



# WOMEN, WORK, AND VIOLENCE IN SOUTH ASIA

## NEPAL

Exploring the relationship between women's income generation and their experiences of violence

### APPROACH

Data was collected applying an intersectional approach capturing a range of women from diverse backgrounds and life experiences.

### HEADLINE FINDINGS

This briefing sheet outlines some of the key findings from the research into the experiences of women from different economic backgrounds, working as professionals, or in the informal sector as construction workers or sex workers. The research draws out a number of key differences across context and groupings:

- Belonging to a women's organisation is more accessible to poorer women and results in greater resilience to end and challenge violence against women (VAW). This resource is not available to wealthier women to the same extent.
- Professional women could use their income to secure exit routes but those in our sample mostly live in joint families, making leaving and challenging VAW difficult (honour and shame).
- The normalisation of violence is challenged more by middle/upper-class women.
- University education for women appears to be the strongest factor triggering a clear rejection of VAW.
- Experiences of violence were common across all castes. Those women who had migrated from rural areas had a more intense history of violence.
- Women who married young disclosed more extreme, ongoing and varied types of violence.
- Male attitudes towards women working and the normalisation of violence differed slightly across class divides.
- Evidence of backlash to women working emerged more clearly in relation to professional women.
- Women from different economic backgrounds suffered equal levels of work-based harassment and feared travelling on public transport and in taxis.
- The majority of women claimed they would work and want to have an income even if they did not have to.
- Combined forms of violence results in a psychological impact that reduces women's productivity at work.
- The workplace is highly gendered with women across the socio-economic spectrum struggling to get promoted or upskilled. Harassment from senior male workers and colleagues operates to keep women locked in low positions.

## THE NEPAL CONTEXT

### Society

- The Nepal Constitution prioritises gender equality and elimination of VAW in Nepal as a major national goal. Constitutional amendments in 2015 included gender equality.
- Women in Nepal have equal voting rights and the right to participate in political parties.
- As per the (2007) Constitution, at least one third of candidates for the Constituent Assembly must be women.
- Violence against women in politics is an area of serious concern (FWLD, 2011).
- Some labour unions in Nepal have strong women leaders and policies to promote gender equality.

### Law

- The Gender Equality Act was passed in 2006 with extra provisions to protect women's rights.
- The Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Law came into force in February 2015.
- The Domestic Violence and Punishment Act was passed in 2009, but its impact requires improved police response.
- Prison sentences for rape range from 5-20 years.
- The media is not strictly censored but there is a prevalent negative portrayal of women.

### Community and household

- Male child bias is extremely common.
- The health and education of girls is often a lower priority than that of boys but women who earn an income place both as a high priority for both their sons and daughters.
- A lack of government agency coordination prevents effective action related to women's economic empowerment (WEE) and VAW at the district level.
- Harmful practices persist including dowry harassment, accusations of witchcraft, chhaupadi (refusal to allow menstruating women into the home) and deuki (where girls are 'married' to God but then regularly prostituted (more intense in rural Nepal).
- Dalit women are exposed to more violence than any other social category.
- Patriarchal norms maintain household decision-making and economic control as masculine preserves. Earning income does not automatically translate as greater autonomy but makes it more likely.

## THE MANOHARA CONSTRUCTION SITE

Thirty-two interviews with women and ten men were conducted with community members, who work as unskilled labourers near this site in Kathmandu.

### KEY FINDINGS

- There is no direct correlation between earning and income and greater resilience to all/any forms of violence.
- All the women interviewed felt that income was important not only for their survival and that of their children, but also for their confidence and self-esteem.
- All the women had stories of being verbally harassed at work by male workers and contractors.
- Pay differences were evident and many women talked about lack of opportunities to progress beyond the role of manual labourers.
- Gendered perception of roles and lack of time and opportunities to train were identified as the two main barriers as well as increased harassment experienced by women who progress on to being masons.

## THE INFORMAL ENTERTAINMENT SECTOR IN THAMEL

Twenty interviews and two focus groups were conducted with women who were employed as sex workers in the Thamel area of Kathmandu. Many of the women interviewed were migrants.

### KEY FINDINGS

- All the women had suffered extreme forms of violence from family members, husbands, Maoists and clients.
- Leaving behind husbands and family was a positive turning point for most of the women despite the hardships they face.
- Prostitution offered their best option of an income sufficient to pay rent, bills, school and medical fees.
- All the women suggest high levels of violence at work.
- Contact with organisations such as Raksha Nepal and membership of a union has helped their confidence and enabled them to challenge violence and build for a future.
- Women talked of the ineffectiveness of the police if they reported an assault at work or home.
- The caste or educational background made no difference to the levels of violence suffered or the ability of the participant to mitigate it.

## INSIGHT FROM WOMENS' EXPERIENCE AS PROFESSIONAL WORKERS IN KATHMANDU

Thirty interviews were conducted with women from good economic backgrounds engaged in a range of occupations including banking, IT, education, medicine, NGOs and in running their own businesses. Some were married and some had remained single, and all had either a Bachelor's or Master's degree.

### KEY FINDINGS

- A few cases of intimate partner violence were captured, triggered by resentment that women earned money.
- Alcohol was the biggest trigger of male violence.
- Work-based harassment was widespread for women who were not home-based for work.
- Some differences emerged across sectors with women working in corporate sector jobs recording higher levels of work-based harassment than those working with international NGOs, civil society organisations, in medicine or in teaching.
- Most of the women had supportive families who were liberal in their attitudes to women working, and most participants felt there had been a generational change and were optimistic for the next generation of girls/daughters.
- Income is seen as building self-esteem and resilience.
- None of the women interviewed belonged to women's organisation.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote local women's organisations and build capacity at this level to challenge VAW and advocate for survivors.
- Extend the support of women's organisations to professional women.
- Challenge the gendering of work and male attitudes.
- Strengthen work-based harassment policies across sectors.
- Support introduction of women-only transport schemes.
- Provide VAW training to police.
- Extend the role of social mobilisers focussing specifically on ending VAW.

83%

of women and 89% of men participated in the labour force (2014)

92.6%

total workforce in the informal sector. These workers have no recourse to provisions of the Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Law

