



PHOTO: WOMAN WORKING IN THE GARMENT INDUSTRY IN MYANMAR

Women, Work and Violence In South Asia Newsletter

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

Women, Work and Violence in Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan

by Tamsin Bradley

Project Introduction



This project has been funded by the UK Department for International Development (UK Aid) and seeks to produce comparative research across

three countries; Pakistan, Nepal and Myanmar. Consortium partners consist of IMC Worldwide (lead), University of Portsmouth and the International Centre for Research. Additional institutional collaborators are the Lahore University for Management Studies and the University of Delhi.

The data will be both quantitative (e.g. household surveys) and qualitative (to include in-depth interviews). The project is 18 months in total with the final report due March 2017.

Research Question

Our overall research question is as follows:

*HOW CAN APPROACHES TO INCREASE
WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT ALSO
TACKLE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?*

Sub Research Questions

Based on our current understanding, our sub research questions include:

- ➔ In each field site how does Violence Against Women (VAW) affect women's economic engagement (attendance, performance, type of job pursued etc.)?
- ➔ Under what conditions or in what contexts does wage work exacerbate VAW?
- ➔ Under what conditions does wage work become empowering for women (i.e. facilitate their agency, resources, achievements) and thereby decrease violence?
- ➔ What can employers do to improve women employees' productivity while at the same time increasing their wellbeing in the workplace and at home? (wellbeing includes reduction of violence).

The informal entertainment industry in Nepal



Read Suti Sahariah's initial reflections from his research in Nepal
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Project News: Stakeholder workshops



Find out more about the three stakeholder workshops have now been held with stakeholders in Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan.
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Introducing the project team

Get to know more about our international team and country based partners.
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Our research will be focus on different levels, from individual and household to state and national programme level and will seek to engage both government, civil society and the private sector. The research can be divided into two broad steps:

Step One

The first step will be to **develop an understanding of the beliefs, values, social frameworks and practical conditions in each site** that shape both violence against women and women's economic engagement. This will require in-depth intersectional analysis of various relevant sociocultural, economic and political factors.

Step Two

The second step will then be to consider **how employers and employment programmes can improve women's productivity while also diminishing the occurrence of VAW** both at work and outside.

Overall Objective

The overall impact objective is to **generate new research that offers clear policy and programme direction on how WEE can be used as a vehicle to reduce and mitigate VAW**.

Key questions guide our impact intentions:

- Does/can private sector engagement be better harnessed for the purpose of ending forms of VAWG (e.g. work based harassment)?
- Can better relationships between civil society women's organisations and the private sector bring positive results in reducing VAW?
- What works to end VAW and promote WEE?
- What positive case studies exist across countries that could be built open and replicated?

Women in the informal entertainment industry

by Suti Sahariah



Hundreds of women work in massage parlours and dance bars which often act as a conduit for sex work in Thamel - a vibrant business centre that is hugely popular with tourists and locals alike in

Nepal's capital Kathmandu.

Whilst there are no official figures available about the number of women working in informal entertainment industry in Nepal, the NGOs estimate it to be around 200,000. An ILO study in 2005 based on a sample of 200 workers found that around 16.5% of the workers were below the age of 18.

Responding to the surge of women working in this sector, and reports of severe exploitation and trafficking, the Supreme Court of Nepal issued procedural guidelines in 2008, giving protection against economic and sexual exploitation to women and girls in the entertainment sector to control sexual harassment. Activists says that guidelines have never been implemented. The Women

and Children office in Kathmandu says it has been finalised and waiting approval from the Home Ministry.

Bimala Rai Paudyal, a former member of National Planning Commission and development specialist says,

"It's a well-known fact that girls and women working in the entertainment sector are being physically and sexually abused. While the massage parlours and dance bars are legal, sex work is not, so the government ignores the matter pretending that the problems don't exist. It is better to regulate this sector and protect the basic rights of those working in it."



A Cabin Restaurant in Thamel

Raksha Nepal is one of NGOs that has been working to provide support, rehabilitation

and shelter for children of women working in the entertainment sector. Its founder, Menuka Thapa herself worked as a singer in a cabin restaurant as a teenager. She says:

"I saw the girls working at such places were mistreated, exploited badly. They were also forced to perform sexual activities by the customers and the owners of the restaurants. The workers went for days without getting paid but could not raise their voice against the employer for fear of losing their job. I was determined to fight against the atrocities."



Raksha Nepal Poster

Raksha Nepal has set up a union of women working in the entertainment sector in 2014. The union now boast over 3000 women. They meet once a month to discuss their grievances - the most common being the frequent raids and arrests by the police. There is also a women co-operative that offers credit and saving facility to women.

One of the women interviewed for our study was abandoned by her husband and in-laws. She says:

FAST FACTS

- In Thamel, Kathmandu's commercial neighbourhood, there are an estimated 1200 cabin restaurants, 180 dance bars and 200 massage parlours

16.5%

A 2005 ILO study based on a sample size of 200 female workers in the entertainment industry found that 16.5 percent were below 18 years of age.

37%

An Action Aid 2004 study found 37 % of cabin restaurant workers had to engage in some sort of sexual activity.

50%

A 2010 study by NGO Saathi and Danish embassy among 436 female workers in Kathmandu found that 50 % were children and around 60 % came from lower caste (Janajati)

90%

Women Forum for Women in Nepal says that around 90 % of the women engaged in the entertainment industry are migrants coming from often poorer and remote regions of Nepal.

24%

A 2015 study of 312 women and girls by NGO Chhori found that 24 % earned less than 5000 rupees a month and 60 % of women were looking for a foreign job. Most of them had no skills.

73%

A 2010 Nepal Human Rights Commission study indicated that 73 % of women reported of being verbally abused by customers, 60 % of women admitted of physical abuse. Four in five workers reported to enter the industry through friends.

"I was struggling to make ends meet despite trying my luck in various paces. Then a friend told me about sex work. Purely out of desperation I worked as a contact sex worker for a year and I'm not ashamed of it. I couldn't let my children starve. I made Rs 3000 a day. Some customers were violent. they beat me, some didn't give me money."

In 2009, she was introduced by a friend to Raksha Nepal's saving and credit scheme. She says:

"I soon took a loan of 7 lacs rupees and opened my own restaurant near Thamel in Kathmandu. The business did well. I then paid off my loan and then brought a small guest house."

She now employs seven women and bought another guest house recently. She adds

"today my children are doing well. The eldest son is studying engineering, the second son is studying management and daughter is in school and wants to be become a lawyer".



Whist this has been one of the success story, women who have been interviewed say major factors that drove them to work in the informal entertainment industry despite facing high level exploitation are child marriage, abandonment by family and husband, violence at home and the Maoist insurgency that gripped Nepal for almost 10 years. Girls were routinely abducted from school during that period.

In Kathmandu, Mohna Ansari, commissioner at Nepal's National Human Rights Commission acknowledges the problem is

"alarming" but adds that in its 'Trafficking in Persons National Report' published this year the Women and Children Office states that it has set up a Monitoring Action Committee to address the issues faced by women in the entertainment industry. She adds

"political inability however means that these issues are never accorded priority. These issues are a challenge for the whole Nepalese society."

Project News

Stakeholder Workshops

INTRODUCTION

In each of the three countries where the project is working we have run stakeholder workshops. The aim of these workshops has been:

- to raise awareness of the research being undertaken
- to seek advice on the design of our research within the different contexts, and
- to build support for research uptake activities to ensure that we maximise the impact of the research findings so that they positively influence policy and practice.

One of the main outcomes from all three workshops has been the creation of country based advisory forums, who will play a role throughout the project in advising and supporting the research uptake activities.

Some reflections on the workshops from members of the project team follow below: the highlights of the workshops are summarised below:

ENGAGING WITH STAKEHOLDERS: ZARA RAMSEY REFLECTS ON THE WORKSHOPS IN NEPAL AND MYANMAR

When designing research, it is extremely important to reach out to people who live and work in the countries being studied. People who have experience of dealing with local gender issues can share valuable in-depth and everyday knowledge of local economic conditions, cultural contexts, political nuances and even geographical issues. Their knowledge not only helps us to plan the methods that we use to conduct research, but it also helps us to shape the

very questions that we will be trying to answer.

To kick-start this sharing process, we have now held Stakeholder Workshops in Kathmandu, Yangon and Lahore. Our team members were joined at the workshops by representatives from government departments, civil society and major donor organisations, who came together to discuss gender, work and violence in their local country contexts. New friends were made and networks were strengthened. But most importantly of all, a new picture was created of the environment in each place – women's sociocultural resources as well as their issues and challenges.

Some of the same key messages arose in each of the workshop discussions. For example, all were agreed that gender-based violence is not dependent on women's economic status – rich and poor alike suffer. Furthermore, the ability to support herself financially gives a woman more power to challenge her circumstances if – and only if – the cultural repercussions are not too punishing.



Zara Ramsey with Alisson Moore (UNDP) and participants from the recent workshop in Yangon

At the workshop in Nepal, for example, Chetana Thapa told the story of a girl who was forced by her family to marry her rapist. This was done to protect family 'honour,' but the girl suffered terrible mistreatment during her marriage. Chetana stressed that economic empowerment is not enough when social systems can inflict situations like this on financially comfortable women. "Economic empowerment might give you flight," she said, "but what if your wings are already broken?" These sentiments were echoed in Yangon and Lahore.

Some important issues were also discussed that applied only to the local contexts. In Nepal, context-specific issues that were raised included the relationship of trafficking laws to work/violence, the influence of caste prejudice, the impact of natural disasters and

the role of informal village courts. These issues have all since been integrated into our research approach.

Myanmar is a country going through rapid economic and political change. The impact that this will have on women's lives is not yet clear, but will be significant. This sudden opening up to new business sits against the continuing conflict in parts of the country, fomenting a unique environment ripe for change. Other context specific factors include rural to urban migration, and the growth of female labour intensive industries such as the garment sector.



INSIGHTS FROM THE PAKISTAN STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP, SHARED BY JON GREGSON

Over 40 people participated in this workshop which was chaired by Ume-Laila Azhar, CEO from Homenet Pakistan.

Fatimah Ishan, the country research team lead for Pakistan, presented details about the research planned. The presentation introduced the stakeholders to the plans to carry out qualitative research among home based workers in communities around Lahore largely working in the informal sector, and to conduct interviews with women entrepreneurs and professionals who are more economically advantaged. We were joined on skype for the session by Nida Kirmani, who is doing interesting qualitative research in the conflict afflicted Lyari community in Karachi.

Presentations were made on the status of women in Punjab province by a range of speakers from NGO, Government and legal backgrounds, and a number of representatives from academic, and media were also present. Initiatives such as the creation of a Gender MIS (<http://www.gmis.gop.pk/>) and a soon to be launched pilot for Violence Against Women in Multan were presented, together with an overview of the key indicators being used for measuring Violence Against Women in the Pakistan context.



Fauzia Viqar, from Punjab Commission on the Status of Women speaking at the workshop

Throughout the workshop there was helpful discussion on methodology and plans were introduced to create a Country Advisory Forum in Pakistan and map out the stakeholder context, in order to facilitate the research uptake activities as the findings from the research become available.

➡ **Coming soon:** An article will soon be published on the project website giving further reflections on this workshop and downloadable resources from the workshop will be made available

Launch of WordPress Site

We are pleased to announce the launch of our project website 'Gender South Asia', which is a WordPress site focussed on 'Women, Work and Violence' in Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan. We will be using the site for sharing projects news, insights and results via blogs, article and downloadable resources.

Recent and Upcoming Events

Project Related

Recent

Pakistan Stakeholder Workshop, Lahore 17th August 2016

Myanmar UNDP Workshop, 24th August 2016

Upcoming

Members of the core project team are planning to visit Kathmandu for meetings with stakeholders and researchers in the week commencing 17th October 2016

Introducing the project team

Implementing Organisations

The project is being implemented by **IMC Worldwide** (lead), the **University of Portsmouth**, and the **International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW)**.

Additional institutional collaborators are the **Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS)** and the **University of Delhi**. The main country partners are:

- ➔ Myanmar we are working with **Myanmar Survey Research (MSR)**.
- ➔ Nepal is the **Health Research and Social Development forum (HERD)**
- ➔ In Pakistan we are working with **Homenet Pakistan**

The team

The project team is made up of:

Management Team

- ➔ Pallu Modi, Project Director
- ➔ Emma Sauvanet, Research Manager
- ➔ Tamsin Bradley, Academic Lead

Research Support

- ➔ Suti Sahariah, Research Assistant

Core Team Specialists

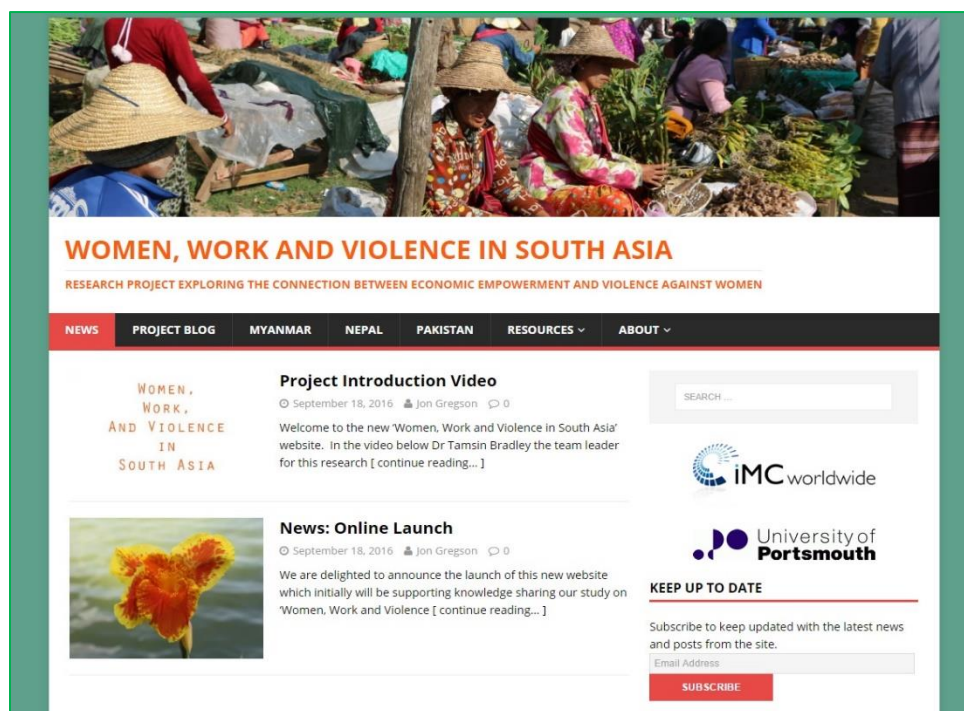
- ➔ Smita Premchander, Country lead for Myanmar and Nepal
- ➔ Fatimah Ishan, Pakistan Country Lead
- ➔ Zara Ramsay, Project Coordinator
- ➔ Neetu John and Daliya Sebastian, Quantitative Research Specialists
- ➔ Jon Gregson, Research Uptake Lead
- ➔ National research team members and Partners

Technical Advisory Group

The project also benefits from a strong international advisory group, bring together a broad range of specialists

Country Advisory Forums

In each of the three countries we have brought together in country experts from a wide range of stakeholder groups who advise on how best to develop the project activities within the different country contexts.



Staying in touch

Contact Information

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Website

Please visit our project WordPress site and stay in touch with all the latest news and information as our study progresses at:

To receive news of new posts and updates on the site please register using the subscribe button on the home page:

- ➔ www.gendersouthasia.org

Social Media

Facebook

Follows us on Facebook by liking our page:

- ➔ www.facebook.com/gendersouthasia

Twitter

Follow us on Twitter at:

- ➔ [#gendersouthasia](https://twitter.com/gendersouthasia)

YouTube Channel

View our video channel at YouTube:

- ➔ [Gender South Asia](#)

