted, 46 percent had been sexually harassed; 43 percent had faced domestic violence; 23 percent had been raped; and 62 percent had been verbally abused. (Irudayam, 2006)

Gender-Based Violence in the Informal Workplace

ILO uses the term informal economy to refer to, 'all economic activities by workers and economic units that are – in law or in practice– not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements' (ILO, 2017b: 5). Informal employment takes many forms and includes employment in unregistered establishments and households, self-employment, informal employment in formal (registered) settings, and 'unpaid contributory family work'(ILO, 2017b: 6). Workers in informal settings, either in law or practice, are not covered by national labour legislation and lack access to employment benefits or social protection such as paid leave, severance pay, and advance notice before dismissal. Informal workers often receive low renumeration, lack organization, work in poor or unsafe conditions and lack representation in policymaking (ILO, 2017a). While understanding the informal workplace, this report draws on ILO's conception of the 'world of work' which includes not just the place of work but also related contexts like travelling to work and public spaces that surround the place of work (ILO, 2011: 17).

In analysing GBV's role in the informal workplace this report uses ILO's concept of the 'world of work' which recognizes that GBV takes place not only in the workplace but also in related settings like public transport to the place of work.

While the last few decades have seen a steady rise in the female composition of the labour force, in the developing world most women have been absorbed in the informal sector (Kabeer, 2010: 55). Sixty percent or more women in developing countries (apart from North Africa) are employed in non-agricultural informal work. In these regions informal work makes up a greater proportion of women's non-agricultural labour than men's (Chen et al., 2004). In India up to 91 percent of women with paid jobs work in the informal sector (IWWAGE, 2021). In the informal sector women workers are more vulnerable to certain kinds of discrimination. Gender pay gaps between women and men are larger in the informal sector than in the formal sector. Women dominated sectors tend to pay lower renumerations than male dominated ones, and even within the same sector, the gendered division of tasks ensures that women make less money.

For example, in the case of domestic work in India, female domestic workers are usually employed in caregiving and cleaning services while male domestic workers tend to work in better paid positions as drivers and security guards (IWWAGE, 2021). Women are also likely to face different kinds of pressures in relation to the locational aspect of their livelihood activities. Informal work usually involves either travelling through or working in open spaces such as construction sites, markets, or apartment complexes where there is greater threat of harassment and sexual violence (Kabeer, 2010: 118). Further, certain kind of informal work such as domestic work which is carried out in private, closed spaces puts women at greater risk of GBV (UN Women, 2020). While there are no large scale surveys of the rates of GBV in the Indian informal economy, smaller sector-specific studies and anecdotal evidence indicate high rates of GBV against women. A working paper by the Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF1, 2018: 14), which collected data from 291 domestic workers in Faridabad, Gurugram, and south Delhi found that 29 percent of the respondents admitted to facing sexual harassment at the workplace, while 40 percent recognized all forms of sexual harassment identified in the survey, indicating that many women faced such harassment but might be unwilling to admit it.

An Oxfam report on GBV in tea plantations in Assam found that women workers faced various kinds of GBV including stalking, lewd comments, demands for sexual favours, and physical harassment (Oxfam, 2021: 39). Informal workplaces in the agricultural sector are usually governed by strict caste and gender hierarchies with male supervisors and female labourers. In such settings women are often forced to provide sexual favours to safeguard their jobs and access their salaries. A qualitative study by the Human Rights Watch suggests that part time anganwadi and ASHA workers employed by the Indian government face significant sexual harassment. Respondents revealed that they were harassed by their male colleagues and other men in places of work (HRW, 2020). Insecure employment, a lack of organization, and poor access to redressal mechanisms mean that women working in informal settings are generally more vulnerable to GBV than

those working in the formal sector. Based on this understanding this project engaged with informal women workers to understand the various aspects of gender-based violence and the ways to tackle it.

Caste and Class

The caste system consists of a 'series of hereditary groups or jatis' organized by a hierarchy based on ritual status (Chakravarti, 2003). Class relationships are also closely related to caste such that upper castes possess both social and economic capital while lower castes lack social privileges as well as material resources. Due to intersecting hierarchies of caste, class, and gender, Dalit Bahujan women are often triply marginalized as they face 'economic marginalisation, caste discrimination and gender subordination' (Rao, 2015: 411).

Feminist scholar Uma Chakravarti in her work, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* (2003) uses the term 'Brahmanical Patriarchy' to allude to the intersection of gender, caste, and class in Indian history and society. She argues that women's subordination in Indian society is not solely the result of patriarchal attitudes but is also deeply intertwined with the hierarchical caste system. Chakravarti argues that this system of power relations has resulted in the subordination and marginalization of women in Indian society. She notes, 'The system of Brahmanical patriarchy is such that women are relegated to a status of inferiority in every sphere of life. Women's roles and responsibilities are primarily confined to the home, where they are expected to perform domestic duties and be obedient to their male kin. The Brahmanical norms and values are used to legitimize the subordination of women, and to impose restrictions on their mobility and freedom' (Chakravarti, 2003) Further, Chakravarti argues that the notions of 'purity' and 'pollution' are used for justifying the oppression of women and lower castes in Indian society and points out that due to the broad congruence of caste and class, poor Dalit women are the most vulnerable to various kinds of exploitation, 'including sexual exploitation at the hands of upper caste men' (Chakravarti, 2003: 152).

Sexual access to the bodies of lower caste/ class women has long been understood as a caste privilege for upper caste men. Dalit women's bodies are seen as 'sexual property whose enjoyment falls into an economy of desire and violation at odds with the licit economies that maintain caste purity through marriage' (Rao, 2015). Gender-based violence against Dalit Bahujan women '[demonstrates] as well as [reproduces]' the caste stratification in Indian society (Chakravarti, 2003: 181). Dalit women's bodies are seen as 'collectively mute and capable of bearing penetration . . . by upper class/caste hegemony without the intervening discourse of desire,' (Chakravarti, 2003: 148). Sexual violence against Dalit women, therefore, must be understood as 'not simply an issue of criminal behaviour by individual perpetrators, but rather a structural feature of the caste system. The sexual violence that Dalit women experience is a form of violence that is directed at the entire community, aimed at maintaining their social subordination and exclusion' (Kannabiran, 1996). Sexual control over women is also a means by which the 'manhood' of a particular caste is established (Kannabiran and Kannabiran, 1991). Dalit communities try to regulate and control Dalit women's sexuality to signal the manliness or honour of their caste group. Accordingly upper caste men try to emasculate or humiliate lower caste groups by attacking their women. Sexual violence by upper castes against Dalit women is often in retaliation for the violation of caste codes by Dalit communities, including but not limited to gendered codes. Thus, GBV against Dalit women is propagated by Dalit and upper caste men, as both communities attempt to control Dalit women's agency and sexuality to structure the relationship between caste groups.

Due to the link between caste, economic status, and land ownership, most of the agricultural land in India is owned by non-SCs/STs. The agricultural census of 2015-2016 showed that Dalits owned only 9 percent of cultivable land. Most Dalit workers in agriculture work as labourers (on others' land) rather than as cultivators (on their own land). Across India, 71 percent Dalit farmers work as agricultural labourers compared to 41 percent non-SC/ST farmers. In Bihar, Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala nearly all the Dalit farmers (above 90 percent) work as agricultural labourers (Census, 2011). The India Exclusion Report (2013-2014) states that there was a, 'preponderance of Dalits in casual labour,' with 59 percent of SCs working as agricultural and non-agricultural labourers in rural areas in 2009-2010. It states how such exclusionary practices of caste condemn Dalit and Adivasi communities to a path towards destitution, in which women fare the worst being oppressed along the lines of caste, class, and gender. Another report by the Navsarjan Trust (India), FEDO (Nepal) and the International Dalit Solidarity Network (2013), observed how rural Dalit women had very limited access to land and other vital resources such as water and sanitation and lacked employment options more so than their male counterparts. A study by ActionAid Association (2019) on domestic workers in Punjab looked at how Dalit women were forced into

bonded labour to clear their debt as they engaged in domestic work in their houses, sometimes for free. Caste dominance over ownership of land means that in the agricultural sector upper caste men are usually in positions of power — as landlords, middlemen, and foremen — while lower caste women work under their control, leading to caste and gender violence being committed with impunity. The report states that, 'Dalit women are met with physical, verbal and sexual violence from the landlords when they try to assert their economic right to wages or land and their right to sexual integrity'.

A Punjabi university study (which collected data from 1,071 rural Dalit households), found that 5 percent women respondents admitted to facing sexual exploitation while performing agricultural labour, while 70 percent refused to answer questions about sexual harassment. The primary author of the study, Gian Singh commented, 'due to social [taboos] and insecurity of losing work,' women are uncomfortable with 'reporting the harassment' *(Tribune, 2019)*. Anecdotal evidence and interviews indicate that this problem is widespread in the agricultural sector. Activists in rural Maharashtra allege that women workers in the sugarcane fields are routinely raped and harassed by middlemen and landlords (Reuters, 2016).

Tea plantation workers in Assam who usually hail from a tribal (Adivasi) background also face rampant sexual harassment from superiors and managers, including the threat of sex trafficking (Martha Farrell Foundation, 2018). Domestic work is another area in the informal sector that follows a caste-based division of work. Several studies have been done on the vulnerability of Dalit women working as domestic workers to sexual and gender-based violence. A Bengaluru-based study stated that women from Scheduled Castes constituted over 89 percent and another study in the same city estimated about 75 percent of the domestic workers, followed by 15 percent OBCs, 8 percent Scheduled Tribes with and upper castes occupying the remaining 2 percent of the workforce. (Chigateri, 2016).

Domestic work related to food preparation is usually performed by higher castes while work related to cleaning, sanitation, and refuse removal is done by Dalit castes such as Balmikis (Raghuram, 2001, 607). In certain regions female migrant labourers from Adivasi communities make up a majority of the domestic workers. In Patna most domestic workers come from Santhal, Munda, Oraon, and Khadia tribes (Gothoskar, 2013 67). The private nature of the workplace, lack of other, safer job opportunities, and the 'lack of strong legal mechanisms' means that domestic workers not only face GBV from their employers but are often forced to remain silent about it. A large number of testimonials by domestic workers give evidence to this. (MFF2) A large number of SC/ST women in low paid and insecure informal workplaces, who deal with traditional notions about the sexual availability of lower caste women, are extremely vulnerable to Gender-Based Violence by men who occupy relatively powerful positions in the informal work hierarchy.

Sector Specific Gender-Based Violence

Domestic Workers

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) (2018-2019), India had roughly 4.2 million domestic workers. The Government of India's Code defines domestic work as activities that include but are not limited to, 'cooking or a part of it, washing clothes or utensils, cleaning or dusting of the house, driving, gardening, caring/nursing of the children/sick/old/men- tally challenged or disabled persons.' Often, domestic workers perform a number of these tasks and work in more than one household. Domestic workers can be live-in or live-out workers. Live-out workers can be part-time and work at, 'different places or homes for definite hours per day,' or full-time and 'work in a single house for a fixed number of hours per day before returning home' (Najar and Zargar, 2020 10). Live-in workers live in the employers' households and are compensated in the form of accommodation, food, and wages. Both live-out and live-in domestic workers could have secured the positions on their own or be contracted through domestic service agencies.

Not only are most of the domestic workers women, a quarter of working women in India work in the domestic sector (Shroff, 2019). Domestic workers are viewed as low status, unskilled employees and tend to belong to economically and socially vulnerable classes. The migrant status of many domestic workers also increases their vulnerability to GBV and other forms of discrimination (Hobden, 2010). Uneducated women from poor/ socially disadvantaged backgrounds tend to enter this sector as they have few other marketable skills and face discrimination due to their caste, class, and gender. Since cleaning, cooking, childcare, and looking after the elderly are generally viewed as female work, women do not have to compete with men to get jobs in the domestic work sector.

Despite being a longstanding and large workforce, domestic workers have been overlooked by institutional mechanisms and labour movements. In comparison to other wage workers, they have lower wages, fewer benefits, and worse access to institutional protection. A report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2014 titled, *Domestic Work and the Invisible Worker in Tamil Nadu, India,* looked at how even though domestic work is an important source of employment for women in Tamil Nadu, domestic workers are often not recognized as workers under existing labour laws. This lack of recognition means that domestic workers do not have access to the same protection and benefits as other formal sector workers, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The study found that many domestic workers in Tamil Nadu worked long hours without adequate compensation or benefits, and that they were often subjected to verbal and physical abuse by their employers. Another report titled, *Domestic Workers in India: A Study of Law and Practice* by the National Law School of India University (2010), found that domestic workers were largely excluded from labour laws and other forms of legal protection, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The study highlighted the need for a comprehensive legal framework to protect the rights of domestic workers in India. Further, domestic work usually occurs in 'private, invisible places' that are hard to scrutinize and are shielded from public attention (Vijaylakshmi et al., 2022).

Further, most parts of India have an abundant supply of domestic labour which means it is difficult for domestic workers to bargain for better wages or working conditions. Workers who demand better treatment face the threat of being fired because others will be willing to replace them. Domestic work often occurs in harsh and dehumanizing conditions and workers, have no guaranteed weekly day of rest, no access to social security, maternity benefits, pension, provident fund or healthcare. (MFF1)

A 2012 survey by Oxfam India and the Social and Rural Research Institute found that daily wage labourers, domestic workers, and women working in small-scale manufacturing units were the groups worst affected by sexual harassment in the workplace (Oxfam, 2012). Domestic workers in India are also subject to social norms that associate sexual harassment with shame and encourage a culture of silence around the issue. A study by Nivedita Narain and Nilanjana Roy (2015) states, 'domestic workers in India are a particularly vulnerable group who face a wide range of abuses, including physical abuse, verbal abuse, and sexual harassment. They are often forced to work long hours without breaks, are paid less than the minimum wage, and are denied basic amenities such as proper food and sleeping arrangements'. Recent studies in South Asia have highlighted the need to treat sexual harassment as a culture specific issue and take into account the culture of shame and silence that discourages women from reporting harassment at the workplace (Adikaram, 2016). Researchers have further identified some of the unique contexts that frame the experiences of working women's sexual harassment in the global South. Studies on the organized sector show that a patriarchal culture, economic status, family pressures, the stigma associated with speaking up, and a lack of knowledge about redressal mechanisms influence how women perceive and respond to sexual harassment (Mukherjee and Bird, 2016). In the case of domestic work, fear of losing their jobs, stigma associated with sexual harassment, lack of redressal mechanisms, and indifference from 'policy makers, employers and trade unions' invisibilizes the extent to which GBV is prevalent in the domestic work sector. Due to the 'private' and 'subservient' nature of domestic work, employers are also unwilling to allow the organization and regulation of this sphere (Gothoskar, 2013 68). A survey conducted in India, Thailand, Sweden, and Italy found that most surveyed employers were against domestic workers having a formal contract, minimum wage, fixed working hours, and the freedom to organize (Anderson and Davidson, 2003). Studies have also shown that domestic workers themselves are sometimes reluctant to formalize their relationship with their employers. Many believe that an informal relationship provides greater flexibility to deal with 'unexpected demands' at home or to ask for loans or advance pay.

While examining GBV in the domestic work sector it is important to conceptualize the workplace expansively. A domestic worker's workplace includes not only the buildings, houses, and apartment complexes that she works in but also the streets and transportation she uses to commute between the workplaces or between her home and the workplace(s). All the spaces inhabited by a domestic worker from the time she 'leaves her own house for work till the time she comes back from work' are part of her workplace (MFF1). Domestic workers' duties also require them to enter and navigate public spaces — they often go to markets to buy groceries and supplies for their employers, they go to parks with children under their care, and they accompany employers on holidays/to events to take care of their children (MFF1). Studies show that domestic workers are vulnerable to harassment from their employers and people visiting the workplace and during travel to work (Mukherjee and Bird, 2016). Domestic workers can experience GBV in various work contexts beyond the employer's household and all of these must be considered while studying this issue.

Domestic workers experience several forms of GBV including verbal, non-verbal, visual, and physical harassment. Verbal harassment includes lewd or sexist comments, requests for sexual favours, and compliments of a sexual nature. Non-verbal harassment may include leering, lewd gestures, and inappropriate staring. Physical harassment includes touching without consent, groping, and rape. Visual harassment may include sending domestic workers sexual messages, content, or videos on messaging platforms or watching such content in their presence (MFF1). Research has also indicated that certain categories of domestic workers may be more vulnerable to GBV than others. A study on domestic workers in Karnataka concluded that live-in workers were the 'most likely to be in bonded labour situations, [. . .] subject to trafficking and vulnerable to sexual abuse'. Other characteristics like marital status and age may also play a role in vulnerability to GBV. Unmarried or single domestic workers who are not under the 'protection of men' can be perceived as freer and available and may experience more harassment than married workers (Kamal and Tariq, 1997). Studies have also suggested that older women may be less accepting of harassment and may respond in more confrontational ways (Reilly et al., 1982). As mentioned earlier, domestic workers' experiences of GBV are also influenced by the culture of silence that surrounds this issue. A 2022 study conducted in Ahmedabad and Pune by researchers from IIM Ahmedabad examined the ways in which domestic workers responded to GBV. The study divided the responses to harassment into four categories: avoidance or denial, social coping (changing or quitting the job), verbal or physical confrontation, and advocacy seeking (complaining to neighbours, family, or the police). The study found that women were likely to prefer confrontation and advocacy seeking in cases where they had a supportive female supervisor or a supportive family. This indicates that the culture of silence can be mitigated by supportive professional and familial relationships. The study also found that domestic workers were likely to choose avoidance and coping as strategies if their only support network was other working women of the neighbourhood. Additionally, the severity of the harassment experienced, as well as the possession of evidence influenced the response strategy.

In cases of severe harassment such as being threatened for sexual favours or being raped, women chose coping as a strategy. There seems to be a greater level of shame/guilt associated with severe sexual harassment, which prevents women who experience it from seeking support. On the other hand, women are likely to seek redressal including reporting it to the police when they have hard evidence of the harassment, for example when they are harassed through texts/ WhatsApp. While there are several studies on GBV in the domestic work sector, most studies ignore how the caste and religious backgrounds of the domestic workers and their employers structure experiences of GBV. The present study overcomes this lacuna by investigating how the intersection of caste, gender, and religion influence GBV in the domestic work sector.

2.4.2. Home-Based Workers

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines home work in its Home Work Convention (No. 177) and Recommendation (No. 184) of 1996 as work performed by an individual in their own home or another location of their choosing, excluding the employer's workplace. This work is carried out in exchange for payment and involves producing a product or providing a service as specified by the employer, regardless of who supplies the necessary tools, materials, or other resources (Convention No. 177, Article 1). However, this definition does not apply to individuals who have sufficient autonomy and financial independence to be classified as self-employed under national laws, regulations, or court rulings. Additionally, employees who occasionally work from home instead of their usual workplace are not considered homeworkers under the Convention. (ILO, 2021)

HBWs participates in various industries and are integrated into both domestic and global supply chains. Working from home often renders these workers invisible to labour statistics and there is a lack of reliable data on the number of HBWs at both the national and international levels. ILO's report, *Men and Women in the Informal Economy* suggested at least 41 million HBWs outside agricultural work in South Asia.

In the publication "Home-Based Workers in India: A Statistical Profile," authors Raveendran, Sudarshan, and Bhattacharya present data indicating that, as of 2011–12, there were approximately 37.4 million home-based workers (HBWs) in India. This group constituted 15% of the total non-agricultural employment and 31% of the female non-agricultural employment during that period. (Raveendran, 2020)

HBW forms a major percentage of women's work in South Asia, especially in the manufacturing industry (ILO, 2013). In India HBW accounted for 70 percent female manufacturing work in 2011-2012. HBWs' can be divided into piece-rate workers and own-account workers. Piece-rate workers depend on contractors or middlemen for work and are paid a piece rate for each unit they produce. Contractors supply them with raw materials and other inputs. Own-account workers are, 'self-employed owner-operators without employees who operate an enterprise for profit either alone or with one or more partners or contributing family workers'. (HNSA)

HBW has been viewed as an exploitative system as it allows companies to expand their production while absorbing, 'overhead costs (on office space, electricity); enabling experimentation with techniques (such as switching to piece rate pay and setting lower wages); and abdicating long term responsibilities (such as pension, and health and life insurance)' (Neethi, 2014). HBW is generally a low-income occupation. A 2020 study by WIEGO found that over two-third of female HBWs in India earned fewer than Rs 23 per hour in the lowest income bracket. The same survey found that 72 percent of the HBWs were between the ages of 25 and 54 years, while 80 percent HBWs were married (Raveendran, 2020). Regarding education levels, the study found that 40 percent women HBWs had not completed primary school. Home-based work taken up by women tended to be 'feminine' and was often seen as a 'natural' extension of their domestic roles (Neethi, 2014). Researchers have commented on how HBW reifies traditional female roles and, '[essentialises] women's primary location within the domestic sphere' (Neethi, 2014). By incorporating income generation in the domestic space, home-based work balances productive and reproductive responsibilities (Miraftab, 1996). In a 2014 published study by Neethi P on HBWs in the food production sector in Kerala found that the husband's opinion was one of the main reasons why women chose home-based work. (Neethi, 2014) In their 1988 publication, "Clerical Work at Home or in the Office: The Differences in the Experience of Women," Kathleen Gerson and Robert Kraut examined the experiences of women engaged in clerical work either from home or in traditional office settings. They found that home-based clerical workers often adhered to traditional values, prioritizing childcare and housework as their primary responsibilities. This preference for home-based work allowed them to balance domestic duties with paid employment, reflecting conventional gender roles. (Gerson and Kraut, 2019). Despite this, some research suggests that HBW may offer certain economic independence to women and that they may have a modicum of control over the incomes that they earn. A 2022 Homenet South Asia (HNSA) study on HBWs found that almost all female respondents reported control over revenue from home-based work. They confirmed that these earnings were seen as their own, and their husbands and families did not dictate their spending. The women did note that for big financial decisions, they generally consulted their husbands (HNSA, 2022). The HNSA study shows that female HBWs are vulnerable to physical, verbal, sexual, and psychological violence from family members. It found that female HBWs in India faced violence from partners, in-laws, brothers and sisters-in-law, and widowed HBWs, even from their sons (HNSA, 2022). Within the domestic sphere, physical violence is mainly perpetrated by partners. The respondents reported being kicked, beaten, and pushed out of their homes by their husbands. Apart from partners, verbal abuse also came from other family members, especially the in-laws. Similarly, psychological abuse such as threats, creating a fearful atmosphere, and restricting mobility came from partners and in-laws. Maligning the reputation and insulting were also recognized by respondents as forms of psychological violence — perpetrated by both family and community members such as neighbours (HNSA, 2022, p60). Domestic violence of this sort can be related to women's home-based work.

In the 2014 publication titled "Informal Economy Monitoring Study Sector Report: Home-Based Workers," authored by Martha Alter Chen and published by WIEGO, the study highlights the challenges faced by home-based workers (HBWs) in Lahore, Pakistan. The research, conducted by local partners including Bilal Naqeeb, Rubina Saigol, and Kishwar Sultana, found that fluctuations in income from home-based work, exacerbated by issues like load shedding (power outages), can lead to increased domestic tensions and violence against women workers. One participant noted that during load shedding, "tensions really increase" and "men beat up the women." (Chen, 2014) Female HBWs are also expected to bear the gendered burden of feeding their families and managing food expenses. Such expectations can manifest as psychological and economic violence. A report on HBWs in Ahmedabad found that during the COVID-19 pandemic women workers were willing to work for as little as Rs10-15 per day because they feared 'backlash from the men in their households' if they failed to put food on the table. (Thomas et al, 2020) In the HNSA study a respondent from Mumbai explained that balancing work and domestic responsibilities often led to 'big fights' with her husband. She said, 'the husband expects ... that when he comes home, the wife should give him tea... or not work... but she is helpless and her mind is split between the two things' (HNSA, 2022 p67).

In the work sphere respondents cited facing GBV from contractors, sub-contractors, and customers. (HNSA, 2022, p13) Many respondents reported feeling harassed when contractors and customers refused to pay their dues. Contractors also verbally abused HBWs using foul language and a rude tone to 'defend their unjust practices.' Respondents also felt psychologically abused when contractors criticized and humiliated them in front of their neighbours. Finally, many HBWs admitted to facing sexual harassment in the form of lecherous looks, inappropriate touching, and demands for sexual favours. The respondents revealed that they often had to travel to pick up supplies and raw materials, making them vulnerable to harassment from contractors or even strangers (HNSA, 2022, p64). Thus, female HBWs may experience GBV within their own homes, from members of their families, contractors, and customers. As with domestic work it is important to conceptualize HBWs' space of work expansively to include spaces that these women travel through to pick up work/supplies and spaces where they interact with contractors and customers.

Agricultural Labourers

According to the 2011 Census, 65 percent of India's women workers were engaged in agriculture (Census, 2011); 75 percent of the 'full-time female rural workforce is in the agricultural sector, against 59 percent for men' (Oxfam, 2013: 1). Despite many women playing a role in the agricultural sector, women in this sector own very little land. (Agarwal, et al, 2021) It is well-documented that women, especially from marginalized communities such as Dalits and Adivasis, are overrepresented in marginal and rain-fed farming areas. These regions are more susceptible to climate variability, making these women particularly vulnerable. Thus a large percentage of women in agriculture are vulnerable farmers. Further, only 37 percent of these women are cultivators (who own land) while the remaining 63 percent work as agricultural labourers on farms owned by others, receiving meagre wages (Saini, 2021). Data from the Labour Bureau (1998-2015) suggests that on average women received 35.8 percent lower wages than men for performing the same tasks (Saini, 2021). Many agricultural labourers were migrants and took up inter-district and interstate rural migration during the agricultural seasons. Data shows that most of these labourers were SCs and STs. Hailing from the poorest sections of society, enduring low wages and insecure employment female agricultural labourers are vulnerable to GBV from farm managers, landlords, and other workers. News reports, anecdotal evidence, and small-scale surveys point to the wide prevalence of GBV towards female agricultural labourers. Agricultural labourers in Uttar Pradesh stated that it was, 'common for [them] to tolerate the landowner's abuse?' They were forced to look the other way when contractors harassed their daughters as speaking up would lead to a loss of livelihood (Singh, 2020). Women belonging to a local self-help group in Jharkhand's Palamu district said that they carried axes with them and moved in groups of four or five while going to work in the fields. One labourer commented that if a mishap occurred it would 'go unreported' and that they had no one to call for help. (Singh, 2020)

Activists working with migrant female labourers in Maharashtra's sugarcane fields have suggested that they are routinely abused and raped by landlords and middlemen. (Chandran, 2016). A study by Ahmedabad based labour rights group, Centre for Labour Rights and Action, on cotton seed production in Gujarat found that migrant Bhagiya women working in cotton seed farms were constantly threatened by sexual abuse and harassment. The study stated that rape and assault of Bhagiya women by upper caste landowners was 'a well-known fact among the Bhagiyas'. (CLRA, 2021)

Protective and Redressal Mechanisms

Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, Redressal) Act was passed in 2013; it provides women with a civil remedy for sexual harassment at their workplaces. The POSH Act recognizes that sexual harassment constitutes a violation of women's fundamental right to equality under Articles 14, 15, and 21 — which provide equality under the law, protect life and personal liberty, and prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. (POSH, 2013) The act uses the definition of sexual harassment laid down by the Supreme Court in Vishakha vs the State of Rajasthan (1997). Sexual harassment is defined as, 'physical contact and advances, a demand or request for sexual favours, making sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography, or any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature'(POSH, 2013, p5). Any of these acts, whether direct or implied are counted as sexual harassment under the act.

The act covers women, 'working in all capacities, whether regular, temporary, ad hoc, or on a daily wages basis'. According to Section 2 of the act, any workplace that employs less than 10 people is considered a part of the informal sector.

The act provides an alternative to filing a criminal complaint with the police. The act requires employers (in the case of private companies) and local government officials (in the case of the informal sector) to set up committees to hear complaints, undertake inquiries, and recommend action. Under the act, every employer who heads a workplace with more than 10 employees is required to set up an internal committee (IC). For informal workplaces with less than 10 employees, the state government's district officer (District Magistrate, Additional District Magistrate, Collector, or Deputy Collector), is required to constitute a local committee (LC) in each district or, if necessary, at the block level. LCs are also intended to cater to women whose harassment complaints are against their employers (irrespective of the size of the workplace). While women can still file police complaints under the Indian Penal Code, the complaint committees mandated by the POSH Act are intended to provide fast and effective redressals. An IC/LC is required to conduct an inquiry into the complaint within 90 days from the submission of the complaint. If the allegations of sexual harassment are proved the IC/LC can instruct the employer/district officer to take action against the accused.

Domestic workers are defined separately under Section 2(e) of the act. Regarding complaints by domestic workers, LCs are to refer the complaint to the police to register a case within seven days under Section 509 of the IPC (word, gesture or act intended to offend the modesty of a woman). The POSH Act also makes the government responsible for raising awareness, organizing educational and training material, monitoring the law's implementation, and keeping records of the number of cases filed and resolved.

As of 2022 the government has not published any data on the functioning or effectiveness of LCs. A Human Rights Watch report published in 2020 entitled: "No #MeToo for Women Like Us": Poor Enforcement of India's Sexual Harassment Law, quoted the 2018 study by Martha Farrel Foundation and the Society for Participatory Study in Asia which found that many districts had failed to either establish committees or constitute them in accordance with the guidelines in the POSH Act. Out of 655 districts in the country, 29 percent said that they had formed LCs, 15 percent said they had not, and 56 percent did not respond. Even when LCs were constituted it was, 'difficult to find any information on websites or public spaces displaying their names and location' (HRW, 2020).

The HRW (2020) study also found that committee members often lacked awareness about their roles and responsibilities, indicating that many LCs were unprepared to handle sexual harassment complaints. There was also a general lack of awareness about the POSH Act, especially among workers in the informal sector. In May 2020, the chair of the Mumbai city district LC commented that the committee had only received five complaints, and all from the formal sector.

In 2017 a PIL was filed in the Supreme Court by the NGO Initiatives for Inclusion Foundation seeking the effective implementation of the POSH Act. The PIL stated that only five states (Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Haryana, and Chhattisgarh) and two union territories (Daman, Diu, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli) were able to provide details about LCs constituted in their jurisdictions. The petition further noted that none of the states could provide information about the steps taken by the respective state governments to raise awareness about the POSH Act (Ungender, 2021). The PIL is still pending before the apex court. In the same year, another PIL was filed before the Madras High Court to highlight the problems in the implementation of the POSH Act in Tamil Nadu, especially in mills and factories. The court directed all district collectors to file individual reports detailing their efforts to constitute LCs.

Legal commentators have also identified legislative and procedural loopholes in the POSH Act as it pertains to the informal sector. One of the major criticisms of the POSH Act has been the inclusion of action against false and malicious complaints. Section 14(1) of the act states that if the LC determines that the complaint is false and registered with malicious intention then it can recommend action against the woman to the employer or district officer. Though Section 14(1) clarifies that the inability to prove a complaint or provide relevant evidence does not falsify it, there is much scope for misuse. POSH consultant and policy advisor Anagha Sarpotdar writes, 'such a provision could act as a trap for the LC members if they do not understand

the stealthy, private and subtle nature of sexual harassment and the hesitation on part of witnesses to depose before a formal mechanism such as the LC'. (Sarpotdar, 2020)

Another issue pointed out by various commentators is the inclusion of a time limit for filing a complaint. The act lays down a time limit of three months to file a complaint with the LC. The LC has the power to condone a delay of another three months, provided it is satisfied with the complainant's explanation for the delay. Mumbai based lawyer Monica Sakhrani points out that such a provision is 'designed to defeat claims that are filed after a woman is victimised'. (Sakhrani, 2017) The presence of a time limit ignores various ground-level situations, power hierarchies, and cultural factors that may prevent a woman from immediately registering a complaint. The law also lays down very few guidelines about how the inquiry is to be conducted. Section 7(4) of the POSH Act merely states, 'the complaints committee shall make inquiry into the complaint in accordance with the principles of natural justice.' Principles of natural justice are a complex legal concept and seeing as LC members often lack a legal background such wording can lead to discrepancies in the way inquiries are conducted. Further, the act places the main responsibility of implementation on the employer rather than involving the state. There is no set time limit placed on the state to set up the LCs and there are no punitive measures for government officials who fail to do so. Finally, while the POSH Act covers domestic workers and allows them to file complaints with the Local Committee, it does not provide specific civil remedies for domestic workers. In cases where the employer is not an organization or company, the enforcement of the IC's recommendations can be challenging, often leading to reliance on criminal proceedings. Thus complaints made by domestic workers have to be forwarded to the police station, irrespective of whether the workers want to enter the criminal justice system or not.

It is evident that with the absence of LCs in many districts, the poor functioning of LCs where they have been constituted, and a huge lack of awareness about the protection provided by the POSH Act women in the informal sector lack institutional support to prevent and redress sexual harassment in the workplace.

CHAPTER 3

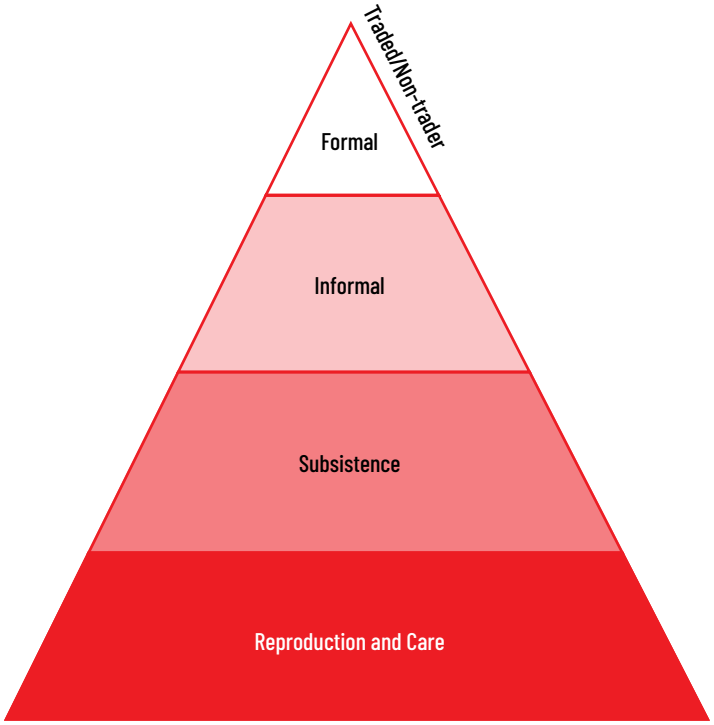
Theoretical Standpoints

Gendered Nature of Work and Women's Increased Concentration in the Informal Economy

This study is substantiated by and built on a critical understanding that economic structures are inherently gendered. Men and women occupy different spaces and positions in the local, regional, and global economies that align with society's gendered roles and expectations. Therefore, it would be a fallacy to look at gender-based violence faced by informal workers without acknowledging, and basing our analysis on, the effects of the gendered division of labour between paid (productive) and unpaid (reproductive) work, the unequal distribution of economic resources and assets, as well as gendered relations that dictate how work is organized. A gendered society concentrates its women in the domestic realm, with their responsibilities primarily surrounding unpaid reproductive labour, while it places men in the public domain, engaging in paid, productive labour.

Such a division of labour severely constrains women's access and participation in the labour force for paid employment. Further, the essentialism attributed to domestic work, responsibilities of marriage and child-rearing limit the time and energy a woman may put into acquiring skills for the market, further restraining her chances of paid employment (Heintz, 2006). Factors such as these, along with social and cultural norms and regulations around women's mobility and access to public spaces contribute to increased gender bias in employment opportunities and also significantly reduce a woman's earning potential and push her into informal, low-paid, low-skilled, unstable jobs, most of which fall in the category of 'feminized' occupations (Heintz, 2006) (such as needlework, sewing, tailoring, and domestic work). Even within the informal economy, the occupations men engage in differ from those of women. The latter's occupations are further stigmatized and devalued for being feminine in nature and, therefore, of less or no value in the market economy. Chen (2001) argues how, compared to male informal workers, women informal workers are generally, 'more likely to be own account workers, i.e., self-employed working by themselves, and subcontract workers and are less likely to be owner operators or paid employees of informal enterprises.'

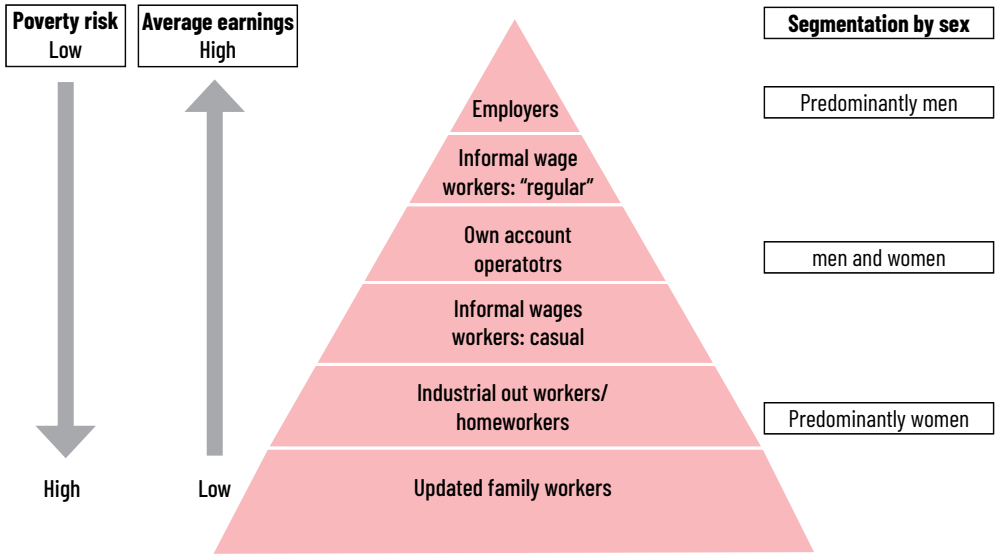
Figure 3.1 **Iceberg view of the economy, Kabeer (2003)**



Elson (1991) argues that economies are structured around gendered institutions that define men and women's social roles and behavior; these institutions go beyond the family and community and include state institutions as well as the market. Naila Kabeer (2003) critiques economic models in developing countries such as India for being 'gender-blind' and excluding reproductive labour from its analyses. (See Figure 3.1) Most macro-economists follow what Kabeer calls the 'iceberg' view of the economy, wherein a masculine understanding of work prevails, and women's work is considered a natural extension of their reproductive roles in society and therefore not considered work essential to the economic structure and is often not paid for or is under-paid for.

Such an understanding of work invisibilizes and marginalizes employment in the informal economy and the workers in it. This is particularly true for women, especially those belonging to marginalized identities of caste, class, and religion, who mostly occupy the lowest rungs of the informal economy, with the highest risks of poverty and the lowest wages. The WEIGO model of employment (Chen, 2012) illustrates that men tend to dominate the most secure and higher-paid jobs, while women concentrate on the lower segments of the pyramid, even within the informal economy (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 The WEIGO Model of Employment, (Chen, 2012a, p9)



Thus, women's position as informal workers in the economy is interlaced with multiple layers of vulnerabilities and precariousness due to gender discrimination and segmentation of work and a gendered division of the public and private realms, along with harsh reinforcements of gendered roles through penalties. All these push women into the informal labour economy (Chen, 2012b). These economically and socially vulnerable positionalities of women as workers, render them prone to many forms of violence, ranging from physical, sexual, and mental to economic deprivation and induced poverty. Thus, to study gender-based violence that informal women workers face, one must expand the definitions of gender-based violence to include various forms of violence that occur due to gendered institutions and structures; in other words, it is imperative that we go beyond instances of physical and sexual violence faced by women at the hands of their employers in their workspaces and also include intimate partner violence, mental and emotional torture by sub-contractors, discrimination and negligence at the hands of state actors such as the police, and violence in public transport. Such a pluralistic attitude towards gender-based violence needs us to look at the whole picture holistically to induce substantial political changes in these women's lives.

Across the three states of Bihar, Delhi, and West Bengal, the voices of the women employed in the informal sectors of agricultural work, home-based work, and domestic work respectively, were united in the ordeals - lived and anticipated - of recounting the forms of violence(s) that they had endured. The ordeal of reporting the incidents posed a bureaucratic challenge, which severely limited access to redressal mechanisms and it was also an emotionally fraught and intensely traumatic experience given the normalization and pervasiveness of violence against women and gender-based violence in society. As informal workers claim their rights in highly patriarchal economic structures, both parts of their identity, as workers and as

women, augment the cumulative violence -- everyday, gendered, structural, emotional – that they endure. The engagements with women in the informal sectors of agricultural, domestic work, and home-based workers in Patna, West Bengal, and Delhi revealed the robustness of the everyday pedagogical and political patriarchal structures that women have to negotiate in their everyday lives.

Gender-Based Violence as a Continuum and Symptomatic of Gender Inequalities

This research recognizes the limitations of a narrow, unitary definition of gender-based violence and espouses the need to have an inclusive framework for gender-based violence to grasp the length and breadth of the experiences of violence(s) of overlapping nature in their multiple manifestations that informal women workers face. The research thus borrows from the theoretical standpoint of gender-based violence to be a continuum (Kelly, 1988), that allows us to look at subtle forms of violence (economic, social, structural) along with the aberrant male behavior in the form of sexual or physical violence as shading into each other. Thus, the informal nature of the work provides the material realities of structural oppression and exploitation which manifests in a range of violent activities, all of which must be included in an analysis of gender-based violence against informal women workers.

To locate women's experiences of multiple forms of violence within a continuum also helps understand which forms of violence are normalized to the extent of being invisibilized or not being acknowledged as 'violence,' as well as which forms of violence are considered 'serious enough' within the subjective vocabularies of the women workers. Further, to adopt the lens of a continuum is to also posit the violence(s) on the intersections of social hierarchies of caste, class, and religion. This helps understand how violence manifests itself as a form of abuse of power and privilege that is symptomatic of, as well as maintains and reproduces, inequalities along the said hierarchies. As Bennett and Manderson (2003) state, 'violence against women routinely functions to sustain multiple inequalities, reinforcing women's subordination within complex hierarchies of oppression.' This research endeavours to not just look at gender-based violence in its aberrant, obvious forms such as rape and molestation but also look at the subtle forms of intimidation, coercion, intrusion, threats, and control that various actors (ranging from direct violence by the employer, to structural violence by the family, community as well as the state) exercise over these women workers, and to understand how each poses a significant challenge to their well-being and quality of life.

The research also recognizes that the burden of recounting, establishing reliability, and seeking recourse in the traumatic event of gender-based violence falls on the woman on account of the patriarchal legal and social structures within which the victim of the violence has to establish beyond doubt that the act of violence was a deviance from the norm. The pervasive normalization of VAW inadvertently frames every victim of GBV as an unreliable witness to her traumas, as the ears attending to her are structurally deaf and are located in the patriarchal foundations of the everyday, structural, and emotional cartographies.

The study's findings provide empirical evidence and policy recommendations to further the public discourse on the rights and protections of informal women workers in the workplace. The research enables engagement with employers, governments, local authorities, and policymakers to understand the gaps in policies and laws for informal workers and to develop mechanisms for better gender responsiveness.

CHAPTER 4

'It's My Shame': Locating Violence on the Self and the Spectrum of Selfhood

Introduction

Gender-based violence against women informal workers is not an isolated incident that they face in their place of work; rather, the violence manifests itself as a form of the various socioeconomic inequalities that the women are embedded in. A labyrinth of vulnerabilities creates specific circumstances for various kinds of physical, verbal, psychological, as well as economic violence that intersect and inform each other. Most importantly, however, each worker locates the violence on her dignity of self, and each negotiates with it accordingly. This study tried to understand the forms of violence that directly and indirectly, affect the lives of these women, as well as how these forms are invisibilized and are normalized through discourses of shame and stigma that the survivors themselves reiterate. This chapter looks at the myriad manifestations of violence, the spaces where violence was identified (as well as normalized), and women's narratives of how they understood and perceived their experiences of violence.

The Plight of Domestic Workers: Fight for Dignity

Domestic work is considered a highly feminized occupation due to its location in the private realm, identified with feminine labour of reproductive and care work. However, tasks in a domestic household too are stratified according to the axes of gender, caste, and religion; women are engaged in household chores such as cooking, cleaning, refuse removal, and taking care of the children and elders in the household, while more men are employed in slightly more stable, higher paid occupations such as drivers, gardeners, butlers, and security guards. (ILO, 2013). Further, even among household chores that the women engage in, the structure of caste significantly organizes household tasks and spaces to be only available to certain castes and religions. For example, cooking is assigned to women of upper castes, while waste removal is assigned to Dalit women. Domestic workers interviewed for this study in Kolkata, West Bengal were from the districts North and South 24 Parganas, living in unregistered slums, constantly living under the threat of demolishment from the state. Their nature of work was divided along caste and religious lines; Muslim domestic workers found it hard to find work as cooks in Hindu households and needed to disguise or pass off as Hindu women. Some wore the traditional symbols of a Hindu Bengali married woman on their wrists to pass of as Hindu women, others give false names to identify themselves as Hindus to gain employment in Hindu households. Further, using surnames such as Das, Haldar, and Mondal, helped conceal the caste of the worker within the local caste stratification of Bengal, and helped workers navigate around employers' casteist households who may employ them for certain tasks without particularly understanding their caste location. Such segregation of work and spaces within the household on the basis of caste and religion made it difficult for the women, most of them Dalits and non-Hindus, to seek employment, and they therefore navigated the situation through strategies of concealment, such as wearing the *shakha-pola* (the white and red customary bangles that Bengali Hindu married women wear), or to pass of as Hindu widows.

Among the domestic workers in Kolkata, the discussion regarding GBV and its various forms often resulted in the conceptualization of self and the claims to dignity as workers. This is important since they did not see the struggle against gender-based violence as divorced from their struggle against an institutionalized devaluation of paid reproductive labour. Such a socio-cultural devaluation of paid reproductive and domestic work has ripples in the way the domestic workers are treated by actors of the state, the employers, and even the families of the workers. The women recounted how, to be employed in gated, high-end residential societies, stringent processes in the name of 'safety' were carried out. There was police verification of the identity proof of the domestic workers and employment cards being issued after verification, followed by a thorough security check before entering and before leaving the apartment complexes. Police verification itself became a tedious process that borrowed from a derogatory social image of domestic workers and fed into the hierarchy of the employer above them; domestic workers' documents were thoroughly scrutinized before permission was granted to work in a residential area and if the police decided not to give permission, these women lost out on favourable employment opportunities.

However, domestic workers themselves were not granted the agency accorded to their employers to know about them. At times, a domestic worker did not even know the name of her employer, thus leaving her vulnerable to charges of theft, wages not paid on time, dismissal from work, and she could not take appropriate action against her employer because of lack of vital information like the name of the employer. Such bureaucratic processes carried out in the name of 'security' that were tightened especially during major festivals, perpetuated a vilifying image of domestic workers as being thieves and dishonest. As a worker exclaimed in our discussions about the compulsory document verification and issuing of employment cards:

How does the police know what kind of a person I am?... The police speaks the truth; we are the liars.

Such depreciative measures taken by agents of the state contribute to the labyrinth of vulnerabilities that domestic workers belonging to marginalized communities find themselves in. This labyrinth of vulnerabilities creates multiple precarious situations for domestic workers, exposing them to a complex system of violence. Women spoke of the kind of harassment that they faced at the hands of the employers, ranging from meagre wages to issues such as not granting sick leaves, easy replacement of workers, no bonus or increase in wages for years, no access to toilets in the household leading to multiple health issues, and no access to common lifts. Employers would dismiss workers without any legitimate reason, especially during festivals, with false allegations of theft or other such excuses --- work and wages not commensurate; employers increased the workload, yet the wage remained the same. In case a domestic worker complained, she was asked to leave. Employers also engaged in explicit verbal and physical abuse towards domestic workers or created an intimidating environment where a worker was forced to leave the household.

The devaluation of domestic work as 'dirty' work is immediately linked to social perceptions about women who engage in paid household labour; only women from lower castes can engage in such work. Further, with domestic work being considered a natural extension of a woman's reproductive capacities of care taking, such factors create significant barriers in achieving dignity of work for domestic workers. The domestic workers in our study found the struggles for fair wages and respectful work conditions and demeanour intrinsically linked to a fight for dignity. The demands that the Domestic Workers Union have with regard to a minimum hourly wage, four days off work each month, paid maternity leave, pension, proper employment contracts, a welfare board, and crèches for children are ways of achieving a dignified life for domestic workers in Kolkata. The demand that domestic workers put forward was recognition of domestic work as dignified work and recognition of domestic workers as workers.

A domestic worker recounted the attitude of upper-caste families towards the notion of domestic work and the women engaging in such work:

Once an employer asked me, are you a government employee that you must be given four days of leave?

While mapping their life histories of working as domestic workers and their entry into the world of domestic work, women reported their struggles at accepting domestic work as dignified work. Such notions of dignity often had repercussions about the instances of violence and the ways of thinking and locating violence in the workplace. Given that women struggled to accept domestic work as dignified work, the discussions on gender-based violence were also attached to notions of shame and guilt. The various kinds of gender-based violence that domestic workers faced ranged from verbal harassment to instances of sexual harassment, such as inappropriate touching of the body. The men of the household would deliberately ask to be handed the tea and would attempt to touch them or hold their hand when domestic workers handed them their cup of tea. In the absence of female members of the family, illicitly touching the domestic worker, holding her hands, attempting to be physically close to her, attempting to have romantic-sexual conversations with her, all came forth in our conversations.

Other forms of sexual harassment by men of the households included creating a hostile environment for a female domestic worker, by drinking alcohol and playing pornographic videos in her presence. Such instances rarely found justice, since women mostly did not report them to the employer, much lesser to the police. The labyrinth of vulnerabilities that a domestic worker is embroiled in, embolden perpetrators of sexual violence ensuring their impunity. Most domestic workers complained to their female employers who, in some cases might even be aware of their husbands' misdeeds. Yet, most female employers tended

Case Study 1

'I was about to take out the fish from the refrigerator when he deliberately held my hand and said, "Didi! Please move aside, let me take it out for you." He doesn't do this with me when his wife is around. He took out the fish. I started feeling very uneasy. It was a four-storeyed building and there wasn't a single person around. I started becoming nervous…When I was pouring the tea, I saw his shadow in front of me. My insides twisted with unease, I understood he was standing behind me. My hands and legs started shivering in fear. I was sweating…how do I get out of here? I turned around and he was standing right there. I said, "Dada, didn't I tell you to sit there? I will really not work here anymore. I don't feel good about all of this." Immediately, he held my hands and said…his voice and language completely changed, "Can I tell you something? I really like you. Please don't tell your sister-in-law" (referring to his wife). I said, "Yes I like you too." I had nothing else to do! If he had closed the door and led me to a room there was nothing I could have done about it. I asked him to go sit with the cup of tea, and we would talk. As he turned around, I immediately ran out of the door and kept running till I was out of the apartment complex.'

Case Study 2

Rekha grew up in poverty-stricken family, the needs of her family pushing her into full-time domestic work at the age of 9. Her first employers, with whom she lived, were extremely exploitative. They would only give her a fist of rice to eat in the entire day, yet her work started at 6 am and ended at 1 am at night. For all the domestic work she was made to do, she was paid a meagre income of Rs 25. When Rekha decided to quit and go back home, the employers behaved violently with her. They stripped a dress they had gifted her from her body, and didn't pay her the monthly salary. After coming out of such exploitative conditions, she was yet again pushed into domestic work because of her family's condition. As she grew up, her employers gave her more responsibilities, but didn't increase her monthly remuneration accordingly. Rekha grew up, married and had children, all of whom she educated with her income. In over 36 years of her life, she has cumulatively worked in 50 households, sometimes as a domestic worker, sometimes as a cook. She believes sexual violence happens to all women who work in households, but many do not wish to speak about it. She remembers how in a household where she worked as a cook, the employer's husband would deliberately touch her back and waist in a disguised attempt to praise her cooking. She didn't complain or react to such incidents, but simply gave up working in the household. She believes that one's dignity is one's own treasure, and one has to guard it carefully. She remembers being alone and without any support system as she dealt with economical, physical, and sexual violence. However, the union of PGPS helped her find the platform as well as the vocabulary to state her demands of decent wages in front of her employer and stand up against discrimination or violence of any kind perpetrated by the employing household. In the union, she has forged a long-term friendship and solidarity which act as a support system to help women challenge men and women in positions of power. She believes the solidarities and friendships built over time because of the union create the much-needed safety net, that can shield young domestic workers from exploitation, monetarily or sexually. She now works to encourage young domestic workers who come from villages and are not aware of the domestic labour market, to not keep quiet in case of any form of violence, and in case a negotiation with the employer is not reached, they should ask the union for help to speak to the police.

Case Study 3

Ruksana has worked for 25 years as a domestic worker. She came to Kolkata 30 years ago as she had an aunt and uncle residing here who provided her a room to rent out in the city. The neighbours helped her find domestic work, and she has been working as a cook and a domestic worker ever since. She remembers how when she had children and had to leave for work, she had to lock them in her rented room and go for work. She would try to come back as soon as possible to her children, but working in six households was no easy task. It was only after she fell ill with tuberculosis after the COVID-19 pandemic induced lockdown, that she left working in most of the households, and continues to work as a cook for an income of Rs 2,500 a month. Before the COVID-19 lockdown, she would earn Rs 7-8,000 a month. Her husband lost his job when she was 48 years old. During the lockdown, she fell sick but none of her employers helped her or agreed on a steady income. It was because of PGPS and one household that she could bear her medical expenses and food expenses and sustain her family of five people during the pandemic. When asked whether she would be comfortable with her daughter working as a domestic worker, she said that while there was nothing wrong with domestic work, it was devoid of any integrity and dignity of work; people treated domestic workers as their personal servants. When asked about her demands as a domestic worker, she listed a fixed pension, paid sick leave, leave during religious festivals, and the basic dignity of the worker. She acknowledged the role of unions in holding households and employers accountable for their actions and pressurizing them to give fair wages and treatment. As she ails from tuberculosis, her son makes a comfortable earning while her daughter studies in a nearby college. But when asked if she would like to retire now, she responded that she would like to work till her body allowed, since she did not want to be dependent on her sons.

to victim blame the domestic workers, and in some cases they were driven out of work. Some women favoured the perpetrators in case of confrontation and did not believe the narratives of the domestic workers. The shame associated with sexual violence, victim blaming, and character assassination further hurt their chances of employment, as they were immediately labelled as not being 'good' women.

Casteist and classist power equations play an important role in the invisibilization (and therefore, the legitimization) of violence towards domestic workers; the Bengali colloquial use of the term *kaajer meye* to denote domestic workers roughly translates into the 'maid servant' which tends to solidify the servant-master relationship that is present in the popular imagination of women engaging in paid household labour. Further, the nexus of gender-based harassment reaches the families of the domestic workers, who too engage in shaming and victim blaming in case they speak up about their abuse. One worker stated, *'If I said this to my husband or in-laws, they'd say there was definitely something wrong with me that this kept happening to me and no one else.'*

While the union has helped them gain the vocabulary for such instances, the discussion on gender-based violence rarely takes place outside the safe spaces that the domestic workers' union nurtures among themselves. The various demonstrations to demand justice, such as police station gherao and sit-in protests speak significantly about the collective solidarity of women domestic workers; however, it remains firmly centred on the collective fight for dignity of work. Most domestic workers place the responsibility of preserving their dignity on themselves, and rather than being a distinct issue in itself, sexual violence becomes a part of the nexus of labour grievances, operating within the labyrinth of vulnerabilities, marginalizing such women and perpetrating violence in different forms, levels, and magnitude. As one worker stated:

'If we don't have food today, we'll get it tomorrow. If we don't have work today, we'll get it tomorrow. But if I lose my samman (dignity), I won't get it back. Its about my samman.'

Struggles of Agricultural Workers: Everyday Violence and Precarity

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey of 2021-22, 62.9% of female workers are engaged in agriculture as compared to 38.1% of male workers. Among the 263.1 million agricultural workers, Census 2011 noted that 144.3 million were agricultural labourers, working in fields that did not belong to them. Among the agricultural labourers, 42.67 percent were female, accounting for 6.16 crore female agricultural labourers (MAKAAM, 2022). Statistics also suggest that 25 percent of the female agricultural labourers belonged to Scheduled Castes, while 55.7 percent of all female Scheduled Caste workers were agricultural labourers (ibid.) These numbers suggest the overwhelming presence of women not just in agricultural work, but in agricultural labour on other landowners' land, the latter mostly being from dominant castes (Srinivas, 1959). Further, the percentage of female agricultural labourers to the total number of female workers is the highest in Bihar at 60.8 percent, thereby highlighting the precarity of the women spoken to for this study.

Among the women agricultural workers in Gaya, Bihar, the discussion regarding GBV and its various forms often resulted in the conceptualization of self that negotiated with a culture of everyday violence, a continuum of power inequalities based on caste and gender. The women agriculture workers belonged to the Musahar Adivasi caste, 93 percent of whose community members are landless agricultural labourers, ensnared in the intersection of precarious livelihoods, long hours of work that do not translate into sufficient pay, and constant discrimination and stigma of being 'untouchables' (Roy, 2016). The women questioned their claims to time which they mapped alongside thinking about the everyday forms of violence they confronted on a regular basis. The gender-based violence they faced was closely knit to the hegemonic caste dynamics; one cannot isolate gender-based violence from the web of caste violence and atrocities. Women labourers were often subjected to casteist slurs and derogatory names by their supervisors, landowners, and even contractors. They were not allowed to sit for a long while or breastfeed/feed their children milk during work; they would be scolded for sitting or feeding their children. Landowners frequently practiced their dominance over these women by not allowing them to use their fields for defecation, pushing these women to defecate in other open areas leaving them prone to violence from men loitering around. The women were not even allowed to take home refused grass from their fields; in case they did, they were met with verbal, physical, and material violence from the landowners, such as grabbing the women by their hair, physically beating them or their family members, and in rare cases, destroying their houses and material property. As one of the women in the discussion recounted:

'I had gone to the nearby fields to get some sarson patta (mustard leaves). The landowners pulled me from behind and asked, "why are you plucking leaves from my field?" I said, "for cooking." He used expletives against me, and physically hit me for plucking the leaves. He grabbed my hair and pulled me and hit me.'

The women working in agricultural fields owned by dominant caste groups from morning till evening on wage rates one-third of what is given to their male counterparts found the choice architecture of a safe working place limited due to the structural embeddedness of caste, class, and patriarchy. The women were taken to the fields through contractors and middlemen, who then took their thumb prints on a registry and refused to pay, or paid less than what they were entitled to. In the nexus of caste, class, and patriarchy, sexual violence took place with great impunity. Our study found gender-based violence against the women agricultural labourers in the form of inappropriate gazing and staring, sexually laced comments and jokes, denigration using casteist names and slurs, and tugging or pulling of garments by landowners, middlemen, supervisors, and contractors. Women reported how upper caste men would pass sexually laced comments on the women passing by, and when confronted would say that they were talking among themselves. If the women retaliated, then they engaged in shaming the women, and questioning their character as moral women:

'They'll say that she thinks she is so beautiful that we are commenting on her.'

Further, our study reports how these women were often subject to sexual demands and favours whenever they went to the landowners' houses to deliver the crops, rejection of which resulted in a deduction from their husbands' wages, or even loss of work. The landowners frequently cracked jokes loaded with sexual innuendoes, to which the women found themselves helpless in retaliating or responding. However, responding to such forms of violence or even protesting against it, the women said, had the chance of more violence. As one woman recounted her experience protesting against sexually laced comments, the man responded in an overtly violent manner:

'They said they will hang us and take us away.'

The women also reported how chances of caste-based violence against their families increased with reporting the violence to higher officials. Some women even lamented that if a male member protested the sexual harassment against his relatives, they ran the chances of getting severely assaulted or even killed. Thus, women did not report to the police or even acknowledged such violence against them:

'If we go to the police station, they might come back and inflict more violence. This is why women are scared. If two of them are beaten, four of us are beaten in return. Even if there are people supporting them, the women get scared and keep silent.'

After instances of sexual harassment, women generally stayed silent and tended to conceal the violence from their communities, fearing moral policing and victim blaming. Unmarried and single women were more prone to sexual harassment, and in case it happened, it was rarely revealed to the community for fear of their marriage prospects getting jeopardized. A culture of victim shaming and policing the female sexuality affected their economic opportunities, whatever little were available to them. They feared that if the matter came to light, a woman might have to leave work, leaving her family in a state of abject poverty. Such economic factors were also considered and women tolerated abuse in silence.

However, while women workers would often map wage discrimination alongside gender-based violence, the discussion about instances of gender-based violence in our FGDs and interviews initially resulted in silence and required slight interactional nudges, signaling to the everydayness of the violence pervading the very fabric of their social realities that attributed to its active invisibilization.

Challenges of Home-Based Workers: Negotiating Work and Violence

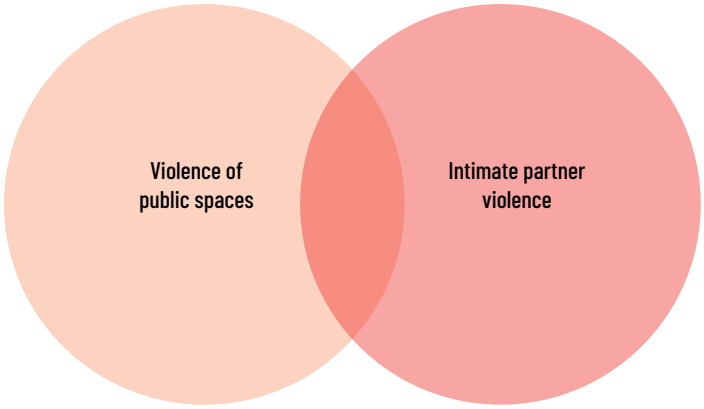
Home-based workers make up to 30 percent of women's informal employment, while over 85 percent of the home-based workers in most countries are women (Chen et al., 2004). Despite being a significant source of employment for women as well as contributing significantly to the local economy through value chains, home-based workers are one of the most invisibilized. The home-based workers interviewed for

this study lived in resettlement colonies in Madanpur Khadar, Delhi. They were all sub-contracted, engaging in garment work such as embellishment, bead work, thread work, and embroidery. They got orders from small dealers, often in their own neighbourhoods. There were many women in the neighbourhood who acted as dealers and set up small production units, who brought work from factories and outsourced it to other women for pasting decorative stones and other materials on pieces of cloth. While they sub-let the work to the women, they were not able to pay them on time or even compensate them fully. They never made complete payments, but stopped some payments so that the women working under them continued to take work from them and not another dealer. While the women worked day and night to complete their pieces, sometimes on an urgent basis, they were at times denied their payments. Women kept working under the dealers, in the hope of being compensated fully someday, but that rarely happened. They stalled payments and asked the women to come later or during festivals, and consistently made excuses to not pay them properly. Sometimes, payments as large as Rs 20-25,000 were stopped, and dealers paid the women in small instalments but never completed the payment. It was also not sure who would get paid when; it depended on when the dealers themselves got paid by the factories and companies.

While some women sub-let work from factories directly, respondents replied how the distance of the factories from their residences deterred them from getting work directly from there. Factories only outsource large amounts of work to people with contacts and are far away from where the women live. They lack the storage capacity to keep so much work. Further, they have no contacts in the factories who will let out work and will compensate them fairly. The chain system, from factory to dealer, from dealer to sub-contract workers works in a trickle-down fashion; the home-based workers are the worst hit in the chain system.

Home-based, sub-contractual workers are situated at the helm of productive work -- at the intersection of economic activity and care work. Their home doubles as their workspace and this presents a rather complicated picture of gender-based violence that these women are constantly prone to. Since they bring (public) work into their (private) homes, we witnessed them situated at the nexus of public and private forms of gender-based violence (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Intersection of Public and Private Spheres in Home-Based Work



Violence in Public Spaces: The women unanimously agreed that Madanpur Khadar was notorious for crimes against women and children in broad daylight. The women were constantly worried about the safety of their children, as well as themselves, and feared that their children may go astray due to bad influences in the area. Molestations and harassment of young girls and women is rampant in the area, and the women accompanied their teenage daughters to school and back, not leaving them alone for a moment. Further, many of these women did not have a support system or spaces where they could keep their children supervised while they went out to work. The women had to be responsible for their children, and therefore piece rate work was feasible for them, so that they could look after their children as well as earn some money.

If they accepted piece orders from male dealers, the latter tended to be more aggressive and violent in case a piece was lost, or when a garment was not embellished according to the proper design. They forced the women to compensate for the lost garment, or they asked the women to undo the embellishment

and work on the piece all over again. Further, relatives of female dealers also posed a threat of sexual harassment, either to the workers themselves, or their daughters and other female relatives. Some women observed:

'That day, her (the dealer's) brother came to get the pieces. When I went outside to deliver the pieces, I saw my daughter talking to him. Now I know she considers him like a brother, and was smiling and chatting. Suddenly, he kept a hand on her shoulders, and I immediately knew his intentions were not good. I went down, gave him the pieces and asked him to go. I then complained to the dealer, and told her I won't work for her anymore.'

'This happened to one of my friends. She had misplaced a piece, and the dealer came and shouted in front of her house! He kept saying that he will not tolerate it, he wanted the piece anyhow. The woman was petrified, she searched her entire house, and then she found it in some other woman's place. She then hurriedly returned the piece, because if she hadn't, she would have had to compensate for the losses, or the man could have returned to her house to shout at her.'

Intimate Partner Violence: Since for these women, the house is their workplace, domestic violence emerged in our conversations as a huge deterrent, not only to the women's economical gains and progress, but also their overall physical and mental well-being. Some of the respondents reported having faced physical violence at the hands of their husbands, while others reported other forms of violence such as verbal, emotional, and psychological. In conversations with these women, multiple factors leading to intimate partner violence emerged:

A) **Constant fights and arguments, and intimidation of women over their work:** The women reported a constant sense of their husbands' annoyance towards their work that led to fights and arguments between the spouses. The reasons were many. While some husbands were worried about the medical expenditure that the health hazards of piece work entailed, others simply did not like the idea of women working and not prioritizing their domestic responsibilities. The causes for this can be rooted in strong views regarding women's gendered roles within the family, workplace, and society, and the primacy of conjugal and marital responsibilities towards the husband over any form of external, paid work.

'My husband told me strictly not to work on piece work, because then I won't be able to look after my child. He asked, "will you ignore your child and work?"'

'When we work, the material gets scattered all over our house. Now he (the husband) comes home... he is already exhausted from a long day, and then he gets to see everything scattered in the house. We must be careful of the piece work because of its delicate nature and have to slowly keep it aside to give him a glass of water. He would then say that you are engrossed in this, I don't have any value in the family, I have come home after working so hard.'

'If sometimes there is a lot of work, and I include my children in the work, then my husband becomes angry that I am making the children do the work, and we fight over that.'

B) **Destruction of pieces or machines:** Some women reported how their husbands, in a fit of rage, destroyed the garment pieces that they had worked so hard to embellish, which meant that they had to compensate the amount for the piece destroyed.

'Sometime back, my husband wouldn't allow me to work. Once, in a fit of rage, he tore the piece garment I was working on. I had to pay double the amount I would have got as compensation for the loss of the garment.'

C) Suspicions of infidelity: One of the major reasons why women did not take work from male dealers, was the 'torture' that their husbands subjected them to. They were restricted from taking work from male dealers, and were immediately subject to suspicions if they interacted with a man outside, or took work from a male dealer. If a dealer came home and behaved aggressively with the women workers for lost/rejected work, then the husbands created hostility because an outsider, a man, had the audacity to talk to the women like this.

'They (the husbands) say, "why do you have to work?" Why do you take orders from him only? Why can't you work on some other dealer's pieces?'

'Such incidents happen! My husband said, "why is that man standing over there?" I replied, "to take the piece." He then said, "oh so you have to take orders from a man only, is it? You couldn't find orders anywhere else?" And then the torture that happens...what do I say?'

'Like for instance somebody wanted to shorten his jeans, and gave it to me. I thought he (the husband) would not come home early, so I said give it to me, I'll shorten it for Rs 30, because then the children will have something to eat! But, when I was stitching the jeans, he came at that moment. He threw all the material and threw the (sewing) machine and broke it. He said, "why did you have to take his pants? Did all the tailors in the world die that only you are left to do his job?"'

This nexus of violence, both public and private, left the home-based workers in a constant state of susceptibility, which further impacted their economic choice of work. Such violence acted to severely restrict these women's mobility, as a result of which they were forced to accept the poor conditions of work, no matter the health hazards that many of them faced. A peculiar fact, however, was that most women did not want to go out because of the fear of sexual harassment outside home, while their homes themselves were saturated with domestic violence. The choice of work as home-based workers was the foremost attempt by these women to avoid violence that pervaded the public sphere, and the chances of a certain kind of violence were minimized by engaging in home-based work of embroidery, stone-pasting, and stitching. This is an interesting observation that despite domestic violence, domestic spaces are considered 'safe,' while public spaces such as the neighbourhood or other localities where women can access other forms of employment are considered 'unsafe.'

The definitions of safety, therefore, must be understood within the larger discourse of community honour being placed on a woman's body, wherein only a certain kind of violation is acknowledged as violence, which women need to be safeguarded from. It is not that our respondents did not realize the violence against them by their intimate partners. However, one form of violence is legitimized so much in society that it renders it almost invisible. Nevertheless, domestic violence emerged to be one of the major forms of gender-based violence that home-based workers faced.

Case Study 4

Lata settled in Madanpur Khadar, Delhi after her marriage in 2007. Her husband owns the property they live in, and while it is small, Lata says at least it's not rented. Her husband works as a casual labourer, whose work is erratic. She has four children, and the family could not make ends meet with her husband's earnings. To save some money and to facilitate her children's education, she took up the work of embellishment, or what is known as 'piece work' in common parlance in 2015. While initially she liked the work and the earnings she got for it, as she kept making the 'pieces,' she realized that her earnings were sporadic and depended on the contractor's decision to pay the full amount or not. Sometimes, she didn't feel like working so hard, but she was brought back to the work due to her dire financial circumstances. She worried about her three daughters and how she will marry them without enough finances at hand. Even for a simple birthday celebration, Lata says, she had to mindfully save money for at least six months to purchase a birthday cake for her child. What she constantly suffered from, is domestic violence at the hands of her husband. She says she has been hospitalized and admitted to the ICU because of physical violence by her husband. Much of it is triggered by the sight or mention of her work. If she works in front of her husband, he gets into an argument and often destroys the pieces she has worked so hard on. When asked if she ever thought of filing an FIR or leaving such an abusive marriage, she said she only stayed for the sake of the children, and economical disadvantage and lack of any resources further stopped her from approaching the police. She is also scared of retaliation from her husband in case she takes such a step.

CHAPTER 5

The Question of Choice - Structural Embeddedness of Caste, Class and Patriarchy

Introduction

When gender-based violence against women informal workers happens due to systematic and structural conditions on an everyday basis, the choice to prevent the occurrence of violence becomes redundant. However, what is important here is the persistent negotiations that each woman worker makes in the face of violence, and she makes certain 'choices' to abate the severity of the violence. These choices, by domestic workers, agricultural labourers, and home-based workers, must be understood within a complex web of constraints that severely limit their agency to make empowering choices for themselves. Macro and micro socio-political and economic factors significantly shape women's agential powers, and the choices that women make in the face of violence must be understood in the given context.

The Architecture of Choice for Domestic Workers

While the architecture of choice of work might certainly be assumed to be expansive for domestic workers in Kolkata, given the agglomeration economies in the city the question of choosing a 'safer' workplace if they felt unsafe, uncomfortable or prone to violence was a choice that most domestic workers exercised. Yet, the study acknowledges that these choices were often truncated due to structural locations that limited the possibilities for women to make their own choices aligned with their articulations of safety. Some of the domestic women workers we spoke to, chose to work in households near their place of stay, and personal acquaintances were often regarded as an assurance of safety. Additionally, the choice question emerged prominently while mapping out the life histories of domestic women workers, most of whom started working as domestic workers due to the absence of any other financial support or for providing financial support to their families. However, the aspects of generational mobility and articulation of a dignified life are built into the dreams of domestic workers, none of whom wanted their children to work as domestic workers, even if all the PGPS' demands were met.

The choice of opting out of working in a certain household was often exercised by domestic women workers when they faced uncomfortable or unsafe situations in such households. If they ever encountered or suffered sexual harassment, physical or otherwise, they would simply stop working in that household. As one worker stated:

'When we see and experience something bad in the household, we simply leave.'

It is, however, recognized in the study that the decision to leave in case of sexual violence (or any other form of violence) cannot be considered a free 'choice' that women make with complete agency over their situation. Factors that range from lack of adequate redressal mechanisms or access to larger legal institutions, to a larger social, cultural, and institutional deafening to complaints of gender and sexual-based violence by women from marginalized communities, severely limit the number of choices that women can make for their safety. Further, the pervasive culture that vests the responsibility of protection of one's own 'honour' that the women are part of, is indicative of the patriarchal conditioning that situates the onus of shame and guilt on the woman on being violated. These 'choices,' therefore, must be understood as negotiations with the everyday threat of sexual violence in their places of work, that is, private households, and as preventive measures taken to avoid being harassed, therefore mitigating any threat to their 'honour' and, therefore, their reputations of being 'good' women. These individual forms of negotiations and resistance must be understood against the backdrop of the casteist and patriarchal social structures that deem the Dalit woman's body as open to violation by upper-caste men. As one worker said emotionally, *'Tears come in my eyes, but nothing comes out of my mouth.'*

Another area of women exercising their own agency came forth when they were asked if they would leave their work in case their needs, financial or otherwise, were met. Most women felt that their work and the

payment of money lent a sense of independence to them. This money, they felt, could be used for their own leisure, separate from their household expenses. As one worker excitedly told us:

'I can buy a bindi with my money, I can buy a saree, ride a rickshaw with my money!'

Structural Embeddedness of Caste and Gender relations among Agricultural Workers

Not only is a discussion of violence mapped on to the legal definitions as prescribed in the POSH Act, but the futility of speaking of gender-based violence intertwined with caste-based violence was also evident among the women agricultural workers interviewed for this study. The choice of a safer workplace was often truncated within the structural embeddedness of caste, class, and patriarchy. As one worker sadly stated:

'What can we do? If we work and earn, we will be able to eat. If we can't work and earn, we won't get any food. Even if they beat us, we are forced to work in their fields.'

The question of choosing a safer workplace if they felt unsafe, uncomfortable, or prone to violence was misplaced in the rural settings of Bihar as the truncated choices due to structural locations also limited the possibilities for the women to make their own choices aligned with their articulations of safety. Women workers chose to work in fields surrounding their villages and would often not leave the agricultural land in the village even if better wages were being offered in the nearby or distant villages. However, rampant sexual violence was reported by fellow field investigators by men of dominant caste families on women agricultural labourers. The details were narrated by one of the women workers:

'A woman labourer was going home from the market when a group of men from dominant castes grabbed her and took her to their fields, where they tried to disrobe her and sexually assault her. The reason they gave was that she had not come to their fields to work, and therefore needed to be taught a lesson. When her mother-in-law protested, they pushed her so hard that she fell and hurt her head. An FIR was lodged in this case. But the upper caste families are putting pressure to compromise the case. All these cases still happen here today.'

Ambiguity of Choice among Home-based Workers in Delhi

Among home-based workers, the 'choice' to choose taxing work such as embellishment, beadwork, and embroidery must be investigated with caution. The piece rate work does not satisfy the financial needs of a family. As one worker stated, *'Even if we work the whole day and night, we won't be able to earn enough for the whole family.'* Further, such work requires women to sit for long hours, straining their eyes and bodies, that leads to many health hazards such as weakening eyesight, hip mobility issues, and uterine cysts. Yet, they consider embellishment piece work or stitching work 'safer' than other work that requires going out of the house. This speaks volumes about the embedded nature of caste, class, and gender inequalities that manifest in institutional forms to restrict these women's mobility, and therefore, their ability to choose plausible employment opportunities for themselves. As discussed in the previous chapters, women are restricted from going outside to work by their husbands or other family members. One of the respondents stated how, because of her caste location, she will not be allowed to go out and work. Thus, caste circumscribes the limits of women's mobility. For other women, domestic violence severely limits their chances of moving out of home to seek employment opportunities. However, the nexus of public and private violence manifests here, since the constant threat of violence in the public areas of Madanpur Khadar does not allow the women to leave their children alone at home or travel alone from home to school or back. Further, many of these women do not have a system of support or spaces where they can keep their children supervised while they go out to work. The women have to be responsible for their children, and therefore piece rate work is feasible for them so that they are able to look after their children and earn some money.

A significant barrier to women's accessibility to better employment opportunities is the lack of proper infrastructure in the informal, resettlement colonies like Madanpur Khadar, which does not have toilets or access to clean drinking water. With severely limited spaces, often only one or two rooms of 16-22 yards, the women are forced to take up less work, leading to less monetary compensation. Less or no electricity

Case Study 5

Brijbala stays in Madanpur Khadar. She gets the raw material from a female contractor who lives nearby. She is given a piece of cloth and the decorative material that she is supposed to stick to the cloth using glue. For one packet of decorative material being stuck, she is paid Rs 70. She is rarely paid on time by the female contractor. When she asks for money, she is told that there is no money to give, the factories have not paid the contractor, or she is asked to come later. The work itself is tedious, and she complains of pain in her eyes and hips from sitting at one place for a long time. The dealer she takes the piece work from, has not paid her for months, and about Rs 9,000 is still due. But she does not know when she will be paid. If she doesn't continue working for the same dealer, she might lose out on all her payment. This is why she keeps working in the hope of getting properly compensated. When asked why she continues working in such poor conditions, she says if she doesn't work at home, she will have to work outside, which is not permissible in her family. She tells us she is from a Brahmin caste, and her husband and in-laws won't allow her, the wife, to go out and work, especially as a domestic worker. She is also worried about her children, since the area she lives in is very unsafe in terms of safety of women and children. Even though her mobility is restricted because of caste and gender, she still needs to work since her husband's income does not help meet household needs and requirements.

connections has implications for women's health as they work on embellishment, leading to a higher work burden and less monetary returns. Some respondents informed us how the glue and the stones affected their eyes but they had no choice but to keep using them for some financial benefits.

Further, they are forced to use public toilets, that charge them Rs 3-5 for each use. Hygienic practices of sanitation are not followed in these public toilets, leading to public health hazards; further, the spectre

Figure 5.1 Precarity of Home-based Women Workers

of sexual harassment outside and around the toilets hangs on all such women. It is, therefore, women's responsibility to accompany their children, especially teenage girls, to the toilets, having a significant impact on their daily productivity. Further, the women respondents of Madanpur Khadar did not have access to clean drinking water, forcing them to fetch water from tankers, or to buy water to drink. All these factors intersected to create a web of precarity that the women faced on a daily basis, severely limiting their access to choice (Figure 5.1).

CHAPTER 6

Strategies and Tactics

Introduction

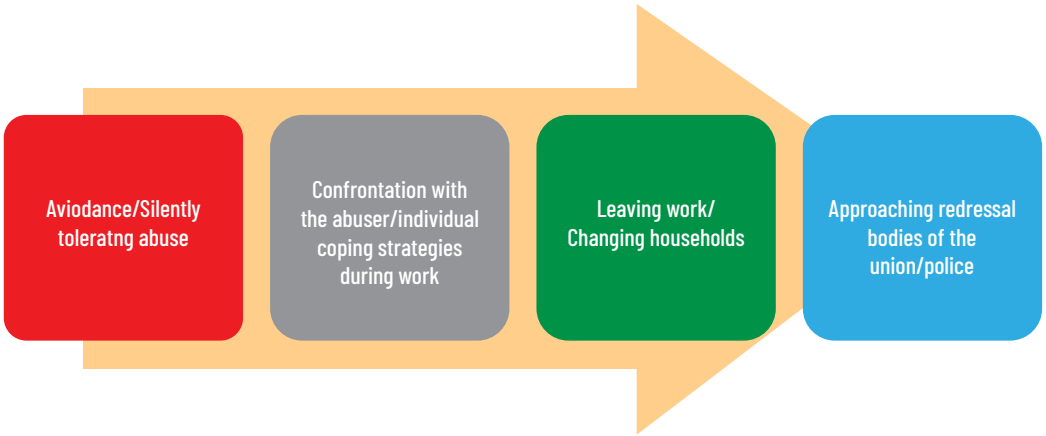
Feminist scholars have underscored the importance of looking at women's agency and how they actively recruit strategies to resist gender-based discrimination, inequalities, and in this case, gender-based violence, through a range of collective and individual actions. These strategies, albeit on any level, are important for challenging the larger gendered power structures of class and caste, where women face violence towards them directly or indirectly and attempt to mitigate it. These strategies range from legal action to collective efforts to individuals acts of resistance. This chapter looks at how each informal worker resists gender-based violence in her own way.

Case of Domestic Workers

Vijaylakshmi et al., (2022) note that, among domestic workers, strategies against sexual harassment that they face are mostly, 'self-focused and with minimal support from friends/family' and only bring in their family and community when they have 'enough' evidence. This observation aligns with our findings, wherein most domestic workers in Kolkata found their own private strategies to deal with gender-based violence which allowed them to feel 'safe.' The study acknowledges that this does not necessarily mean that the women are no longer prone to gender-based violence; instead, these strategies are merely an effort to mitigate the degree of violence that they are exposed to. Such strategies include using indirect methods to subdue the perpetrator or, if the harassment becomes intolerable, a direct confrontation with the perpetrator.

Domestic workers also make sure that young members of their families never join domestic work in their place. Similarly, many domestic workers choose to visit the households at a time when all the family members are at home. For some domestic workers, if they felt unsafe, uncomfortable, or anticipated any instance of gender-based violence, they would discontinue working in that specific household and would not report the instance to any family member, fearing shame and victimization. However, others followed an informal mechanism of negotiations where they confronted the employer and came to a common understanding of the situation. It is only in a few cases that domestic workers approached formal legal redressal mechanisms to report their abuse. While these are individual strategies of negotiations with the everyday violence against women, collective strategies often include building pressure to file a police complaint to report any instance of gender-based violence, including their own mechanism of the union to document and report such cases.

Figure 6.1 Spectrum of Negotiating Violence in Domestic Work



Case Study 6

'Uncle would come behind me on the pretence of switching on the water filter, to fill up the water bottle. Our bodies would then touch. I would say, "Uncle if you need something, don't stand behind me, stand apart and tell me, I will give it to you." One day, I had to dust the bed and I was not wearing a dupatta. As I was bending down and dusting, I saw uncle standing there in front of me. I asked him not to stand there, but he kept standing. I think I did the right thing by deliberately hitting him with the duster pretending to clean the bed. He asked me, "Why did you hit me?" I said, "I didn't do it deliberately, but this is what happens when you stand too close to the bed. I asked you to stand aside, but you didn't, so the duster hit you." Later I left working in that house. One day uncle called me and asked me why did I leave my work in that house. I told him, "Change your behaviour first and then only can anybody come to your house to work."'

Case of Agricultural Workers

Since accessing and approaching formal legal institutions for the redressal of sexual violence and harassment were not considered a plausible option for the women agricultural labourers due to the constant fear of violent retaliation from the dominant castes, the women employed indigenous strategies and tactics to deal with the everydayness of the violence. They chose to work in farms that were near their homes, and in case they needed to travel, they travelled in groups. They avoided being left alone in the field, or even working after the stipulated period of time on the farm. However, when all strategies to avoid gender-based violence failed, and such instances did happen, the women did not always stay silent and chose to respond in spaces and situations compatible to do so:

'*The women respond, "Don't you have sisters at home, that you are cracking lewd jokes at us?" We say, "Were you not born out of a woman? You are a man, and we are women. Its not like you were fed more milk and we less milk by our mothers. Its not like you were in your mother's womb for nine months, while we were there only for one month."'*

These choices entail the choice to move spatially to bargain for better wages, the choice to explore opportunities for other work, and the choice to choose a 'safe' working place. Additionally, these tactics also include reinforcement of practices of untouchability which otherwise are fought fiercely against in arenas beyond work. For example, in Gaya, reinforcing untouchability becomes a way of not maintaining proximity which in turn reduces the risk of various kinds of violence, especially caste-based violence. Adolescent, young girls who are unmarried are constantly warned against creating any atmosphere that can give the upper caste landowners a chance to sexually violate them; they are asked to strictly follow the code of conduct dictated by untouchability by being very careful of not touching anything in the landowners' houses, otherwise the latter will create a reason for of her touch to physically or sexually violate her:

'We tell the girls, "Don't touch anything in his house, don't give him a chance to touch or abuse you."'

Case of Home-based Workers

Among the home-based workers, limited spatial mobility is practiced by women workers by working in groups and dealing through agents who coordinate with the factories and the workers. The intermediary agent negotiates wages to capture the monetary margin of profit and women workers end up getting paid relatively lower wages to ensure their safety and avoid any form of gender-based violence. The women also told us about the various strategies that they employed to mitigate the chances or severity of violence, both in the public and the private domains:

'Once, a friend of mine went to a male dealer to get pieces. Suddenly, the man started touching her hand, and even her waist. You know what she did? She hit his hand with her elbow, and when he let go of her and winced in pain, she shouted at him that she will never take orders from him again.'

Domestic strategies are also employed by women to mitigate domestic violence. One of the strategies is not making their work visible to their husbands:

'We make sure that we do all our household chores and piece work before our husbands come home. They get very annoyed at us if we keep things scattered around at home. They shout at us for working and not looking after them after they have come home. Not one bead must be there on the floor, or else they will get angry at us. Sometimes I keep my piece work hidden so that he doesn't come to know.'

'Sometimes when I know he (the husband) will come late, I take some urgent work and finish it before he comes home. If I know he is coming at 10 at night, I finish all the work by 10. And once I get to know that he is coming, I quickly hide my work so that he doesn't see it.'

CHAPTER 7

Collectivization and Solidarities

The informal economy places quite a few challenges in the way of organizational collectivization since most modes of collectivizing are based on models in the formal economy that are built on organized collective action as workers in the industry. In the case of domestic work, the nature of the occupation, such as it being disaggregated, isolated, part-time, irregular, and having multiple employers, presents significant challenges to the emergence of a collective identity and collective interests. However, among domestic workers who are associated with Pashchimbanga Griha Paricharika Samiti (PGPS) – an association of domestic workers supported by ActionAid Association, collectivization and affective solidarity among the workers emerged as a significant way of negotiating instances of gender-based violence. The role of the union was recognized by all the domestic workers, not only as a political collective to claim the rights of domestic workers but also as a critical, affective, 'safe' space where instances of gender-based violence can be discussed without the fear of being judged and questioned.

While instances of sexual harassment might cause hostility, and possibly further violence at the hands of men within the patriarchal structure of a traditional family, this space assumes great importance in the lives of women, where they bond over shared lived experiences and emotions of working in different household spaces and facing violence, sexual or economic. Additionally, the union has also evolved its own means of redressal and taking up complaints. The friendships forged in the union emerge as a political act producing spaces of conviviality which not only enables the women to form robust associations, including safe spaces outside of the hegemonic and heteronormative (essentially caste-informed and patriarchal) ways of being and becoming. Domestic workers not only shared stories of everyday struggles but also intimate stories of being and dreams. Further, the union has provided the women with the vocabulary to state their demands. A registered domestic workers' union has given its members a permanence to their identity as domestic workers. It also made it clear that domestic workers wished to better the conditions surrounding their work, rather than abandoning it. Having a sense of establishment of their occupation and their status as workers, provides the women with the legitimacy to state their issues to upgrade their working conditions and environment. As one worker asserted in our interactions:

'We now have a space to speak, now we can speak.'

The union and the forged solidarities create a safety net for these women to challenge both their employers on their unjust conditions of work, as well as people in positions of bureaucratic power. Another worker stated:

'We couldn't speak to the police earlier, we would be scared, and they would drive us away, but now that we have a union, we are able to go and register our cases. We get the support...they too are bound to listen to us.'

The union, therefore, becomes a medium of magnifying the voices of the women bound in multiple marginalities.

The members of the union help young and new domestic workers to safeguard their rights, as well as to assert their needs in cases of injustice or violence. Among the women we spoke to, many did not own cellphones, but a list of numbers has been provided to all of them in case of emergencies. Each woman, therefore, becomes a support system for the other, creating a culture of intolerance towards gender-based violence and harassment. As one worker aptly said, *'Let them stand by us and let us stand by them.'*

In the absence of any psycho-social support available to the victims and survivors of gender-based violence, which many domestic workers are, the union space has emerged as an alternative and reflects the more-than-political potential of the union space.

Case Study 7

'We have no rights, no dignity. We are not even allowed to use toilets in the households and not treated properly. If we are sick and absent for a few days, we lose our jobs. All this needs to change. We want a contract before we are engaged in a service and hourly pay. We want paid leave and sick leave, apart from bonuses according to government rates,' said Pritika, who has been working as a domestic help for the last 15 years.

'The government should legally recognize us and set up welfare boards. We are a vital part of the household and if we all do not come for work for one day, you know what happens?' asked Roy. Challenging traditional relations between employer and employee, domestic workers have started voicing their demands for justice and equality in the workplace. And the day is not far when a domestic worker will enter into formal agreements with employers – just like any other employee in the organized sector.

This new-found awareness is a direct fallout of collectivization, and a joint program launched under the auspices of PGPS, an association of domestic workers supported by ActionAid Association. As a young organization, its membership has crossed 8,000 domestic workers, and this collective strength has given them the confidence to challenge the existing workplace relations to win demands of dignity, respect, and justice. Amu from Dhakuria has been working as a domestic worker. Her employer threatened her with dismissal if she missed work due to illness or any other reason. 'I was not treated well and they kept increasing my work load. I wanted a raise as I was working on the same salary for over two years,' recalls Amu.

'The employer threatened to dismiss me. At that point I informed him about my membership of PGPS and informed him that I was not alone. Before dismissing they had to give adequate notice to look for another job,' said Prerna, narrating her experience. 'The conviction in my argument forced the employer to increase my monthly remuneration by Rs 500. Four monthly holidays were also sanctioned. I feel strong and I feel confident,' she said. Association with PGPS has also helped members to extract better work conditions.

In states like Gujarat and Karnataka domestic workers are recognized. They have welfare boards and fixed minimum wages. In West Bengal they are demanding these benefits. In addition to workplace conditions, PGPS also focuses on issues like accessing legal aid free of cost for victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence. 'We are now aware of the POST Act and Domestic Violence Act in our state and the authority to be approached to seek redressal,' says Pritika. 'We are even aware of the process of filing a First Information Report at the police station,' she adds. The union has also developed its own mechanism to register these complaints and follow up for redressal. The collective effort of the women's organization has been successful in reducing incidences of gender-based violence and domestic violence in the community. In addition, the union provides these workers a safe space to share their stories and experiences.

Women workers recounted instances of coming together against any incident of violence. The collective is empowered by the imagination and impetus of women activists working with the workers. In the absence of any psycho-social support for the survivors of gender-based violence, these collectives become instrumental as support systems by way of sharing stories and experiences. Among home-based workers in Delhi, the collective ways of negotiating with payment delays and the boycott of agents have become a means of solidarity.

CHAPTER 8

Violence and Mitigation Strategies

This chapter provides an exploration of the multifaceted nature of violence experienced by three distinct groups in the informal workforce: domestic workers, agricultural labourers, and home-based workers. It delves into the unique challenges that each of these groups confronts and methodically compiles the insights gleaned from their experiences. Finally, it consolidates the findings related to the ingenious strategies employed by these remarkable women in the informal labour sector to mitigate the risks and perils that they face in their daily work lives.

Table 8.1 and the following sections offer a comprehensive examination of each group's experiences, highlighting their specific challenges and detailing the inventive solutions that they crafted to safeguard themselves against the threats of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) within their diverse workplaces.

Figure 8.1 Continuum of Violence against Informal Women Workers

Perpetrator	Domestic Workers (Kolkata)	Agricultural workers (Bihar)	Home-based workers (Delhi)
1. Employer	a) Sexual harassment in the form of unwanted touching, sexual innuendoes, etc. b) Meagre incomes c) Eviction without notice during major festivals, as well as during the pandemic d) Denial of sick leave e) Threat and intimidation f) Denial to access toilets g) False accusations of theft	a) Unequal and low wages b) Sexual harassment in forms of inappropriate staring and gazing, sexually laced comments, demands and requests for sexual favours, pulling of garments etc. c) Verbal denigration using casteist slurs d) Physical assaults e) Demands of extra work and threats of dismissal if not complied with\	a) Low wages and irregular payment b) Holding payments and binding workers to one dealer c) Sexual harassment in the form of unwanted touching and lewd comments
2. Family	Intimate partner violence	Intimate partner violence	Intimate partner violence in form of a) Physical violence b) Destroying pieces of work and household items c) False accusations of cheating d) Intimidation and threats e) Victim blaming

Perpetrator	Domestic Workers (Kolkata)	Agricultural workers (Bihar)	Home-based workers (Delhi)
3. State	a) Police verification before allowing them to work in gated societies b) Torture and arresting them on the basis of false accusations of theft by employers c) Refusal to register complaints against employers d) Police victim blaming workers on complaints of sexual harassment e) Non-functional local Complaints Committee f) Labour Department not registering more unions for domestic workers g) Eviction for illegal settlements	a) Casteist humiliation and denigration b) Refusal to file FIRs against resourceful landowners, contractors etc. for sexual harassment c) Intimidation, character assassination, use of derogatory language to address the complainant, blaming the complainant for provoking the accused	a) Improper planning of resettlement colonies b) Insensitivity and unprofessionalism on the part of the police; refusal to register complaints of domestic violence
4. Community	N.A.	a) Victim blaming and shaming b) Moral policing c) Denigrating young, single women and shaming them for provoking the accused in case of a sexual assault	a) Verbal or physical abuse due to competition for gaining more work from the contractor b) Moral policing and shaming

In the unorganized sector, where women often toil in domestic roles, a web of mitigation strategies is meticulously woven to safeguard against the looming spectre of SGBV in their workplaces. This study unearthed and documented such strategies. This intricate tapestry of survival is intricately constructed, molded by the labyrinthine interplay of factors, including the divisive caste and religion-based segregation of labour, the absence of formal redressal mechanisms, and the weight of societal norms.

A prominent trend in this mitigation is concealment and disguise. For Muslim domestic workers striving to secure positions in Hindu households, a transformative act of camouflage often becomes a necessity. They ingeniously masquerade as Hindu women, adorning themselves with the traditional Hindu Bengali marriage symbols - bangles that serve as a guise, a disguise as it were, enabling them to find employment. The subterfuge extends further to the adoption of false Hindu names and the donning of Hindu-sounding surnames, an ingenious ruse designed to obscure their true religious identity and enable them to have a livelihood.

In parallel, for those marginalized by caste, the act of altering surnames such as Das, Haldar, and Mondal, serves as a clandestine veil. Concealing their caste identity, these workers traverse the minefield of casteist households, securing work for specific tasks without revealing their true backgrounds.

Timing and household selection are tactical choices made by these women. Selecting working hours when all family members are present in the household becomes a strategic shield, minimizing the risk of sexual harassment. Careful curation of employers further amplifies this defense, as they deliberately opt for households with a reputation for treating workers respectfully.

When confronting uncomfortable or unsafe situations, women exhibit a remarkable degree of agency by leaving such work environments. However, the decisions are not arrived at lightly, as the limited redressal mechanisms and societal pressures cast a long shadow over their choices.

Collective voices among unorganized sector workers require organizational scaffolding and a platform to amplify their concerns. This resonates profoundly in Gaya, where even the most marginalized women find their selfhood unrecognized in its most fundamental, material form, effectively denied any claim to their

own time. These women often band together to address instances of violence, and their collective strength is emboldened by the unwavering commitment and enthusiasm of women activists collaborating with the workers.

In the absence of adequate psycho-social support for survivors of SGBV, these collectives evolve into instrumental support systems. They serve as platforms where stories and experiences are exchanged and resilience is fostered.

In Delhi, home-based workers display a knack for using collective strategies to navigate payment delays and boycotting unscrupulous agents. Solidarity is the anchor that binds these workers, uniting them to confront shared challenges on the employment front.

In sum, women in the unorganized sector are resourceful in their use of creative strategies to defend against SGBV while navigating the multifaceted maze of their unique work environments. The strength of collective action, fostered by unions and support networks, is a cornerstone in their empowerment. It not only assists them in addressing the pervasive issue of SGBV but also in championing improved working conditions while safeguarding their dignity and well-being. These collectives operate as crucial support systems, cultivating a sense of unity and offering a space for women to share their experiences, all while advocating for transformative change.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion and Recommendations

As reported in the interviews and focus group discussions, there are various forms of gender-based violence faced by informal women workers in India that includes physical and sexual assaults, harassment and bullying, denial of wages and benefits, discriminatory treatment, and unsafe and unhealthy working conditions. In the discussions with women informal workers, it was evident that precarity of work becomes a major factor in negotiating GBV. Similarly, the barriers to access to rights and protection for women workers in India include lack of legal recognition and protection for informal workers, lack of awareness of their rights, lack of access to justice and support services such legal aid, stigma and discrimination faced by women workers, and power imbalances in the informal workplace.

The identified barriers and the associated mitigation strategies are summarized in Table 9.1.

Figure 9.1 Barriers and Mitigation Strategies regarding Gender-based Violence

Barriers	Mitigation Strategies
Lack of Social Security and Recognition	Advocacy for policies for recognition of work in non-traditional spaces, and ensuring protection and social security
Lack of Awareness regarding Labour Laws, POSH Act and laws on Prevention of Domestic Violence	Extensive awareness campaigns regarding functioning of local committees and the rights granted under the POSH Act
Lack of Access to Justice and Support Services	Ensuring access to legal aid and psycho-social support through counselling
Lack of Adequate Government Policies for Urban Planning	Incorporating the needs of home-based workers and domestic workers in city plans and policies
Lack of Sanitation and Access to Potable Water	Improving the physical environment by creating better access to water and sanitation; more focus on WASH policies
Stigma	Systematic engagement with informal women workers on issues of GBV
Discrimination	Enforcement of available legal instruments and capacity building of workers' organizations to tackle issues of gender-based violence and discrimination

Civic actors, organizations, and movements can help change the norms that contribute to violence against informal women workers in India through various means:

1. Awareness campaigns: Educate the public and workers and raise awareness about the issue of violence against women workers, promoting gender equality and respect for women's rights in the workplace.
2. Advocacy: Advocate for stronger laws, strict enforcement of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 and policies to protect women workers and hold employers accountable for workplace violence.
3. Community mobilization: Engage communities, including families, workers, employers, and local leaders to promote cultural change and challenge harmful gender norms. Awareness sessions on bodily autonomy, consent, respect, equality, and dignified work must be conducted in communities. A national campaign to redistribute and share household and care work should be carried out.
4. Support services: Provide resources and support services to help women workers report incidents of violence and access legal, medical, and other forms of assistance. It should be ensured that there are women police officers in each police station in all districts. Free legal services, envisioned in the Legal Services Authority Act, 1987 should be adequately accessible to women.

6. Collaborations: Work with government and business partners to implement programs and initiatives that address the root causes of violence against women workers.

Apart from these recommendations, it is crucial to chart out the agenda for further action in the context of gender-based violence against informal women workers, including:

1. Research and data collection: There is an urgent need to gather and analyze data on the extent and impact of violence against informal women workers to inform policy and advocacy efforts. This may include sector specific research studies and surveys to map out the extent of gender-based violence.
2. Legal frameworks: There is an urgent requirement to enforce laws such as the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 that provide protection and redressal mechanisms for women facing violence in the workplace. It is necessary to publish data regarding the status of local committees along with the status of cased filed and their resolution. Such a mechanism will ensure an effective implementation of the law.
3. Sensitization and awareness: There is a need for creating awareness about women's rights and gender-based violence through campaigns, training, and sensitization programs for employers, workers, and the wider community. This cannot be achieved without the support of CSOs.
4. Collective bargaining: There is a necessity for promoting collective bargaining and worker-led organizations to empower informal women workers to negotiate better working conditions and protection from violence. This is evident from the experience of PGPS in Kolkata.
5. Support services: We need to establish support services such as counseling, legal aid, and emergency shelters for informal women workers who face violence at the workplace.
6. Engagement with stakeholders: Engagement with employers, trade unions, civil society organizations, and government agencies is a must for creating a coordinated response to violence against informal women workers.
7. Data collection and monitoring: The collection of data on violence against informal women workers and monitoring the implementation of laws and policies to hold those accountable.
8. Economic empowerment: The fight to end gender-based violence in all its forms cannot go forward without providing economic empowerment opportunities such as skill development, financial literacy, and access to credit to increase women's independence and agency.

Annexures

Annexure 1:
Key Recommendations from State and National Consultations

1. Recognition: It was agreed that precarity of informal work plays a crucial role in exposing informal women workers to GBV. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure a fixed minimum wage rate, defined hours of work, nature of work, maternity benefits, health benefits, access to social security benefits, and paid leave, which will ensure a safe working environment for women.
2. Awareness: It was found that awareness regarding nature and types of gender-based violence is lacking among the informal workers. Additionally, most of the workers were unaware of provisions of local committees under the POSH Act which can be approached to seek justice in instances of gender-based violence. Thus, there is a need for intensive awareness campaigns which include sessions on gender-based violence and its nature and legal provisions including widespread dissemination of information regarding local committees.
3. Enforcement of existing laws: As previous studies have suggested, and the present study has confirmed the functionality of LCs remains a major bottleneck as these committees merely exist on paper or have not been functional. The proactive role of LCs is required to disseminate the information at appropriate public places and concerned places of informal work. Additionally, it is recommended to set-up a national portal where monthly record of cases dealt by LCs and their status should be updated to ensure transparency and accountability.
4. Capacity building: There is an urgent need for capacity building of members of the Local Complaint Committees, district administration, and police personnel on issues of gender-based violence and sexual harassment.
5. Psycho-social support and access to legal aid: In any instance of violence, the victims are left without any psycho-social support and legal aid. It is recommended to ensure psycho-social support for victims of gender-based violence along with free legal aid.
6. Need of a national feminist solidarity network: The role played by workers' organizations, collectives, NGOs, and CBOs is evident and it is recommended to create a National Feminist Network which will work collaboratively to mainstream the issue of gender-based violence.

Annexure 2:
Press Release of the National Consultation on Gender-based Violence against Women Workers in the Informal Sector of India

On December 29, 2022, ActionAid Association organized a national consultation on gender-based violence against women workers in the informal sector of India. Organized at India International Centre, New Delhi, it was part of ActionAid Association's study on gender-based violence against informal women workers in the country. The fieldwork for the study was conducted with women home-based workers in Delhi; domestic workers in Kolkata, West Bengal; and women agricultural workers in Bihar.

The consultation began with sharing of findings of the study amongst the diverse pool of attendees. There was representation from various community-based organizations working with street vendors, construction site workers, domestic workers, and other informal sector workers, besides the *National Human Rights Commission* (NHRC), *United Nations Population Fund* (UNFPA), journalists, activists and leading women's rights organizations such as Jagori. The objective of the consultation was to discuss the various forms of violence faced by women in the informal sector and to find mechanisms to tackle the same – at institutional as well as community levels.

Swapna from the Pashchimbanga Griha Paricharika Samiti (PGPS), a domestic workers' collective in West Bengal, stated that the violence that domestic workers face is not just physical or sexual in nature. It is deeply rooted in structural inequalities and intrinsically tied to their identity as domestic workers. Furthermore, if they do share instances of violence faced at the workplace, they end up facing stigma and harassment at home. They are blamed and, in many instances, even discouraged from working.

Kanchan, a street vendor from Delhi, talked about cases of violence that women street vendors routinely face, including harassment from male street vendors and the authorities who remove them arbitrarily and even break their carts.

Mr Pranav Jha from the *National Human Rights Commission* shared that the Commission has improved their online complaint mechanism and has begun disposing off the complaints rapidly. He implored more people to lodge complaints on this online portal.

Following in-depth deliberations, the gathering unanimously agreed that there is a strong need for spreading awareness on complaint mechanisms as well as to ensure last mile connectivity of complaint mechanisms to make them more accessible to the most marginalized women workers of the informal sector. Additionally, it is imperative to activate and further strengthen the Local Complaints Committees and to ensure their swift and efficient functioning.

It was further agreed that women in the informal sector must be identified, duly registered with their employers, unionized, and be given a voice and platform. National policies for groups such as home-based workers and domestic workers must be formulated and implemented, clearly defining their work, working hours, days off and wages, and ensuring them maternity and health benefits. It was strongly felt that the creation of a safe workspace would help prevent violence. This would require clearly defining, regulating and monitoring informal workspaces through vigilance committees and complaint mechanisms.

The consultation ended on the possibility of forming a feminist network to work on the issue of gender-based violence and for different civil society organizations, community-based organizations, activists and policymakers to come together for an improved access to justice and creation of safe workspaces for women workers in the informal sector.

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