



EVERYDAY VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

A STUDY BY
FEMINIST POLICY COLLECTIVE
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SUPPORTED BY ANANDI, SAHAJ, AND SOPPECOM

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Women farmers and labourers face systemic discrimination in India. Violence at the workplace is pervasive and impacts their wellbeing and economic opportunities. This study 'Everyday Violence Against Women in Agriculture' unpacks everyday violence faced by rural women in spaces such as farms, markets, and other agricultural worksites, and the redressal mechanisms and their access to victims of violence. The study is informed by qualitative research conducted in seven districts in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Telangana in 2021.

The research team is grateful to women farmers and labourers who graciously shared their lived experience. We appreciate your time and insights to inform this study. We are also thankful to local government representatives and civil society actors who participated in key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

The study was conducted as a partnership between the Feminist Policy Collective (FPC) and Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM). We are thankful to the generous support of Society for Health Alternatives (SAHAJ), Area Networking and Development Initiatives (ANANDI), and Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM).

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Over the next 2-3 years, MAKAAM and its associates will develop evidence-based strategies for interventions to address violence against women engaged in agriculture. MAKAAM hopes to launch a participatory action research to understand the forms, nature, manifestations, and consequences of the violence on women in the agricultural workforce, that hinders wellbeing and gender equality outcomes, and deeply impacts their productive engagement in agriculture and allied activities. This study is the first step in this direction.

Research Team

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Glossary

Child Development Project officer	CDPO
Focus Group Discussions	FGD
In Depth Interviews	IDI
Indian Penal Code	IPC
Key Informant Interviews	KII
Local Complaints Committee	LCC
Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act	MGNREGA
Ministry of Rural Development	MoRD
National Commission for Scheduled Castes	NCSC
National Human Rights Commission	NHRC
State Commission for Women	SCW
Safety, Health, Environment	SHE
Sub-Inspector	SI
Violence Against Women	VAW
Women and Child Department	WCD
Women and Child Development	WCD

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Women constitute a substantial part of the workforce in India's farming sector but have little recognition or support as farmers. While more and more men have moved to non-farm work in the industrial and service sectors, women have remained substantially involved in agriculture (Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM), 2018).

In India, 73 percent of female workers (and only 55 percent of male workers) depend on agriculture. In 2005, women comprised 40 percent of India's agricultural workforce (National Sample Survey 2004-05). The number fell to 30 per cent in 2017-18 (Periodic Labour Force Survey), even though significantly more men than women migrated to non-farm jobs. While there is no official data on land ownership, a recent study shows that only 16 per cent of women in rural landowning households own land, and constitute only 14 per cent of all landowners, and own 11 per cent of the land (Agarwal, Anthwal, & Mahesh, 2021).

Despite their participation in agriculture, women face discrimination in terms of unequal wages, access to land, water, credit and other agricultural inputs, markets, extension services, and information on new technology and practices. The severity and forms of discrimination vary depending on their class, caste, ethnic groups as much as age, marital status, disability, and other vulnerabilities.

Power hierarchies are based on these forms of discrimination, and it is in the interest of the powerful to continue with the status quo. Harassment and violence are among the many tools deployed to maintain structural hierarchies, and women, especially from marginalised sections, continue to be dominated and controlled by men in positions of power. These men are also part of the patriarchal capitalist economic structures of society.

Everyday violence in the agriculture sector

The precarity of work compels many rural women in agriculture to simultaneously enter multiple workspaces as migrant workers, agricultural labourers, and livestock and forest workers. These mobility patterns across multiple livelihoods combined with unequal power relations often put women at increased risk of violence.

Oxfam's recent literature review of sexual violence against women agricultural workers in the United States concluded that '...sexual violence is a longstanding and pervasive norm in the agricultural industry. The social and cultural dynamics of the farmworker population create unique obstacles for women farmworkers to report and seek support and remedies for sexual violence in the workplace.' (Kominers, 2015)

[1] Singh Neetu (2020), Fields of Fear: How safe are women farmers and agricultural labourers from gender violence, Goan Connection (<https://en.gaonconnection.com/fields-of-fear-how-safe-are-women-farmers-and-agricultural-labourers-from-gender-violence/>)

In the Indian context, there are increasingly gruesome reports of sexual violence against women in the rural workspaces - whether in Hathras in Uttar Pradesh, Kutch in Gujarat, or Jalore in Rajasthan (Singh, 2020)[1]. Growing inequalities along with ecological degradation has deepened the agrarian distress and led to increased instances and new forms of discrimination and violence denying women basic human rights. It has also adversely impacted women's access to livelihood resources. In such an environment, women's productivity is drastically reduced. Violence against women (VAW) in agriculture is closely related to their access to food security, nutrition, and agricultural development. It can drastically reduce a rural woman's ability to work, care for her family, and contribute to the rural economy and the wellbeing of rural communities. VAW can have devastating impact on agriculture by negatively affecting the health, resilience, and productivity of female victims[1]. (Camey, Sabater, Owren, & Boyer, 2020)

While violence in the realm of the domestic has received well-deserved attention due to the tireless efforts of feminists towards the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDA, 2005), violence and harassment at the workplace has not received as much attention, especially in the informal agricultural sector. There are legal frameworks such as the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act, 2013 following the Vishaka Guidelines of 1997, and amendments in the Criminal Amendment Act, 2013, however there is much to be done to improve awareness and legal redressal. In 2019, the International Labor Organisation (ILO) adopted the Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work Convention No. 190, which is still to be ratified by the Indian government[2]. (International Labour Conference R206, 2019)

MAKAAM has consistently engaged with the question of non-recognition of women as farmers and their access to land and other entitlements. However, it has not paid adequate attention to the everyday violence and harassment in the workplace, which has direct and indirect impacts on their wellbeing and economic agency. While increased commercialisation of agriculture, dispossession, denial of rights over resources, loss of incomes, increasing suicides, and decline in paid employment opportunities representing the agrarian crisis forms the context, through our participatory action research study, we hope to make an enquiry into the various forms of everyday violence meted out to rural women engaged in multiple livelihood activities and their access to redressal and justice.

Over the next 2-3 years, MAKAAM through its associates in different states of India, hopes to develop concrete evidence-based strategies for interventions to address violence against women engaged in agriculture. MAKAAM hopes to launch a participatory action research to understand the forms, nature, manifestations, and consequences of the violence on women in the agricultural workforce, that hinders wellbeing and gender equality outcomes, and deeply impacts women's engagement in agriculture and allied activities. The present study is a first step in this direction.

Feminist Policy Collective's (FPC) vision is to transform the policy and financing agenda to achieve women's rights and gender equality. FPC's subgroup that works on the issue of ending violence against women has engaged with this study. This study was conceptualised as a result of a collaboration between FPC and MAKAAM.

[1] Castañeda Camey, I., Sabater, L., Owren, C. & Boyer, A.E. 2020. Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. (Also available at <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/48969>).

[2] https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_721160.pdf

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

The short-term exploratory study of FPC and MAKAAAM in partnership with Society for Health Alternatives (SAHAJ), Area Networking and Development Initiatives (ANANDI), and Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM) explores how the workplace is defined and understood by women engaged in agriculture and what is the nature, form, manifestation, and consequence of everyday violence (state or otherwise) for women workers and farmers in agriculture. The study unpacks everyday violence in spaces such as farms, markets, and other agricultural work sites and the available redressal mechanisms and the extent to which these are accessed by victims of VAW.

The study was conducted in seven districts of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Telangana.

Defining everyday violence experienced by women in agricultural work

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 defines sexual harassment as any one or more of the following unwelcome acts or behaviour (whether directly or by implication) namely (i) physical contact and advances; or (ii) a demand or request for sexual favours; or (iii) making sexually coloured remarks; or (iv) showing pornography; or (v) any other unwelcome physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the research team under the guidance of the Advisory Committee[1] defined violence in the broader sense of everyday harassment that constrains women from performing their agricultural tasks and live a life of dignity.

This includes denial of rights over resources that are critical in the agrarian space and denial of a decent and safe workplace environment. The central research questions are as follows:

1. How do women define their workspaces in the agriculture sector?
2. What is the nature and the form of everyday violence/harassment they experience at their work sites?
3. Who are the likely perpetrators?
4. What are the manifestations and consequences of this violence/harassment on their lives, at work and home?

What are women's experiences of the available redressal mechanisms? Are these accessible and are there support services to facilitate women's access to justice?

[1] The Advisory Committee was formed to guide the research team in developing the research methodology and support with the literature review. The advisory committee comprised of Renu Khanna, Suneeta Dhar and Amita Pitre.

[1] Castañeda Camey, I., Sabater, L., Owren, C. & Boyer, A.E. 2020. Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. (Also available at <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/48969>).

[2] https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_721160.pdf

Sampling and research tools

This qualitative research study used three different tools: In-depth individual interviews (IDIs) with women cultivators and agricultural workers, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with women cultivators and agriculture workers, community members, village leaders, sangathan[1] members and other stakeholders, and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with activists, members of forums, sangathans, farmers' organisations and representatives of redressal institutions such as members of Local complaints committee (LCC) Sakhi team, Child Development Project officer (CDPO), Safety, Health, Environment (SHE)[2] team Sub-Inspector (SI), etc.

The primary research included in-depth interviews (IDI), focus group discussions (FGD), and key informant interviews (KII). The study conducted 25 in-depth interviews with women farmers and agriculture workers, 15 with more than 100 women, and 11 KIIs with activists, members of forums, sangathans (grassroots collectives), and farmers' organisations. Selection of the study sites and the participants was based on purposive sampling to engage partner organisations working in the target states. These partner organisations' work resonated with the study's work and advocacy plans.

Table 1: Participants and sampling process and sample size

State	Participant Category	Sample Size	Tool
Maharashtra FGDs (2) IDIs (13) KIIs (3)	Sugarcane cutters, Beed, Maharashtra	One FGD with 30 women cane cutters in the 18–60-year age group IDIs with nine women in the 25–45-year age group	FGD IDI
	Women Farmers from farmer suicide households in Yavatmal, Maharashtra	One FGD with five women farmers Four IDIs with women in the 30-45-year age group	FGD IDI
	Members of LCC and Mahila Dakshta Committee and Child Rights Committee	Three KIIs with: One LCC member One member of the Child Rights Committee One Yavatmal district and Ralegaon block level Mahila Dakshta Committee member	KII
Telangana FGDs (5) IDIs (6) KIIs (5)	Women from farmer suicide affected families in Warangal, Telangana	Two FGDs with eight women farmers 23 - 36 age group Two IDIs with women in the 25-35 age group	FGD IDI

[1] Sangathan is a collective, in this case a collective of rural women.

[2] CDPO is the district level official of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) a flagship programme of the GoI; SHE is department under the police department for the safety of women in Telangana

Telangana FGDs (5) IDIs (6) KIIs (5)	Women from farmer suicide affected families in Warangal, Telangana	Two FGDs with eight women farmers 23 - 36 age group Two IDIs with women in the 25-35 age group	FGD IDI
	Marginal women farmers and migrant agriculture labourers from the Lambada community in Nalgonda, Telangana	Two FGDs with 6 women farmers in the 22 - 39 age group Two IDIs with women in the 28-31 year age group	FGD IDI
	Dalit agricultural labourers facing sexual harassment by a landlord in Nizamabad, Telangana	One FGD with 6 women farmers 24-33 age group One IDI with 28-year-old woman	FGD IDI
	Activists working with Rythu Swarajya Vedika (RSV) and civil society members in Telangana	Two activists working with a forum named Rythu Swarajya Vedika working for farmers rights. One Civil Society members working for women's rights One Sakhi centre team member One KII with SHE team Sub Inspector and One KII with Child Development Project Officer	KII
Gujarat FGDs 8 IDIs 6 KII 3	Women farmers (Single and widowed women and migrant agricultural labour) in Panch Mahal, Gujarat	Four FGDs with 27 women members in the 18-56 age group Two IDIs with women in the 40-50	FGD IDI
	Women farmers (Single and widowed women, migrant agricultural labour) from Dahod, Gujarat	Four FGDs with 14 women in the 19-55 age group Four IDIs with women in the 40-50 age group	FGD IDI
	Activists, civil society members and Devgadhi Mahila Sanghatan leaders	Three key informant interviews with activists, civil society members and village leaders	KII
	Dalit woman victim of rape and murder in Charel, Gujarat	One case study	Case Study
Total	FGD: 15	IDI: 25	KII: 11

Research Analysis

The research team held regular meetings to discuss research findings from the different study sites. Discussions within and across study sites were conducted to arrive at a research analysis framework. Data was collated and coded using a qualitative data analysis software. Data was then organized under main and sub-themes. The main themes were around the five research questions, which were further categorised under themes and subthemes. For example, under the main theme of ‘nature of work’ the themes included descriptions of the workplace, descriptions of work, division of labour wages, etc. The subtheme under wages included details about whether wages were paid daily, monthly, or were task-based in the form of advances etc. The coded data was then used to analyse links between informal work, exploitative power structures, and gender-based violence.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the study, the team was cognisant that many individuals may not immediately disclose their experiences of violence. The team was mindful that probing, using loaded language, or asking questions explicitly referring to violence may cause distress to the participant and may retraumatize her. The researchers were therefore careful to employ mitigation strategies for these risks, such as:

- To minimise the risk of psychological harm to key informants during the case study, participation was completely voluntary and with the participant’s informed consent.
- A panel to review the ethical considerations for the study was set up and an informed consent form was developed. The informed consent form included a participant information sheet, background of the study, risks, and benefits of participating in the study, and the participant’s right to refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any time. This form was administered in local languages.
- The interviews were conducted in secure and private settings to minimise the risk of inadvertent disclosure of the questions or their responses to third parties.
- The data collected through case studies was anonymised and names of participants were changed.
- Interviewing survivors of violence poses significant risks of retraumatisation, therefore, researchers ensured contact details of providers of mental health support and other psychosocial support were available.
- The tools were constructed considering the sensitivity of the subject. All questions were asked carefully and respectfully. Affirming language was used, and an attempt was made to build a narrative that highlights the participant’s determination, resilience, and strength.
- The interviews were conducted by field experts trained to provide a safe and validating environment and equipped to help the participants with any distress that may surface during their conversation.

All data collected for the study is confidential. Contact details of the participants can only be accessed by the researcher and data was deleted after data collection was complete.

Recordings of the interviews were also deleted after transcription. The research ensured that all identifiers along with the participant’s names were removed from the transcripts. The intention of the study is to understand the everyday violence faced by women at workplaces in agriculture and document it in detail. Researchers and study partners ensured this by compiling the report carefully and honestly.

Researchers’ interactions with other stakeholders for the study have already proved to be beneficial for the community as study partners in Telangana were able to intervene immediately in a case where a woman was facing harassment in the village. The study partners involved the Sakhi centres and the Women and Child Department (WCD), and action was taken against the harasser. They were also supported by the village panchayat who agreed to offer protection to the aggrieved woman.

The researchers hope that the culmination of the report will be a step to advance adoption and implementation of efficacious interventions such as establishing links with advocacy groups and strengthening redressal mechanisms. In the process of the study some advocacy efforts were also taken up when the situation demanded immediate intervention.

Research team

The research team for this study consists of members of organizations working with rural women and independent researchers from the three sites. The team members have a feminist perspective and several years of experience and understanding of the status of women farmers in agricultural sector. The team members have a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic and patriarchal dimensions that impact the rights and safety of women in agriculture as cultivators and agricultural workers.

Table 2: Research Team

Research Site	Team Members and Organization
Gujarat	Sejal Dand, Neeta Hardikar, and Naheda Shaikh - ANANDI
Maharashtra	Seema Kulkarni and Swati Satpute - SOPPECOM
Telangana	S. Ashalatha - MAKAAAM P. Prashanthi - Bhumika Women's Collective Divya Veluguri - Independent Researcher
Overall research coordination	Arjita Mital, MAKAAAM

Participant Profile

The study sample included women who are migrant workers, sugarcane cutters, wage labourers, cultivators belonging to farmer suicide affected families belonging to diverse social groups like Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, etc. Most also belong to economically weaker sections. Diversity is also captured through their marital, age, and disability status. Age, caste, and marital status contribute to the vulnerability of the participant women towards violence and harassment.

The study conducted 15 FGDs with 110 respondents and 25 in-depth interviews with women farmworkers. The youngest participant was 18 years old, and the oldest participant was 67 years old. Out of the total 140 participants 47 women were widowed, 65 women were married, and 28 women had never been married. Of the 25 women interviewed, 12 are married and 13 are widowed.

The occupational categories identified by each partner from their respective study site is as follows:

Table 3: Occupational categories covered in the study

State	Occupational category
Gujarat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture wage labourers from Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Castes (OBC), Denotified Tribes (DNT) communities • Migrant agriculture wage workers/ sharecroppers, • Small and marginal women farmers including widows working on family lands, forest produce collectors
Maharashtra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women farmers from farmer suicide affected households • Women sugarcane cutters
Telangana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women Farmers from farmer suicide affected Families. • Women farmers from small and marginal farming households and women, • Agricultural labourers.

Table 4: Profile of participants of in-depth Interviews

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Numbers</i>
<i>Education</i>	
Non-literate	10
Primary	5
Middle	4
High school	4
Higher secondary	2
<i>Caste profile</i>	
Backward Castes (BC)	5
Scheduled Castes (SC)	11
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	9
<i>Marital Status</i>	
Married	12
Widowed	13

A total of 25 in depth interviews were conducted across the three study sites. Among these 13 were conducted in Maharashtra and six each in Telangana and Gujarat. As we can see in the table above, ten participants were non-literate and others were evenly distributed among those who had completed primary, middle, and high school education. All interviewed women belong to marginalised communities which included SC, ST, and BC community.

KEY FINDINGS

Defining Workspaces: Perceptions and Nature of Work

Women's workspaces are often a continuum between the home and the farm. Managing livestock, backyard poultry, working on their own family farms, is not considered as work, making it difficult for women to define workspaces. This study sought to understand the meaning and articulation of the workspace by the women farmers themselves.

Work Routines and Unpaid Care Work

The research finds that women in farming communities play a significant role in the agricultural labour force and in agricultural activities, including managing livestock. Women's participation in economic opportunities is lesser because they face a higher burden of work than men. In most societies, women are responsible for most of the household production activities. This additional work burden is unpaid and limits women's capacity to engage in income-earning activities, which often require minimum fixed time before becoming profitable. Apart from unpaid care work, women's access to markets is also hindered by the perceived threat of violence due to the male-dominated nature of the space. The case studies in this section illustrate the unfair work environment in the agricultural sector.

Long and undefined working arrangements

Cane-cutting is a laborious task consisting of cutting sugarcane from farms, tying them into bundles, loading these bundles into the tractor, transporting them to factories, and unloading the bundles at the factory. The labourers work for almost 12 to 14 hours every day without any holidays. Apart from this work, women workers tend to do other strenuous chores such as fetching water for drinking, cooking, cleaning, and looking after children for additional four to five hours a day, which impacts their health adversely. As the work lasts only for four to six months, the canecutters live in temporary shelters in the vicinity of the farms or factories. This increases the threat of sexual harassment and violence for women workers. And as the settlement is temporary, it lacks the proper facilities to meet basic needs of hygiene, clean drinking water, and toilets.

The timings of work are generally decided by the sugar factory and contractors. Missing a day of work costs the worker almost INR 500-1000 and so they prefer to work even through sickness. Women are seen working till the peak of their pregnancy. Single women are more vulnerable and often face the worst impact of sexual harassment at the workplace.

To earn a livelihood for themselves, canecutters migrate from their village for almost six months of the year for sugarcane cutting. The cane cutting work begins after the festival of Dusshera and goes on till the months of April-May. Apart from working as cane cutters during the season, they work as farm labourers, construction workers, artisans, etc.

Labour-intensive work along with dual burden of household work

Deepa works as a cane cutter in the Beed, Maharashtra along with her brother-in-law. She mentions that her brother-in-law does not extend any help in fetching water or firewood, and she does all the household work herself as her husband works as a truck driver. She further states that she is 'unclear' about the working arrangements between the household work and the cane cutting work as she does most of the hard work under her brother-in-law's instruction.

30-year-old Sugandha who has been working as a cane cutter for the past 15 years informs that she wakes up at 3 am every morning to start her household work. She goes out to fetch water and firewood and while she fears venturing out in the dark, she knows that other women in the village have similar schedules.

Strenuous work hours of labourers in sugarcane farmers

The day for women involved in cane cutting begins at 4 or 5 am in the morning, sometimes as early as 3 am if the truck from the factory arrives early. By 7-8 am, they complete their daily chores, cooking and tending to their children, and reach the sugarcane farms for work. As soon as they reach the farm, they begin by tying the harvested sugarcane into bundles and load the bundles into the truck trolleys. The sugarcane is usually cut by their husbands who arrive at the farm before them. Each bundle weighs almost 40 to 50 kg. The men cut enough sugarcane to fill a truck by afternoon. And the same number of bundles are tied and carried by women on their heads to be loaded in the trucks. The men help to lift and place the bundles of sugarcane on the women's head and transfer them to the truck. The truck is parked on the farm boundary and there are two ladders attached to the trucks. Women use one ladder to climb, balancing the sugarcane bundles on their heads and climb down the other ladder or often jump down from the ladder. Everyday two such trucks are loaded, one in the afternoon and one in the night. On some occasions the contractor has more vehicles, and more trucks must be loaded.

While talking about cane cutting, women shared that they detest the work but have no alternatives. "I accompanied my parents since my childhood for cane cutting and continued the same work after marriage. Sometimes I feel I should get some other job in the village instead of this cane cutting", says one women cane cutter from Beed taluka, Maharashtra.

Debt-based work

A cane cutter couple is known as "Koyta" or a sickle in Marathi. Generally, the term Koyta is used for a husband-and-wife duo. The contractor forms a group or a toli of such cane cutters Koytas and hires them for the cane cutting work for the season. The contractor is supported by a sub-contractor or a mukadam in this process.

The sugar factory, which is largely invisible in the chain of work, engages contractors who in turn engage various labourers in groups or tolis. The contractor gives an advance payment to the Koyta, usually in the hands of the male, prior to the harvest

season. He also helps the cane cutters with loans during a financial crisis which the Koytas are expected to repay even after they have worked as labourers.

The reasons for the migration of labourers for sugarcane cutting can vary. Some labourers have no farmland of their own, while some grow seasonal or temporary crops in the farms, and some others do not have employment opportunities in the village. There are few options for earning money and so labourers are forced to borrow money from contractors to pay their day-to-day bills. Unable to repay the loans from the previous year, the cane cutters are compelled to continue to work as labourers the next year again.

The cane cutters families stay in the vicinity of the sugar factories for six to eight months or in the open lands in the outskirts of the village in temporary shacks. The temporary settlement does not have any basic facilities, bathrooms, or toilets. The women bathe by making a makeshift bathroom by tying sarees to four wooden sticks or in the open.

Women navigate multiple jobs, often with taxing travel schedules

Many women in agriculture travel long distances and work extended hours. The study also reveals that most women farmers work in multiple worksites and perform diverse roles. Kondra Sagarika, working in Jangaon, Telangana, with farmer suicide affected families and herself from farmer suicide affected family, informs that women sometimes travel as far as 10 kms to work as agriculture labourers. They travel in groups of 10-12 people in an auto rickshaw to other villages. They travel to the markets where they sell their cotton and paddy. They also work under the MGNREGA[1] scheme. Some women also work in rice mills and undertake construction work. They take care of livestock and take buffaloes, sheep, and goats for grazing in the empty fields, common lands, or scrub forests. However, for each of these activities, women are usually accompanied by other women.

Vanita from Jangaon who along with agriculture also undertakes MGNREGA work, shared that she began working at the age of 17 when she got married. After her husband's death she started working full time to support her family. In the peak agricultural season, she works 8 hours and in summer, when she works under MGNREGA, she works for an additional four hours in the morning. Vanita does not enjoy this work. She stated that she would like to learn how to read and write so that she can work in an office job.

Geeta from Chenpur village, a tribal migrant worker from Gujarat like many others from the area, has less than an acre of rain-fed land in the villages and hence is forced to migrate for work to the irrigated fields in the western part of Gujarat nearly 600 kms away. She says that her day begins at 5am. She prepares meals, performs household chores, and then spends eight hours or more on farm work. In addition, the farm owners see women as labour available for any extra work like masonry or livestock farming.

[1] Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act or MGNREGA is a social security measure that guarantees hundred days of wage employment in a financial year to a rural household.

However, this additional work, which takes approximately three hours daily and extends women's work day from 6 pm to 9 pm, is completely unpaid.

Child Care at the Workplace

Unpaid household production work along with women's disproportionate responsibility for childcare also undermines their equal right to decent work. Women in informal economies are further disadvantaged as remote and rural areas do not have organised childcare services such as crèches and day-care centres. Women in rural areas resort to taking their young children to work as they might not have appropriate support at home. Roshni from Beed, Maharashtra shared that she had to take her new-born son to her cane cutting work. Eventually she stopped working because she could not manage her duties along with her caregiving role. When she stopped to feed her son, her employer would confront her and warn that she has a backlog for which he would deduct her pay. Maya, another cane cutter added that there have been several accidents where the trucks and tractors have run over the infants.

Lack of childcare support drives women's reproductive and childcare choices

Chhaya, a cane cutter from Beed, Maharashtra, started cane cutting work when she was married at the age of 13. Only three months after her wedding she was pregnant with her first child and had to continue her cane cutting work throughout the eight months of her pregnancy. She was back to work at the farm less than a month after giving birth. She would take her baby along as there was no one to look after the child. She shared that she could not pay attention to her child's crying as she was occupied with tasks. Soon after, she started taking her second infant child to work as well and, eventually, she got a hysterectomy. Recently hysterectomies among cane cutters in Maharashtra have gained a lot of media attention. The workload in cane cutting is heavy and women have often complained of reproductive health issues that do not receive the attention they deserve. Many women undergo hysterectomies at young ages irrespective if these are warranted (Shukla and Kulkarni 2020).

The added responsibility of childcare affects women's retention at workplaces and significantly influences the decisions they make at work. Participants of a focus group discussion conducted in Zadgaon village of Yavatmal, Maharashtra inform that they would often ask strangers who are passing by to give them a ride to their homes. Their families and neighbours disapprove of this method and often get suspicious about their intentions. However, the women insist that they have no choice since they need to get back to their children as soon as possible.

The danger to children is manifold for agricultural migrant workers. Most tribal families are away for agricultural work for 6-8 months and must migrate with the children. Children as young as 3- and 5-years old look after younger siblings but are at risk themselves. Migrant workers live in open sheds, in the fields away from the main village, where the children do not have access to education, healthcare, and are vulnerable to sexual violence without a community to keep an eye on them.

Working on Family Lands

In agriculture, it is common for families to work at the same farm or field and to live together in the same community with their co-workers. It is also common for families to work together on their own lands. They may do this as their sole occupation or in addition to working on other people's lands. The existence of family-like relationships between supervisors and workers often establishes feelings of security amongst women workers. A focus group discussion with women from farmer suicide affected families in Cheryala, Telangana, highlighted that women farmers were more content working on their family lands as they felt fulfilled seeing the yield of their hard work. The experience of working with a group of women who were also affected by farmer suicides made them feel part of a community. This provided them an opportunity to talk to the other women about their experiences rather than staying home and reflecting on the hardships they had to face as young widows.

Everyday Violence against Women Farmers and Agricultural Workers

This section elaborates the everyday violence and harassment women farmers and labourers experience at their workplaces. The interviews and discussions identify a pattern of the perpetrators and the power dynamics that enables this harassment. It is based on findings on the following central questions:

1. What is the nature and the form of everyday violence/harassment they experience at their work sites?
2. Who are the likely perpetrators?
3. What are the different redressal mechanisms used by the women and
4. What are the manifestations and consequences of this violence/harassment on their lives, at work and home?

Working Conditions and Perceptions of Safety at the Workplace

The physical worksites of agricultural work are often remote in terms of geographical location. Many women work in remote and isolated environments that are hidden by crops and trees. The nature of their work requires women to bend over and crouch, making them vulnerable in their physical positions as they work in proximity with men. The workforce is commonly made up of family members, friends, and neighbours, blurring the line between their work and family lives.

This subsection of the study highlights, through the women's experiences, the precarity of their informal worksites and its impact on their perceptions of safety at work.

Women Experience Unsafe Workplace Settings in Farms

Guliben the president of the Devgadh Mahila Sangathan says that women farmers' workplaces are farms, forests, markets, common lands used for grazing or for collecting fuel or fodder, roads, and the home. She notes that women are not secure in any of these sites. Girls and women do not speak up about the violence they face at the workplace as they fear being blamed by their family and society. The study found several cases where women reported sexual harassment at the workplace to their families, and instead of extending their support the men ended up beating the woman

and suspecting her of having a relationship with the perpetrator. Women experience re-victimisation in the household, community, and other places if they speak out on issues of violence at the workplace.

Physical setup of the farm increases women's safety concerns

32-year-old Chitra from the Beed, Maharashtra reports feeling insecure in the fields once the crops reach their maximum height. She states that shorter crops allow her to see other people in the fields. Therefore, during the time of harvesting she makes sure that there are other women working with her. She further said, "There is no security in the cane cutting locations. Staying in the open farmlands and working for 12-15 hours a day is exhausting. Working in a field in our village is a different feeling, village is home. You do not feel at home when you are out of your village and hometown and so I do not like this work."

Women migrant workers from Kantaveda village shared that there are no facilities for women at the worksite, 'we must stay in open kachha houses (temporary houses), must take baths in open spaces, and have no sanitation facilities. We feel safe only in groups and migrate with known people of the village or members of our extended family.'

Women farmers from Beed, Maharashtra inform that there are no toilets at the cane cutting sites. Further, farm owners forbid them from using their farms for defecation. These women often travel long distances outside their worksites for defecation. Usha, a 26-year-old cane cutter elaborates that due to the cumbersome process of walking several kilometres and the lack of safety that that entails, she often does not feel like working as a cane cutter. N. Chitti from the Nalgonda, Telangana informs of the dangers of working in proximity with men from different villages. Men tend to loiter around the huts, drink alcohol, and pass inappropriate comments about women working nearby.

Workplace Experience for Single Women and Migrant Women Workers

N. Chitti, a community leader belonging to the Scheduled Tribe community in Nalgonda district, works with women farmers and agricultural labourers. She emphasised that single women working in fields are at heightened vulnerability and tend to face greater harassment. Women from Cheriya, Telangana informed that they started to receive greater attention from men at their workplace after their husbands died by suicide. Women farmers who have been working since their childhood or young-adulthood days, found factory farms unsafe for unmarried women. The landowner and contractors harass them and ask them to stay back in their temporary shelters after work. They are often stopped on their way to work by strange men, and therefore must deliberately time their movements to avoid crossing paths with them. The women also reported harassment when they visited neighbouring farms to get vegetables.

C. Bhanuja, Founder and Director of the Rural and Environment Development Society (REDS) organisation based in Ananthapuram, Andhra Pradesh, said that single women and adolescent girls belonging to marginal agricultural households who migrate in search of work to nearby cities often end up in extremely vulnerable situations. Migration to the city for young women puts them at risk of trafficking as some middlemen and employers for agricultural work as agents of brothels. A focus group

discussion conducted with the women agricultural migrant workers in Paluguthanda village highlighted the difficulties women migrant workers face during migration. Apart from migrating with their children, women also carry heavy carry-ons like vessels and clothes. They take temporary shelter in sheds and shacks and set up small bathrooms covered with plastic sheets adjacent to their shelters and carry water from nearby borewells and canals for washing and cleaning purposes. This practice is more cumbersome when women are menstruating. Challenges in menstrual hygiene management in such precarious conditions leads to sexual or reproductive health issues.

The single women farmers from the suicide affected families of Yavatmal, Maharashtra said they face severe violence from their families. They also face trouble from other people in the village in getting help for agricultural operations. For instance, they do not have bullocks or tractors for ploughing and depend on other farmers. This leads to delays in work on their farms and affects the farm productivity. As single women.

Saritatai reflected that *“after the death of the husband, his widow is considered worthless. She is given such a hard time, that she wonders if is she wants to be alive.”*

“We went to work in the fields of a farmer. But for more than a month the farm owner did not pay us any wages. If I had not been single and was accompanied by a family member, would they treat me in the same way?”, asks a women labourer from Ralegaon taluka of Yavatmal district.

The women farm labourers from Yavatmal, Maharashtra shared that a group of single women work in other people’s fields together. Once they had gone to a farmer’s fields to work, but even after a month, the farm owner had not paid a week’s wage to them. Discussions with women indicated that the owner dominated and pressurised single women and widows. Women are also weary of the aggressive tactics required to ensure their interests are fulfilled. For instance, a respondent shared that the employer owed money to two tractor owners but decided to pay the one who threatened the landlord in front of the women and snatched away the money from him. She shared that she did not think she could demand money owed to her in the same manner.

Unequal Power Relations at the Workplace

The power dynamic prevalent in the employee-employer relationships especially in agricultural work becomes an enabling factor in violence against women at the workplace. Employers in agricultural work assume positions of power due to their socio-economic status. Apart from being farm owners and contractors, often employers belong to systemically privileged castes and classes that also place them in a hegemonic position. The oppressive caste structure, which is assiduously maintained by an ideological hegemony of the upper castes plays an important role in creating unequal power relations. It makes women and people belonging to ‘lower castes’ or Dalits at increased risk of exploitation. Apart from employers, perpetrators of violence are middlemen, agents, money lenders, government officials, etc

Sunita from Yavatmal, Maharashtra, has been working as an agricultural labourer in an upper caste landowners farm. Sunita ensures that she only goes to the fields when there are other women with her.

The farm owners who assume a supervisory position are often present on the worksites and heavily scrutinise the work done by women farmers. Sugarcane cutters who participated in the study from Beed, Maharashtra report that they are unable to rest during work even if they suffer from neck or back pain due to the constant surveillance by the Mukadam (contractor). Varying factors such as caste, economic instability, low education levels, marital and migration status, etc. tend to exacerbate women farmers' vulnerability to the risk of violence.

Nature and Forms of Harassment

Forms of everyday harassment range from casting aspersions, denial of basic amenities, physical or mental abuse, character assassination, asking sexual favours, denial of rights over land, refusal to comply with the women's instructions at work. Usually the perpetrators are the employers, supervisors, and fellow male workers who belong to upper castes or are in economically privileged positions. At migration sites, women have often mentioned that violence by their husbands also increases. Manifestations of violence include direct impacts on mental and physical well-being of the women, along with indirect impacts on farm yields and productivity at work. This section outlines the different forms of violence women farmers and agricultural labourers face.

Violence Against Single Women and Women from Farm Suicide Affected Households

A significant number of the study participants were young widows in the 25-40-years age group. Young widows often bear the burden of repaying loans and providing for the needs of the family singlehandedly. This makes them more vulnerable to exploitative situations. Women farmers from the Nalgonda, Telangana who were widowed at an early age reported being dependent on wage labour and MGNREGA work, in addition to working on their family land. They are often denied rights to their husband's share of family land and harassed by their in-laws. Families see them as an unwanted burden or potential claimant of the family land. Women from farmer suicide affected families face harassment and threats from their brother-in-law and father-in-law when they demand a share of family land. They are also subjected to sexual harassment by the male members of the family. In some families these women are not allowed to cultivate their husband's share of land, let alone transferring the land in their names. Setti Sunanda from Jangaon says that money lenders from whom her husband borrowed money harass her each time she takes a loan from SHG or gets monetary help from donors. "One day some donors came to my house in a car and handed over me a cheque for 20,000rs towards medical expenses of my daughter, that night someone started pelting stones on my house, I was scared to go out, I held my two children close to me and sat crying"

Savitriben and Sunitaben, widows from the tribal districts of Gujarat, shared experiences of being targeted as "witches." This led to mental and physical torture by the extended family members. Both women felt that calling them witches was a way to

alienate them from their land. Savitri is a widow, and her greatest worry is that the extended family will drive her and her children away from the land on which she is dependent. She sought support of the Sangathan in getting the land titles transferred in her and her children's names.

MGNREGA work sites are workplaces for a large portion of women farmers and labourers who also work in agriculture. Government offices of revenue and agriculture departments, banks, seed and fertiliser shops, and markets are some places where women from farming communities frequent. The men who work in these sites, especially in government offices and banks, hold positions of power owing to their dominant class and caste positions and higher levels of literacy. This gives them leverage to wield power over women who ask for help. The women participants from farmer suicide affected families, especially young widows, report being mistreated by revenue officers when they visit the offices to apply for compensation for their husband's death. Young widows also reported that they did not receive their widow pension even after being sanctioned several years ago.

Sexual Violence

From the data collected, it is evident that the conditions in which women farmers worked made them vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment. The sexual violence and harassment that agricultural workers experience takes many forms. On farms, for example, these included inappropriate staring or gazing, speech containing sexual content, denigration, or insinuation, and requests, and demands for sexual favours. Sexual harassment and violence were mostly perpetrated by men in supervisory positions such as employers or landowners or men in other positions of power such as money lenders, bank or block office employees, forest guards, and agents. Women shared that perpetrators retaliate if their sexual passes were rejected. This includes publicly humiliating the survivor, spreading rumours, denigrating her, restricting wages, and dismissal from work. It was also observed that women tend to accept the advances or do not explicitly reject them as they fear this retaliation. In these cases, the men tend to 'reward' them by assigning them additional work, praising them, and increasing their wages temporarily.

The data also shows that young widows, single women, and adolescent girls were vulnerable to sexual violence in the various worksites. According to single women farmers and farmers who were young widows, their 'unattached' status made them easy targets. The women shared that the villagers tend to blame the women and accused them of 'inviting' these men due to their 'singlehood.' Further the prevalent social norms enabled the perpetration of sexual violence and harassment. These include a tendency to blame the survivor rather than the circumstances surrounding and promoting violence, cultural beliefs of women's subordinate position, including in the area of work, and acceptance of violence and harassment at the societal level.

Children from migrating tribal families are at greater risk of sexual violence

Tribal children accompanying migrant labour families are at greater risk in their new environments. Anita recalls the horror of finding out that her 13-year-old daughter was abducted in the middle of the night from the worksite. The child had been abducted by another agricultural labourer working in a nearby farm, taken away to another district where the child was sexually assaulted, made to work on a banana plantation, and cook for the man. Anita and her husband received no support from the landowners and had given up on the missing child. They returned home to the tribal district and approached ANANDI a women's organisation in Devgad Baria, Dahod district, Gujarat to register the complaint in a police station. Their complaint was registered in a police station nearly 500 kms away from their home since the child was abducted from their worksite. It was after much follow up with the police station and investigation with the farm owners, that the whereabouts of the abductor were identified. The child was rescued after six weeks, and the man was arrested on charges of sexual assault and abduction. This was a rare case where a trafficked child from a migrant agriculture work site was rescued and returned to the family.

Sexual violence and harassment are associated with risk factors in the workplace such as physical, structural, infrastructural, or spatial arrangements. The data shows that most incidents of sexual violence on farms occurred in isolated places such as behind tall crops and temporary shelters. An additional reason for vulnerability to sexual violence is the travel to workplaces along isolated paths or roads as illustrated by experiences of canecutter women from Maharashtra.

Domestic Violence against Women Farmers

The study showed a direct relationship between workplace harassment against women farmworkers and an increase in domestic violence. Returning late from work is an important trigger for domestic violence. In some cases, women reported taking lifts from strangers to reach home quicker which further angered their husbands.

Women bear most of the blame for the sexual harassment they face at their worksites. The women reported having to be extremely careful not to interact too much with male employers or men around the farm as that is often perceived as a threat by their husbands. In such cases, women find it extremely challenging to confide in their families and husbands about instances of violence, effectively dismissing them as their first support systems.

Women working at the cane cutting sites in Maharashtra shared that their husbands monitored their interactions with other men at the farm. The study also showed that domestic violence increased on cane cutting sites in Maharashtra due to increased suspicion by women's husbands and due to larger work burdens, and lack of privacy and other basic amenities. Women's interactions with agents, drivers, guards, or other men at the worksites also led to domestic violence. Instances of violence become cyclical as domestic violence inhibits women's work capacity leading to more workplace violence.

Violence against Women Farmers during the COVID-19 Lockdown

The data shows that the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown contributed to increased harassment and violence faced by women farmers. These women farmers worked multiple jobs including in rice mills and as construction labour. Owing to reverse migration during the pandemic, the number of workers available in the villages increased substantially. However, due to strict restrictions in movement, work opportunities had declined. Therefore, more workers worked on one job and shared the wages. Even though the wages were minimal, the women workers agreed to work in exploitative and discriminatory work settings.

For instance, women farmers from the eastern tribal regions who migrated for work to Saurashtra region in Gujarat found themselves without work. The landowners for whom they worked refused to call them back. The women also reported a lack of availability of MGNREGA work. Lack of work during this period put the women in precarious situations and they had to borrow money from money lenders for household expenses, children's education, and investment in agriculture. Widowed women farmers from farm suicide affected households reported becoming increasingly dependent on their widow pensions to meet household needs.

Women also reported being stranded at worksites with no means or resources to return to their villages. Girjaben from Devgadbaria, Gujarat, along with her husband was forcibly terminated by the landowner whose farm they worked at during lockdown without settling their dues. They were left destitute in midst of the lockdown as the farmland owner did not provide any support, nor could they return home with the meagre money on hand as there was no public transportation available. Finally, they sought help of a women's organisation to travel home across the state.

Women farmers who participated in the study from Maharashtra also reported being stranded at their worksites due to the lack of availability of public transport. Consequently, women farmers had to walk hundreds of kilometres to return to their villages. The long journey on foot rendered women even more vulnerable to violence.

Violence against Migrant Workers is Pervasive

Migrant women workers are disproportionately vulnerable to violence and harassment. Women workers who migrate face many compounding difficulties ranging from lack of safe shelter and sanitation facilities to financial and sexual harassment.

Sumitraben from Ratadiya village of Panchmahaal recounts the bonded conditions of labour in cotton fields of Saurashtra, where her family worked without wages to repay a short loan with an annual interest of around 40 per cent. Women who work as sharecroppers said that they are often cheated by the land owners as there is no documentation of the land taken on sharecropping, the total price obtained from the sale of the produce which is most often done by the landowner. Advances for expenses are made from time to time and settled at the end of the season. However most agricultural wage labourers return empty handed after the settlement of dues.

At the discussion held with the Nyay Samiti in Gujarat, women who had migrated to a village in Bhavnagar, for agriculture work informed that they were harassed by the landowners. Leelaben who had migrated with her husband and daughter reported being sexually harassed by the landowner. Upon confiding in her husband and conveying that this incident frightened her, they both left without collecting their wages.

During another discussion held in Dabhva village, in the Dahod, Gujarat with the village leaders, the women stated that it was mostly communities who migrated for agricultural work that faced harassment. Several women migrant agricultural workers spoke of their own experiences of being accosted and assaulted by farm owners. Since the migrant agricultural labour live in the fields, it was common practice to send the man to irrigate the fields in the night and use that time to assault the women who normally stayed home with the children. Women didn't share their ordeal with their husbands afraid of losing their wages or facing domestic violence if the husband suspects her of having an affair with the landowner.

Migrant Workers Bear an Unfair burden of work

Gayatriben, a 40-year-old farmworker had been migrating to Kathiawad with her husband for work. She was hired to look after buffaloes on the farm and her husband worked on the farm. They worked long hours, and the farm owner assigned them additional tasks after work hours.

Migrant workers on the farm are also expected to do any other tasks assigned to them. In Gayatriben's case, she was asked to undertake construction labour work as new stables were being built, which included carrying heavy rubble. She got an eye injury while working and was unable to return to work the following day. The farm owner tried to force her to work, abused her, and then asked the family to leave the farm immediately. When they asked for their wages, the farm owner attacked them physically. Gayatriben complained to the village to the Sarpanch. The landowner threatened to physically harm Gayatriben and her husband and forced them to leave during the lockdown, knowing well that they will not be able to travel or seek help at this time.

In Telangana, during a discussion held in the Palugu Thanda village with migrant agricultural labourers, women shared that they did not have access to basic facilities like toilets and need to carry water for all washing and cleaning during their travel to migrate. They stay in crowded places, usually in a shed or small temporary shacks made of plastic sheets. The women also said that the landowners or other influential men at migration sites try to sexually harass them and that they are scared to speak out about this as they fear that they may be asked to leave the work. Some women often succumb to the demands from men and keep silent so that they can continue to work. The pressure to repay loans also stops women from leaving their worksites.

Sugarcane cutters from the Beed, Maharashtra migrate for six months in a year. Young newlywed women are most vulnerable at these sites. The contractors wait for an opportunity to prey on the young girls and women. Manishatai recounted the case of a single woman being tortured by the contractor for repayment of the loan.

The contractor repeatedly called the woman to ask her to repay the money and when he could come to collect the money. Sometimes he even asked if he could come even if she does not have money. These calls came at odd hours of the day, sometimes at 11 pm. Contractors use these tactics to pressurize women and though women try to avoid them, sometimes they give in out of frustration.

Caste-based Violence against Women Farmers

A key finding that emerged in the study was the direct and structural violence faced by women from marginalised caste groups and communities. Qualitative interviews with women farmers working in the cane cutting industry in Maharashtra, highlighted the exploitation of women at the hands of men from the upper-caste community. The women reported sexual harassment by contractors, sub-contractors, agents, and drivers largely belonging to the upper caste. At the cane cutting sites, the huts/dwelling units for the farmers were set up in open spaces, making women vulnerable to the gaze of outsiders. Men from neighbouring villages drive past or loiter around the farms.

The cane cutter women also reported having to hide their ethnicity from other upper caste women or couples within the group. They did not feel safe to say 'Jai Bhim' (a greeting used by followers of Babasaheb Ambedkar) or celebrate Ambedkar Jayanti as, in the past that had led to some conflicts within the group. The Dalit women described other incidents of caste-based discrimination such as not sitting together with other communities, separate utensils for fetching water or cooking, and children not being allowed to mingle with each other. They were forced to maintain silence as raising their voices against dominant communities would have grave consequences. Dalit women also shared that upper caste women were less likely to face harassment, especially if the perpetrator also belonged to an upper caste.

In Telangana, Dalit women agricultural labourers in Nallamadugu village in Kamareddy district reported being sexually harassed by the landowner from the Munnurukapu caste[1] for whom they had worked. The landowner was accused by several women workers of repeated verbal and sexual harassment, solicitation for sex, and threat of physical harassment. The women filed an FIR, but it did not lead to a charge sheet or any action.

A case documented by the Dalit Sanghatan regarding the sexual assault and murder of a Dalit woman labourer from Charel village in May 2020 records the context of the caste-based violence. Darbars in the Charel village hold incredible political power, where even after two decades of being allotted plots, the Dalits have not been able to take possession of the land to build homes, are still forbidden from entering temples, do not have any representation in the village panchayats, and largely survive on agriculture wage labour on the farms of the Darbars. A young Dalit woman was attacked with a rod when she resisted an attempt of sexual assault by a man from the Darbar community while she was working on the farm. She succumbed to her injury. After much struggle and support from Dalit organisations the complaint was registered in the police station and the accused was arrested. The pressure to withdraw the complaint continued from the Darbar community, and eventually the Dalit community had to flee the village and seek refuge in a nearby town.

[1] Munnurukapu is a land-owning caste in Telangana. They are categorized among the Other Backward castes

Perpetrators of Violence

Violence by Employers

Violence against women in agriculture often happens at the hands of the employers or the supervisors. Supervisors, in agriculture, ‘control decisions concerning work performance and hence remuneration for the ‘task’[1]. (Flora, 2014) In many cases, they have the power to dismiss or not rehire the workers working under them.

Women in Gujarat recounted instances of violence they face from their families when they assert their rights as women farmers. Women in tribal communities spoke of the increasing violence against women who claim land rights or are likely to claim land rights on being widowed. The forms of violence range from casting aspersions on their character, abusive language, and physical violence. Most women facing violence were legal claimants to their land through inheritance. “Witch branding” is employed as a tactic to harass women and drive them away from their land.

An FGD conducted in Kathoda village in the Beed, Maharashtra with canecutter women highlighted that many supervisors and employers requested sexual favours from women working on their farms. Women working in a maize field informed that the landowner would try to harass women if one of them was left behind alone after work. He would assign excess work and force women to stay back alone. Being alone in the farm put them in precarious and vulnerable positions. As a precaution, women try to always work and leave in groups and ensure that no one gets left behind alone.

Women farmers from Cheriyala, Telangana also spoke of facing harassment by their employers. 27-year-old Setti Sunanda shared that she had to stop working at a landowner’s farm because he would constantly ask for sexual favours. The women also report fearing humiliation and public shame as the employers threaten to denigrate the women and spread rumours about them in the village. Vanita, who works in Jangaon, Telangana, works in several landowners’ fields. She is often offered transportation back to her village personally by her employer. The perpetrators who are supervisors or foremen sometimes ask women to spend time with them in exchange for work or for work privileges. They punish the women workers if they refuse, by not offering them further work.

Landowners Abuse their Power to Sexually Abuse Women Farm Workers

At a discussion held at the ANANDI Damavav office with the Ghoghamba Nyay Samiti on the issue of violence against women in agriculture, women spoke of the sexual violence meted out to migrant tribal labourers from eastern tribal regions. These groups worked as sharecroppers in the western rain-fed agriculture areas. Sumi spoke of an incident that occurred nearly 15 years back, reliving the horror of being accosted by the landowner at the temporary housing in the fields outside the village where she lived with her husband and child. The landowner came to the house while her husband was irrigating the fields and pushed his way in, disrobing her. She ran away to the main village with her child and sat shivering outside a shop in the market, until many hours later when her husband came looking for her. She refused to go back to the house, and they boarded a bus to take them home which was 400 kms away, leaving behind their wages, grains, and household goods. She said that despite acute poverty, she never went back to any sharecropping site, nor did she let her daughters take up share cropping.

[1] Flora, C.B. 2014. “Agricultural Labor:Gender Issues”, in Encyclopedia of Agriculture and Food Systems, N.K. Van Alfen (ed.). (Amsterdam:Elsevier/Academic Press), pp.123-130.

Sunitatai narrated an incident that took place after the death of her husband. They had returned from a village after Diwali celebration. She stepped out to fetch flour from the flour mill. While coming back from the mill, a man from the village who lived in her lane, followed her back to the house on the pretext of some important work with her. He entered her home behind her and gave a note of hundred rupees to her daughter. He asked the daughter, who was four years old then, to give the money to her mother and send her mother to him. Sunitatai scolded the daughter and sent her back. She then got out of the house and started shouting at the man. The man threw the flour jar/container on the floor. She then went and lodged a complaint against him in the police station. But the man came to her house holding a stick and threatened to attack her when she is alone.

Another woman, Koki a young graduate tribal woman was forced to migrate for wage-labour due to lack of employment locally shared her story of being repeatedly stalked and accosted by the foreman of a construction site and her fear of reporting this to her husband. She returned home and decided to discontinue wage work despite being in terrible poverty.

The stories of Dalit, Adivasi women shared here speak about the vulnerability that comes with caste class and ethnicity. Supervisors and employers often take advantage of their vulnerable social situations and harass women on a day-to-day basis.

Violence by government officials and other actors

Apart from employers and supervisors, other men in positions of power such as money lenders, bank and block office employees, forest guards, and agents also create unsafe conditions for women. This finding seemed to be consistent across all three study sites. Women's interactions with certain men in positions of power and their own subservient positions become precipitating factors for workplace harassment.

Hemaben, a 40-year-old labourer from Panchmahal, Gujarat was assaulted by a forest guard while collecting fodder. She sustained several injuries on her legs. She filed a case against the forest guard which went on for four years, during this time she lost her husband. The guard was transferred but the case has not progressed in the court, and she was pressurized into an out of court settlement at the village level. She was promised compensation of INR 1,50,000 but she only received INR 35,000. Hemaben did not think this was fair compensation and she had spent a much higher amount on hospital expenses. She is still unable to work in the fields as her knees were permanently damaged in the incident.

Women from farmer-suicide affected families in Cheriya, Telangana have been facing harassment at the hands of money lenders since their husbands died. Women reported unwelcome visits by money lenders every time they sold their crops. The pressure to repay the family debt also led many women into selling parts of their land and/or jewellery.

Jija, 25-year-old labourer from Kamkheda village from Maharashtra stated that she had faced harassment by the mukadam (contractor) for several months. The mukadam would visit Jija at home in an inebriated state and then refuse to leave. He would threaten to kill her and her family. Jija feels that women like her are not in any position to escalate such issues, since their livelihoods are dependent on such men. For women doing cane cutting work, seeking relief from everyday harassment is a distant dream, according to Jija. Their grievances are often dismissed, and their complaints are met with threats of termination from work.

Women from Yavatmal, Maharashtra, also report facing harassment from block officers and bank officials. Women's poor literacy levels is another factor in workplace violence. It places them in vulnerable positions when they ask for help and the officials try to exploit them. Vimal a 45-year-old labourer shared that when she asked assistance to fill a form at the bank, the official asked her to spend the night with him for five hundred rupees.

Impact Of Violence on Women's Lives

Physical and Psychological Impact

Women farmers experience a multitude of negative emotions due to workplace violence. Women reported a spectrum of feelings of fear, anger, shame, humiliation, helplessness, guilt, and even confusion. While some survivors reported experiencing negative feelings in the short term, most of them reported continued feelings of humiliation, vulnerability, and violation. These feelings contribute to survivors of harassment not speaking up if she is harassed again. Women reported feeling a sense of shock, mental anguish, and anxiety leading to sleeplessness, incessant crying, and even suicidal feelings.

Sumalatha working at the Gramya Resource Centre for Women in Nalgonda district, informed that the trauma survivors experience due to workplace violence and harassment, often causes depression. Due to the social and occupational repercussions of speaking out, women survivors tend to not report such instances which further isolates them.

Anjana from the Nizamabad, Telangana who was sexually assaulted at her workplace, reported that she has not been able to recover from the 'shock' of the incident. In addition to the psychological trauma, Anjana also sustained injuries on her head, back, and legs, and has trouble walking. She lost her wages and was unable to resume work for several months. Leela and Koki after their experience of assault by the employers have never migrated again for work despite the extreme poverty they face in the village.

Hemaben from Panchmahal, Gujarat, also reported sustaining injuries to her knees from the forest guard which prevent her from returning to agriculture work as she cannot bend her knees. Both these women did not receive adequate compensation from the court and suffered significant financial losses due to medical expenses. Anita is glad that she got her child back alive, who was trafficked from the migrant work site, but the child is still in trauma. She has not received the interim victim compensation due to victims of sexual assault, and still must travel 400 kms for the court hearings at the site of work where the case was registered.

Savitri and Sunita who faced violence at the workplace continue to work on the family farms but are constantly worried about the attacks from the extended family and being alienated from their lands.

Ruksana, working with ANANDI, shared that workplace violence has a deep impact on women's work opportunities. The trauma makes them avoid such workplaces and these safety concerns decide and limit their employment choices. Women who have suffered from violence at a workplace never return to that workplace and lose opportunities for work based on their education, skills, and experience.

Occupational Impact/Economic Costs

The study finds that violence at the workplace for women in agriculture has led women farmworkers to feel dissatisfied with their jobs, co-workers, and supervisors. A meeting with the Nyay Samiti in Goghamba, Gujarat, highlighted that violence against women at the workplace may impact women's work life at different levels. For instance, violent incidents may cause women to leave work or the workplace where the incident took place. However, in some cases, women tend to continue to work out of fear of losing their job. The high time and effort investment for women farmworkers to find work and retain it is an important consideration in whether they choose to leave workplaces after incidents of harassment. Women also continue to work for the fear that they may not find work soon after leaving. In most cases, they felt they had no choice in the situation. They do not want to think about having to find alternate work or sources of income. Financial insecurity and meeting household needs, then, becomes a precipitating factor for workplace abuse. Widowed women are particularly vulnerable in such scenarios as they are often the sole earners in their families.

Women farmworkers also report experiencing varying degrees of emotional stress that affected their productivity. Women farmers who continue to work in violent or hostile workplaces reported that they worked in the constant fear that the violence may be repeated and found themselves unable to focus on work which affected their productivity.

Women farmers from Yavatmal, Maharashtra reported that discrimination and everyday violence directly affected the productivity of their lands. Delays in securing labour for various agricultural operations simply because they are single women or belong to the Dalit community is a consistent challenge. Similarly, single women are the last to find transport for their produce and here too they are harassed if they want timely support. This impacts their farm productivity and their incomes.

Women agricultural workers also face discrimination in wages. Women workers in Telangana shared that for a day's worth of work they are paid 200 to 300 rupees while male workers are paid 400 to 500 rupees for doing similar work. Women tried to challenge the wage discrimination but were dismissed on the pretext that men performed more strenuous labour such as lifting heavy weights. Additionally, women from Zadgaon village in Yavatmal, Maharashtra, informed that they could not miss daily wage work even on personal contingencies such as an illness.

Social Impact

Sexual violence in the workplace disrupted social dynamics and severely impacted women's support systems. Women are unable to confide in their families, especially their husbands as that often leads to more violence at home. The women also reported facing further harassment when news of their harassment spreads. They are blamed for the abuse and social pressure starts mounting against the woman as the guilty party. For widowed women or single women, sexual violence and harassment often becomes a catalyst for rumours, gossip, and blame by their parents, spouses, or in-laws, who put pressure on them to keep working at the same workplace, even if the work environment is unsafe. This adds to her feelings of guilt and confusion. In an instance of harassment, rumours in the village caused both the survivor's family and the wider community to blame and turn against her. In such cases, women turn to their local mahila mandals (women's groups), women's organisations, and activists.

The women also reported feeling apprehensive about children growing up in such environments and learning rumours spread about their mothers. They did not want their sons to grow up and learn the same abusive behaviours.

Redressal Mechanisms

The final section of the findings elaborates women's experience in accessing formal and informal redressal mechanisms and the role of support services.

Women Devise Individual and Collective Response to Everyday Violence

Interviews conducted for the study show that women employ ingenious ways of coping and negotiating risks in their day to day lives. For instance, women from Panchmahal, Gujarat travel in groups to mitigate the risk of harassment. They take their children along to the fields and engage them in work to feel more secure. The women also reported feeling more secure in buses when they had their children with them.

Women made sure to only work in open spaces where their view was not obstructed by tall crops. They try to keep each other company in spaces where visibility is low.

Women devise multiple strategies to address the day-to-day harassment at the location of sugarcane cutting. For instance, they always travel in groups or find someone to accompany them, or they confide their troubles to a trustworthy person in the group. For example, a young girl narrated an incident where women and girls walking towards a sugarcane field were followed by a man in a car every day and sometimes, he would even stop them on their way. A few women spoke about this concern to a trusted persons in the group who raised the complaint with the owner of the farm. That owner then accosted the man and gave him a hearing. Other local citizens also warned the man after which the man stopped troubling the women. Unfortunately, there are stories of women giving in to the oppressor's demands to stop the harassment once and for all.

Sometimes women collectively devise solutions to the problems. One such incident is about a single woman or what is locally referred to as Ardha Koyta (half sickle) who was part of a cane cutting group. Since she was alone every night, men would visit her

hut and trouble her. Other women from the group whose husbands were visiting her, blamed the woman for stealing their husbands. They decided to collectively talk to her 'You are a single woman and every man in the group has his eye on you. So, you must leave.' They sent her back to her village and took the responsibility of completing her share of work against the advance that she had received from the contractor.

These examples show that there are no formal spaces where women feel comfortable raising complaints. Their workplace is far away from home, and they feel like outsiders there. Besides, as women they feel they are at the mercy of their own husbands and other men. They also find it difficult to confide in their own husbands. They therefore respond to the situation in whatever way they can.

Help Seeking by Women at the Workplace and Barriers to Reporting

Help-seeking can be defined as violence disclosure to obtain some form of assistance. It is beneficial in defining the importance of the problem, reducing the number of violent episodes, and limiting the victim's distress[1]. (Taylor, Hardison, & Chatters, 1996) Help-seeking processes include three stages: (1) problem recognition, (2) decision to seek help, and (3) selecting someone to provide help. This study revealed that while women farmers understood the gravity, scope, and consequences of the problem of workplace violence, many factors contributed to women's disinclination to seek help. The data showed that the decision of whether to report the violence and seek help was based on factors such as:

- fear of not being believed, fear of being blamed, fear of being ostracized at work and in the community for accusing the harasser of such terrible actions, especially if the harasser has a 'good reputation' in the village, and fear of losing her job,
- shame,
- poor awareness of her rights,
- lack of available support resources,
- marital status, and
- migration status.

The concerns are largely rooted in cultural social norms and attitudes about workplace violence, especially sexual violence, and the role of the criminal justice system.

The study also revealed that these inhibiting factors to help-seeking also influence the decisions about who women approach for help. There is a strong correlation between the increase in domestic violence, familial and marital difficulties, and an increase in workplace violence. Therefore, women farmers often do not report instances of violence to their families. In addition, due to the stigma around workplace violence and sexual violence, women farmers also refrain from speaking to other people in the village about their experiences of violence.

Women workers who witnessed violence and harassment were apprehensive of coming forward. Women farmers reported that they remain silent after seeing other women being sexually harassed or abused as the men who perpetrate workplace often occupy powerful positions in the society due to their caste or class affiliations.

[1] Taylor, R. J., Hardison, C. B., & Chatters, L. M. (1996). Kin and nonkin as sources of informal assistance. In H. W. Neighbors & J. S. Jackson (Eds.), *Mental health in Black America* (pp. 130–145). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Moreover, women must compete among themselves to retain their jobs. In some cases, they remained silent to win the goodwill of their hierarchical superiors and to avoid having problems with the villagers.

Inadequate Police Response and Lack of Awareness of Rights

In the very few instances where women did report instances of violence to the police, the official response was inadequate. In many cases, employers in the agriculture sector and the authorities do not take measures to punish the perpetrators or protect survivors when they report workplace harassment. This study reiterates this understanding. Women who reported incidents reported a less than adequate response from the police. Women found the conduct of the police personnel harsh, rude, and condescending. The women farmers informed that the police constables were not sympathetic to their plight and often used intimidation tactics such as using derogatory language about their character, shouting at them, or blaming the complainant of provoking the accused men. In addition to their negative interactions with the police, the women also reported that the police response was inadequate and inefficient. We must foreground this by clarifying that the first post of action in a case of workplace harassment is the internal complaints committee (if one is constituted) or a local complaints committee (constituted in every district). In most cases, the police filed an FIR but took no further action. However, the women also shared that they were not given a copy of the FIR as mandated by law.

Migrant workers also reported being sceptical of the police response since they were outsiders in the villages where they work. The survivor's scepticism is further reinforced by their lack of access to and negative experiences with the police and service providers who failed to investigate their complaint, discriminated against them, or failed to address their cultural needs. Survivors reported that police often blame them for the violence or insinuate that they may have provoked the perpetrator. Migrant workers also have little means to file or pursue police cases which are filed at the site of the violence which are not close to their homes. The women from suicide affected households also reported that the police would often tell them that their husbands did not die due to systemic issues but rather due to personal negligence or family disputes.

In certain cases, where the women experienced violence due to caste-based reasons, the police would often file FIRs under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) as a criminal offence rather than under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. The women reported insufficient legal awareness to be able correct such errors.

Women farmworkers also face numerous obstacles in accessing justice against workplace violence. This includes inadequate knowledge about legal remedies and other protections. The women farmers who participated in the study did not possess information about the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, Local Complaints Committees (LCCs), Child Development Protection Officers, or One-Stop Crisis Centres.

Very few women knew that they could approach the village level *Samakhya*[1] (collective) or the Mandal (block) level federation of SHGs for support in case of harassment.

Women farmers who sought relief from the village panchayats or the Sarpanch (elected head of the village-level local government) faced threats of further violence. For instance, the family of a Dalit woman who was raped and murdered in Charel, Gujarat, was threatened by the villagers from the Darbar community after they complained to the Sarpanch as well as the police. The family of the woman as well as the local Dalit organisation constituted by 25 Dalit families faced threats of violence and ostracization and were forced to withdraw the case.

In addition to approaching the police, the women farmers also reported that they sought redressal through the village elders and caste leaders as this is the tradition in villages. The village elders decide a date where a meeting is arranged between the two parties and both the parties pay some amount for such redressals. In case of severe violence or harassment, in case there is a witness, the perpetrator is punished with a fine.

Women's Leadership and Voice

The study also revealed that village leaders, local women's organisations, collectives, farmworker women themselves, mahila mandals and SHGs, and academic institutions are creating new ways to address and combat violence in the agricultural workspace. Strong women leaders have been crucial for addressing and raising gender issues. Where women leaders exist and choose to take up feminist issues, they have had a widespread and significant impact.

In Gujarat, the women's sanghatans (organisation) promoted by ANANDI have set up Nyay Samitis that actively support women victims of violence. The women's Nyay Samiti talks directly to the women, calls for the traditional adjudication forum which earlier was composed only of men "paanch" (council leader in the village local government) but now it calls both parties for adjudication. The forum is convened by the Naya Samiti so that women can speak without fear and in the presence of other elder panchayat members of the community as witnesses to ensure that the decision taken is followed through. The Nyay Samiti members follow up with the survivors of violence regularly and accompany them to the police station and judiciary if the survivor of violence chooses to pursue the legal mechanisms for justice. Women participants from Telangana, especially women from farm suicide affected households, take their issues to the Single Women Forum formed by Gramya Resource Centre for Women.

This study saw some immediate outcomes owing to the women's local leadership. Two cases of severe violence were escalated to higher government officials as the local police refused to take any action. The local activists decided to bring the issue to the notice of the district collector and district superintendent of police. Letters were sent to the Chairperson of State Commission for Women (SCW), Commissioner of Women and Child Development (WCD), National Commission for Scheduled Castes, and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Unfortunately, this did not lead to any tangible action either.

[1] Samakhya is a federation of self-help groups at the village/mandal level.

In Paugu Thanda, a Lambada village, in Telangana, women approached the researchers after an FGD was conducted, to resolve a case of child abuse in the village. With the help of a local organisation, Gramya Resource Centre for Women, a complaint was lodged with the Child Welfare Committee.

Many local level organisations also supported women to mobilise and conducted training and awareness campaigns on the complex issues facing women farmworkers who experience sexual violence in the workplace and how organisations can extend support.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report outlines the nature, forms, and impacts of everyday harassment on women farmers in the context of the agrarian distress in India. The stories of migrant workers from Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Telangana, narratives of women farmers from farmer suicide households in Maharashtra and Telangana describe the distress of the region and the interconnections between availability of work, its nature, and their associated forms of harassment. The stories also speak eloquently of social relations organised around caste, class, patriarchy, ethnicity exacerbating women's vulnerability.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), violence and harassment in the world of work is a threat to one's dignity, equal opportunities, and security, and impacts physical, psychological, and sexual health and well-being. It impacts workers, employers, and their families, communities, economies, and society as a whole[1]. (International Labour Office, 2008)

Secondary literature review supplemented the study's finding that non-standard forms of work, including temporary work and informal work, play an important role in creating power hierarchies that enable perpetrators to carry out violence and harassment against women workers in agricultural workplaces. The study also revealed that arduous working environments including low pay, migration and marital status, caste hierarchies, the need to link housing entitlements with employment, and dangerous working conditions contribute to women's lack of safety at work.

Women reported that some male employers abuse their positions of power. If women refuse sexual advances from supervisors, or even attempt to report these incidents they risk facing increased workload, reduction in wages, dismissals at the personal level, and face denigration and humiliation at the societal level. The experience of violence at the workplace leads to a series of negative psychological and social consequences, like feelings of shame and abuse from co-workers or family members who learn of these incidents along with victim blaming. In addition, it reduced the productivity of women as they live in constant fear of harassment impacting their ability to concentrate at work.

[1] International Labour Office. 2008. Resolutions adopted by the 97th International Labour Conference. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_098017.pdf

The study, however, also outlined some successes in addressing violence at the workplace for women in agriculture such as local activists, forums, and women's and farmers' organisations providing support to women and building women's leadership through collectivisation. The study highlights the potential for women leaders to amplify each other's voices and create feminist alliances and peer support.

The study underlines the power of feminist research and the value of feminist research methodologies. For example, during the data collection process, the study partners in Telangana intervened to provide immediate support to a woman facing harassment in the village. The study partners were running a Sakhi centre with the WCD and were able to act against the harasser. They were also supported by the village panchayat who agreed to offer protection to the aggrieved woman. However, even though there are indications of some positive actions, the study flags that implementation of laws and policies is challenging in unorganised and rural contexts.

What can be done at the Macro-level?

Data on the Pervasiveness of Violence Against Women and Attitudes on Violence Against Women in Agriculture

Disaggregated data to account for women farmers and the several precipitating factors that make some women more vulnerable to abuse is an important requirement to build evidence about violence against women in agriculture. This includes details about their caste, migration, widowhood, age, and male to female ratio of supervisors and workers. Quantitative data should be corroborated with understanding about the attitudes of women and men in positions of power about their acceptability of different forms of violence at home and work.

Budgetary Allocation for POSH Awareness in the Unorganised Sector

Budgets must be allocated by WCD, Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and other departments to conduct large scale awareness activities to implement the POSH act in the unorganised sector, with a special focus on women in agriculture. The awareness campaigns need to be conducted with individuals as well as institutions such as police, panchayats, banks, etc.

However, awareness alone is not adequate, as experience and data from the field suggests that women often find it difficult to challenge the power relations as it has wide ranging implications on their lives. The unorganised sector does not allow for a safe and secure place where women can confide and seek redressal for their grievances. There is need to invest in infrastructure and mechanism that create a safe space for women. This needs to be aligned with the nature of work of women both for migrant labourers and women who work on their own fields. Context specific solutions are imperative for successful implementation of POSH provisions.

Strengthening Women's Knowledge of and Access to Safe Reporting Procedures

The study revealed that many women who experience workplace violence lack access to information on safe reporting procedures. It is imperative to increase awareness about workplace violence and demand safe spaces for women. This includes safety while

travelling to and from work where abuse often occurs. Encouraging women to organise into groups could enable them to make demands and potentially create a safe space for discussing issues related to workplace violence.

What can be done at the Micro-level?

1. The Ministry of Women and Child Development should take up extensive proactive awareness programmes in all gram panchayats through LCCs so that the information about redressal mechanisms and the phone numbers to be contacted can reach the women in villages. Village Organisations, such as the federation of SHGs, can be made part of these awareness programmes and in prevention and monitoring harassment of women at workplace in villages.
2. Anganwadi workers and village organisations must be trained to respond to local cases of violence against women. They can be part of awareness building initiatives at village level about the redressal mechanism and support reporting of cases of harassment and violence immediately to the CDPO.
3. Gram panchayats should be made responsible for prevention and reporting of cases of harassment of women (including migrant labourers) in their panchayat jurisdiction. Ward members and the village Sarpanch must be educated to play this important role.
4. Women's organisations and federations at the local level should be strengthened in tackling cases of harassment of women at the workplace. They can extend support to survivors of violence through counselling and connecting them with redressal mechanisms.
5. Sensitisation training should be conducted with the police. Improving police awareness about provisions under the POSH act is crucial for the unorganised sector. They must be sensitive to the concerns of women while filing FIRs and chargesheets against the perpetrators and should be sensitised as to not blame the women.
6. LCC's must be mandated to take up proactive steps to publicise their constitutions and should make special outreach efforts to approach women working in the agriculture sector.
7. Sugar factories need to collaborate with the WCD and state women's commissions to set up mechanisms for safe reporting and support systems for cases of harassment and violence

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