



PHOTO: VIEW OF MANOHARA - ONE OF THE PROJECT'S FIELD RESEARCH SITES IN NEPAL

# Women, Work and Violence In South Asia Newsletter

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

## Emerging insights

### Project Update

Welcome to our 3<sup>rd</sup> newsletter bringing updates and insights from Women, Work and Violence in South Asia project. The study is funded by the UK Department for International Development (UK Aid) and is focussed on three countries: Pakistan, Nepal and Myanmar.

We have now reached a very interesting stage in our project, with most of the research data now collected and analysed, and we are starting to share our findings from both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study with stakeholders and interested parties and individuals.

We are doing this through our website, and social media (see the information provided at the end of this newsletter) and in the coming weeks we will be sharing important documents, video material and other knowledge products. We are also engaging directly with stakeholders to discuss findings and plan actions for follow up at up-coming workshop events being held in March in all three countries.

In this edition of our newsletter as a taster for things to come we have some articles relating to work we have done in Nepal and Myanmar which we hope you will find of interest.

*iWomen empowering sticker from Myanmar*

### Gender South Asia Blog

Please also check out our project blog and the resources available for download and wider sharing at [gendersonthasia.org](http://gendersonthasia.org). Recently added posts include:

- ➔ Three video interviews from Pakistan: Salman Sufi Punjab Special Monitoring Unit, Fouzia Vaqar Chairperson of the Provincial Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) and Farkhanda Waseem Afzal Punjab Ombudsperson
- ➔ Suti's nepal's entertainment industry article pre-view (coming soon) latest article
- ➔ First impression from Pakistan field research with Fatimah Ihsan, our Pakistan research team lead on some of the emerging findings from the VAW study there

### Association with NGO greatly helps women who work in Nepal's entertainment industry

Suti Sahariah discusses some of the VAW findings related to the study conducted in Thamel relating to women working in Nepal's 'entertainment industry'.

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### Violence Against Women: in Womens Voices

Smita Premchander *et al* share some of the interesting findings from a VAW related survey carried out using the 'iWomen app' among women living in rural parts of Myanmar.

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### Innovating to empower women in Myanmar with the iWomen app



Allison Hope Moore from UN Women, shares insights from the development of the 'iWomen app' with Jon Gregson

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By way of reminder the main research questions for the study are provided below.

## Research Question

Our overall research question is as follows:

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

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Scene from the streets of Thamel in Kathmandu where project research on the entertainment was conducted as part of the field work

## Sub Research Questions

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

- ➔ In each field site, how does 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).

# Association with NGO greatly helps women who work in Nepal's entertainment industry

by Suti Sahariah



Suti Sahariah in Thamel with women from Rakksha Nepal, an NGO supporting women who are involved in the entertainment industry

In Nepal, like other parts of South Asia, it is a taboo to talk about sex let alone discuss about the problems of sex workers. Sex workers' rights activists have often been a victims of slander campaigns and have been personally attacked. However, In Nepal where sex work is illegal, sex work has been operating in a systematic manner through massage parlours, bar dancers, cabin and duet restaurants.

- ➔ Activists says there are no official figures available on the number of women working in what is largely regarded as informal entertainment industry in Nepal; a 2009 study by Terre des homes (TDH) estimated it to be 11,000 to 13000 girls and women in Kathmandu valley alone - the actual figure is believed to much higher across Nepal.

## Some Research findings from Nepal

The DFID South Asia project funded project on Women, Work and Violence has interviewed 22 women who are working in the informal entertainment industry.

Analysis of data has revealed that women poverty is not always the cause for driving women in droves to work in the highly exploitative informal entertainment industry

The study shows in Nepal there are a range of reasons both political and social that compel women to work in the entertainment industry.

At least 40 % of the women interviewed admit that they had to first migrate to Kathmandu, Nepal's capital during the ten – year conflict between Maoist insurgents and government forces that ended in 2006. Thousands of girls were abducted by the Maoist rebels from schools and homes. The insurgents also kidnapped women whose male family members were suspected to be in the army or the police.

These women say that they were raped and sexually exploited. One of the participant says

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*"I was abducted by the Maoist and taken to Jungle. I was given a gun and bullets to kill army personnel, but I didn't know how to use them. I was very young. During one of the clashes, I lied down the grass but the bullet hit my leg.... I was bleeding and had excruciating pain but even then, I had to trudge along. They simply gave me a pain killer."*

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*"There was another girl who was being repeatedly raped. They told me that it was my turn. After hearing this, I was very scared and decided to run away. I spent the night in cattle shed and in the morning, I managed to get to a bus stop. I didn't have money so I requested the bus conductor to help me", says the participant.*

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The research shows the internal conflict had a massive bearing in the lives of women and girls. They not only lost husbands, sons and brothers, the fear of being abducted by the Maoists forced many young girls to discontinue schools and come to Kathmandu at a very young age.

Once in Kathmandu, they had to look for ways to make a living. For most girls, joining the informal entertainment industry wasn't the first option. Many worked as maid and joined as construction work but couldn't continue because they were exploited, physically abused not paid or were mistreated in

families where they worked as domestic maid. This phenomenon is common in most south Asian countries, where maids are often seen as slaves rather than an employee. In the construction sector, it was hard labour with long hours of work and many women say they suffered from tuberculosis because of exposure to dust. There were no health and safety measures to ensure safety of women at work. They also complain of harassment at work site.

One of the participant was asked

*Why did you migrate?*

I came to Kathmandu so that I could work and study. I worked as a domestic maid

*Were your parents aware about your decision to come to Kathmandu?*

Yes, my family was aware of it. My parents were convinced by the lady who brought me. She told my parents that it will be good for my future and that I would be sent to a good school for studies.

*Were you paid?*

Very little, and whenever I didn't do my job, I was beaten

They were four people in the family with two children. One was six months old and the other one was four years old. I also had to look after them"

*What kind of work did you do?*

I had to clean the whole house, wash clothes and dishes.

The participant later joined the entertainment industry because being unskilled and educated there she says she had "little choice". She says "I had to support my family back home and there was a lure of quick money"

To help women affected by internal conflict Nepal has set up a National Action Plan to implement UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820, and further formed good institutions and policies like the Prime Minister's National Plan for Action against Gender Based Violence, 2010, but in practice these policies have been poorly implemented and many women who were affected by the internal conflict are not aware of it.

The study also shows that all women who have been in contact with a NGO or have been a part of a training programme feel that they are far more empowered and are in better control of their lives.

One participant who has been a part of three NGOs says that, "they taught how to move

forward in life. We learnt that by doing this job we are not doing anything wrong. We are doing this to earn a living. We joined on our will, and we can leave when we want to. It gave us a voice and to talk openly about our problems. They tell us about condoms, they tell about all health risks and teach us where to go, where to seek support, they tell us not to go to the client's house etc



*Typical Kathmandu Street Scene*

One of the participants says she has been a part of stitching and spa programmes and received a certificate for the same. This helps her to deal with police as they demand to see such certificates. She has also taken a loan from the co-operative and opened a tailoring shop.

"I have the capacity to win in life under any circumstance. My daughter doesn't know about my work but one day when she will ask I will not shy away from telling the truth. I am proud to be standing on my own feet."

Another participant says, "professional spa training enabled her to get a certificate and earn more." Earlier I couldn't speak with anyone, after my association with Raksha I feel much confident. I feel good as we provide moral support to each other"

To advocate for the rights of women working in this sector, Women Workers' Protection Union was formed in 2015 with the help of DKA Austria in Thamel, Kathmandu's vibrant commercial neighbourhood popular with tourists. The union now boasts 9000 members. The union leader Sabina Tamang says, "our biggest problems are frequent raids, abuse and unlawful detention by the police. We want this to stop. Our key demands are formal recognition of our work, minimum wage and better work conditions."

# Violence Against Women: In women's voices

by Smita Premchander, Eleonora Gatti, Aindrila Mokapatti, and Pietro Fiorentini



## Introduction

Gender Based Violence (GBV) is such a common phenomenon that women fail to recognize it as such. Since the society has rarely questioned it, women have grown up accepting it as natural. The normalizing of Violence Against Women (VAW) has led it to become under-recognised, and therefore under-reported, un-addressed, and a peril that has been perpetuating for years.

## First Steps

The first step to addressing the violence is to find out how endemic it is. UNDP added to a growing body of research on VAW in Myanmar during the **16 Days of Activism Campaign 2016**, through a GBV survey that could be taken anonymously by Myanmar women on the mobile app 'iWomen-Inspiring Women', a flagship app of UNDP Myanmar women's empowerment and women's access to justice programme work. The survey was a joint effort of UNDP Myanmar with May Doe Kabar National Network of Rural Women, and the UN Gender Theme Group. The questionnaire was prepared as part of the **Women, Work and Violence** research project, and the UNDP survey represented the first uptake of the project's work in Myanmar.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE SURVEY WERE THREEFOLD:

1. INCREASE AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE LEVELS OF WOMEN ABOUT THE VIOLENCE THAT THEY MAY FACE AT HOME, AT WORK OR IN PUBLIC PLACES
2. SHAPE THE RESPONSE OF THE NATIONAL NETWORK OF RURAL WOMEN IN MYANMAR TO TACKLE GBV
3. INFLUENCE THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY-MAKING EFFORTS, ESPECIALLY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSES TO THE CEDAW CONVENTION.

The plan was to administer the survey to women who would answer questions relating to work and incomes with an aim to explore links between work and violence. This article presents the finding of the first survey.

The main questions asked in the survey were on the types of violence faced namely, verbal abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual violence and economic violence; the abuser and place of violence; the action taken once they were subject to such violence and the kind of support services needed to cope with it. These questions were then mapped with their economic profile, their leadership roles and their educational qualification etc. to understand their reaction against violence.

The survey had 189 participants of which, 172 participants completed the entire survey. 95% of the respondents were females aged over 18 years and 68% were members of May Doe Kabar women Self-Reliant Groups (SRGs), which are groups of 8 to 20 women, who meet regularly at village level to conduct savings and credit operations. Others were members of other local women's groups. This gave rise to a hypothesis that needs further testing: women's groups enable women to share their experiences about GBV. This link

was also found in an earlier study in India conducted by Sampark and GIZ, wherein women stated that Self Help Groups enabled them to share incidences of violence, and provided them the strength to collectively address the issue.



*Women being trained on use of the iWomen app*

Around 35% of the respondents had an average monthly household income of over Kyat 5 lakh (US\$ 385<sup>1</sup>). 28% of the respondents revealed that they contributed to more than half of the household income. The highest number of respondents was from the states of Chin and Ayeyarwady followed by Shan, Magway and Mon. The lowest number of respondents was from the States of Kachin, Kayah, Yangon, Rakhine, followed by Mandalay with the least number of respondents. The respondents were an educated group with 61% holding at least a Bachelors degree or higher, 18% having completed Higher Secondary and 17% having completed Middle School. This is substantially higher than the expected education level of the average iWomen app user, supporting the hypothesis that higher education levels correlate with greater willingness of women to talk about VAW.

#### FAST FACTS

- ➔ Key facts from the mobile survey conducted in Myanmar.

34%

34% of the women surveyed had experienced violence in the month before the survey was conducted

76%

76% of the total survey respondents had experienced some form of violence in their lives

>90%

Over 90% of reported cases of Gender Based Violence were from known people

24%

When asked what sort of support services would be required to survive violence 24% of women responding to the survey question suggested they would want a counsellor

On being asked whether they had been subject to any form of violence in the month prior to when the survey was taken,

66% denied the occurrence of any violence. Of the 34% who had experienced violence, 22% had been subjected to emotional or physical violence, 4.5% to physical abuse and sexual violence and 4.5% to economic abuse and online harassment.

Of those women who faced violence, most of them reported to have been attacked outside home. While 34% had faced violence in the month before the survey was taken, 76% of the total survey respondents reported having faced some form of violence/ aggression in their lives.

Out of the 70 women who answered the question about their abuser, 23 of them pointed out to their partner/spouse, 10 stated that it was a family member, 9 reported that with authority and 11 stated that it was someone they knew. 13 said that their abuser was a stranger. Over 90% of the reported cases of GBV were from known people.

Having faced violence, most of the respondents communicated a lack of awareness on their part to handle the issue.

Few responded that they did not resist physically, nor dared to act or denounce the abuser on social media. A similar number replied that they contacted a village leader, ran away, or sought legal assistance. A handful of them actually sought help from 'iWomen' app or contacted another women's group. Almost no victim sought medical assistance or contacted religious leaders, or from their Self Reliant Group or its larger township and national federations.

On the question pertaining to the kind of support services they would require to survive violence, around 30% expressed no opinion. Out of the 172 responses, 24% demanded for a provision of a counsellor, 17% suggested providing social support and 27% gave other options. Very few suggested options like approaching a doctor, the police or seeking religious support. Only 2 respondents opted for provision of shelter, indicating that most women do not see stepping out of their homes as a viable option.

#### Footnotes to this article

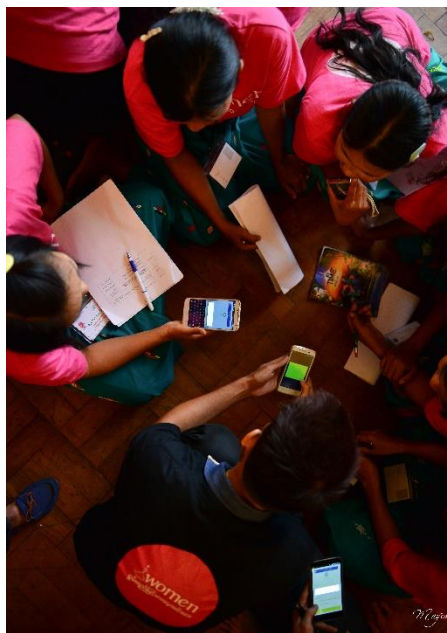
iWomen - Inspiring Women is a free mobile application developed by Myanmar tech women for Myanmar rural women. iWomen app connects women living in rural villages across Myanmar to inspire, foster self-belief, and channel mentorship and peer support into their daily lives as they expand their roles in public and private spheres to become respected leaders in their communities. iWomen app is a joint initiative of UNDP Myanmar and May Doe Kabar National Network of Rural Women. <http://iwomenapp.org/index-en>

The results in this article refer to the 172 total participants who responded the survey in full.

The Exchange rate is taken at USD 1 = 1300 Kyat

# Innovating to empower women in Myanmar with the iWomen app

*One of the interesting aspects of the Violence Against Women research in Myanmar has been the use of a mobile application called iWomen to support some of the survey work. On a recent visit to Yangon, I met up with Allison Hope Moore from UNDP, who showed me the app and told me about how it was developed and shared some of the exciting future to extend its use. I realised as I was listening to Allison that what I was hearing is certainly worth sharing more widely, and decided to turn my notes into this short article documenting my learning from our conversation.*



The idea for the mobile phone based app was developed initially at a design workshop involving some human design centred thinkers. A local innovation hub called Phandeyaar based in Yangon who encourage social entrepreneurship and use of IT skills were running a 'hackathon'. There was a

competition held at this event and the winning team were 'Geek Girls' who refer to themselves as a 'community of women involved in tech in Myanmar'.

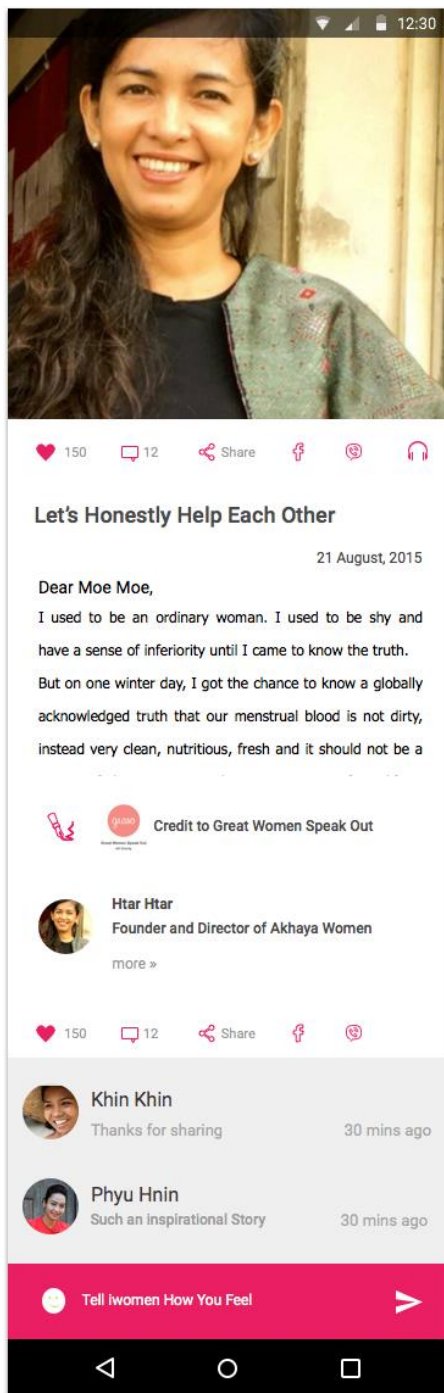
Through a Geek Girls networking event, interested individuals were approached to work on a prototype for the iWomen App. This took about eight weeks focussing on the design, and then following a convention about two hundred people from villages across Myanmar put the app on their phones and tested using it for six months. After getting the feedback from this initial piloting, a further eight weeks were spent enhancing the app before a full launch in March 2016.

From the initial two hundred users, by late 2016 the numbers had increased significantly to eight thousand users. Most of the growth came about through phone to phone sharing using Bluetooth, as it is difficult in some areas to get Wi-Fi or mobile phone coverage. Any updates of content or features of the iWomen app generally happen when someone goes to a town where they can get connected to the Internet. For these reasons, it was recognised as important from the outset for the app to work whether or not the user was connected to the Internet.

Over the last three years the spread of mobile phone coverage has been amazing, going from virtually no coverage to around 80% of the country now having mobile access. Affordable 'smart phones' largely brought from China have flooded the market. The iWomen project team found that whilst many of the rural women had access to such smart phones many were clones that looked similar to more familiar branded feature phones, but many of these had very little memory enabling them to run just a couple of apps and store a few photos, so it was difficult to run iWomen on these phones.

The response to this problem was to design the iWomen app so that it was 'light in terms of its memory requirement'. May Doe Kabar, a major national NGO and iWomen project partner, realised through its national network of rural women that there were a lot of bad phones in the market. They shared this information across the network, providing information on how and where to get better phones that were good value, but they soon discovered that there were also availability issues related to this. In response to this problem, the national association signed a contract with a hardware seller to buy one thousand mobile phones at a time at discounted rates (roughly £30 per set), and sold these on to rural women using a five-

instalment plan to make it easier for them to purchase the mobile phones already pre-installed with the iWomen app.



iWomen now has a range of content partners, so editorial duties are being handed over to the national network partners, through it focal points, who provide training to the rural women on how to use the app and share it via Bluetooth. A group of college students and recent graduates self-identified as "iWomen volunteers" have also been very happy to support the programmes as volunteer code error trouble-shooters, app help line responders, and resource persons

going out to new field locations to share the app and train new users.

The iWomen app now includes an impressive range of features to support communication, community activity and knowledge sharing. There are also monthly individual and cooperative games on the app with multiple

choice and fill in answers, and the 'Violence Against Women (VAW)' survey was set up in this way. As game participants can also be rewarded with prizes (such as a mobile credit top up card) you can also incentivise participants to complete the survey. Note: The findings from our VAW survey are available separately.



The app can recognise the location of the users, and basic profile information such as gender. It's interesting to find that men have also been users, and started to find development resources on the app useful for them as well, and are now requesting an iMen app!

The app already includes audio as well as text for many of its resources as some of the population are not literate, and users also report multitasking while listening to the app (podcast-style) and having their hands free. The app is coded in English and Myanmar language, although this has been a challenge as there is not one protocol for the font, so the iWomen team have had to use both Unicode and Zawgyi protocols. There are many different ethnic languages used in Myanmar so there are also plans for the future to include the ability to switch to Chin and Hpawjing language versions of iWomen.

iWomen is now regularly used by the 20,000-strong May Doe Kabar national network of rural women as well as large numbers of village-based men and women involved in other rural groups, so the growth in users has been very impressive. Could the app be adapted for use in other countries? The answer certainly seems to be yes, and there is already interest from women's networks in India. However, as well as the product itself, there is also much to learn from the process followed that has been instrumental in

developing iWomen as a successful and widely used app. This has included working with an enthusiastic group of tech-oriented social entrepreneurs who designed the app with a human centred design approach, and partnering with a national rural women's network and a large group of willing volunteers who helped make the app accessible to a large number of women and provided training on how to use and share it.

You can download the iWomen app for Android based phones from the Google Playstore website, and find out more about the iWomen app at the following website:

[lwomenapp.org](http://lwomenapp.org)

You can discover more about the innovation hub and the social entrepreneurship organisation mentioned by visiting the following websites

<http://phandeevar.org/>

<http://www.geekgirlsmyanmar.com/>

## Events



### Upcoming

We are planning to hold a stakeholder workshop in Yangon in April or May, and in the week commencing 27<sup>th</sup> February 2017 Zarah Ramsay and Jon Gregson from the project team will be visiting and meeting with a range of stakeholders.

On March 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> 2017 members of our Pakistan research team will be participating in a VAWG symposium event being organised by ODI in Karachi.

The final project workshop is being held in Kathmandu on March 15<sup>th</sup> 2017 when stakeholders and team members will be present from Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan, to discuss the project findings and next steps and develop final plans for uptake, action and communication.

# 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:

- In Myanmar we are working with **Myanmar Survey Research (MSR)**.
- In Nepal we are working with **Health Research and Social Development forum (HERD)** and **Social Science Baha (SSB)**
- 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 Ramsey, 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.



*Rural Scene from Myanmar, with Pa'O women taking their goods to sell in a local market*

## Staying in touch

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### Website

Please visit our project Wordpress site and subscribe to updates:

[www.gendersouthasia.org](http://www.gendersouthasia.org)

### Social Media

#### Facebook

Follows us on Facebook by liking our page:

- [www.facebook.com/gendersouthasia](http://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](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

