

“यौन उत्पीड़न के कारण को समझ कर हमें ज़मीनी स्तर पर काम करने में और सहायता मिलेगी”

“Understanding the causes of sexual harassment will further help us in our work at the grassroots level.”

Women domestic workers came together to identify root cause of sexual harassment at the workplace and their subsequent effects on their physical and mental health, employability and other aspects

Introduction: Background

Martha Farrell Foundation, in partnership with women domestic workers in Delhi-NCR, is working towards strengthening mechanisms under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 (SHW Act, 2013) for women domestic workers; to enable effective prevention, prohibition, and redressal of experiences of sexual harassment in the world of work of domestic workers.

We seek to bring the issue of sexual harassment in the world of work of women domestic workers to the fore and create responsive, accountable, sensitive institutional responses, in compliance with the 2013 Act. In our endeavour to achieve this, Martha Farrell Foundation has since its inception conducted awareness cum training sessions with the Women Domestic Workers (WDWs) to inform, aware and empower them of their right to safety and gender-justice in workplaces.

Problem Tree Analysis

In line with the Martha Farrell Foundation’s mission to inform, aware and empower workers regarding their right to safety and gender-justice in workplaces, it was felt that there was a need to facilitate sessions with WDWs to discuss underlying causes of sexual harassment faced by them in their world of work. Focused group discussion using the Problem Tree Analysis helped in mapping the root causes and underlying effects of sexual harassment in the workplace. Discussion through Problem Tree Analysis empowered them with voice, agency and space and provided a template for mapping causes and effects to better understand the chain of connected circumstances that led to the violence, harassment or any other issue.

It is a participatory tool which uses community-based participatory research methodology which empowers women to think of their problems and their root causes and in the process they reflect and discuss the issues which are relevant for them and use their own experiences and knowledge to highlight the root causes of the issues. Problem mapping exercises give them ownership of their concerns and they put their voice forward with resilience.

Objectives

1. To discuss the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence and sexual harassment which empowers them to ask questions against the existing social structures and norms
2. To make women aware and informed that there is a cause-and-effect relationship related to sexual harassment at the workplace, which can impact their well-being, physical health, employment, mobility and self-esteem.

Highlights from the sessions

The Focused group discussion through Problem Tree Analysis saw active participation from the WDWs. The session was led by the WDWs who through discussion in groups mapped the problems faced by them at their workplaces (with a focus on sexual harassment) along with their underlying causes and the effect it has on their daily lives. These sessions were facilitated by MFF at the following locations:

1. Gurugram

Date: 12th September

Number of participants: 15



Picture 1: Women domestic workers of Gurugram engaged in mapping the problems faced by them in their world of work

2. Taimoor Nagar

Date: 14th September

Number of participants: 50



Picture 2: Women domestic workers of Taimoor Nagar engaged in discussion as part of the session

3. Munirka

Date: 15th September

Number of participants: 30



Picture 3: Women domestic workers of Munirka participating in the session

4. Jasola

Date: 19th September

Number of participants: 35



Picture 4: Women domestic workers of Jasola drawing the problem tree as part of the session

Observation

1. The Focused Group Discussion provided women with an agency to discuss their everyday problems, its underlying causes and effects, thereby helping them understand the cause-and-effect relationship which is critical to effectively address the problems being faced by them.
2. The exercise provided an opportunity for the WDWs to rethink their established notions of the underlying causes of gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment.
3. It helped them to understand that being paid less and being harassed by their employer has nothing to do with themselves and that the problem lies in the hierarchical structures of society which have suppressed the rights of women both within and outside the household.
4. The session provided women with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of working as domestic workers and experiencing sexual harassment.
5. During one such reflection in Jasola Vihar, a Pehelkar (community leader) brought into discussion a case where two domestic workers belonging to Jharkhand were being harassed by their employer at their workplace. She narrated how they were being forced to work without sufficient food and were not being paid their salaries for months. Despite both of them wanting to leave the job, the employer forced them to continue working. As the case was being discussed by the WDWs, it was decided that they would mobilize other WDWs and protest for the release of both the workers and demand their rights. As planned a group of 35 WDWs sat in protest outside the employer's house and demanded the release of both the workers. Simultaneously with the help of the Delhi Commission for Women's helpline, 181 a complaint was filed and police support was sought. Once the police arrived, a case was registered against the employer on charges of harassment and non-payment of wages. Fearing action from the police and WDWs, the

employer then released both the workers and tried to bribe the police to settle the matter. The police sensing the pressure from the WDWs, immediately ordered the employer and the aggrieved to reach the nearest police station and settle the case as per the rules and regulations. After interrogation with the employer and the aggrieved, the police ordered the former to pay the pending salary and plead guilty for his acts which were liable to be punished under the Indian Penal Code. The employer followed the orders and the aggrieved WDWs were paid their due salary.

The above case is an apt example of how participatory training can empower women to stand and fight for their rights. It also highlights the critical role of women collectives or groups in fighting the varied institutions of discrimination that subjugate women to follow the regressive norms set by the patriarchal structures of society.

Findings

The session on problem tree analysis with the WDWs brought out a varied set of problems and their underlying causes and effects. Some of the key problems identified/highlighted by the women domestic workers during the session were:

1. Gurugram:

- **Sexual Harassment:** Women Domestic Workers (WDWs) face sexual harassment both while on their way to work and at their workplace. People stare at them, whistle and sometimes even follow them on their way to work. Inside the workplace, they are verbally harassed by their male employers who frequently ask for sexual favors from them in return for monetary benefits.
- **Discrimination:** WDWs are not allowed to use the washrooms at their workplace and they are served food in separate utensils by their employer which according to the WDWs is discriminatory since they are treated differently based on the work that they do.
- **Unequal working conditions:** The WDWs are not paid their salary on time and even if they are paid it is less when compared to the amount of work that they do. They are also not allowed to take leaves even during bad health and menstruation and if they take any leave their salary is deducted.

The underlying causes include the poor implementation of the SHW law and hence no disincentive or fear on the part of the employer to refrain from doing such acts also since the employer considers the WDWs as possessing no rights and power to act against such practices they keep doing it without any fear of being caught or punished.

2. Taimurnagar:

- **Lack of support:** Many WDWs expressed that in cases of sexual harassment, they are not supported by the police who in most cases collude with the employer creating an environment of fear so that the WDWs take back their cases.
- **Less pay:** The WDWs expressed their concern about the lower pay that they receive and that their salary should increase from 2000 per month to 5000 per month considering the amount of work that they do every day.
- **No security of job:** The WDWs shared several incidents when they were asked to leave their job on the pretext of stealing valuable items from the employer's house. Such incidents make the WDWs economically vulnerable since it is time-consuming and difficult for them to secure employment.

The WDWs asserted that a major underlying cause for such discriminatory behaviour of their employer was the feeling that since WDWs work for them and are women, they are powerless and hence can be subjugated to a second-class citizen.

3. Jasola:

- **Abuse:** The WDWs shared how their employers verbally abuse them when they ask for their monthly salaries which they are entitled to. They say “ *Kaam par to time se nahi aati ho lekin salary mangne time se aa jati ho*”
- **Domestic violence:** As a result of low salary and delay in payment from the employer, often WDWs find themselves being verbally abused by their partners at home which sometimes takes the form of domestic violence.

The rest of the problems were similar to the problems shared by WDWs in Gurugram and Taimurnagar. The underlying causes highlighted include lack of information to the WDWs about their rights under the constitution and various laws so that they can fight against being meted out to them by the employer.

Conclusion

Problem Tree Analysis as a participatory tool provided women with an agency to map their problems they face at their workplaces. It helped them understand that the discrimination and harassment meted out to them is an outcome of the regressive societal structures built over the years and that intervention in terms of external action is needed to fight them.