



Exploring the complex interrelationship between Gender Based Violence and Women's Work

Study by Azad Foundation

Abstract

This Study explores the complex inter-relationship between violence and its impact on women's work and understands factors that help women challenge violence in their lives using voices of women in non-traditional livelihoods and community leaders who facilitate women to challenge violence and access work opportunities.

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Executive Summary

This study and report generate a qualitative analysis on the correlation between women's entry into work and the violence women face within the home, community and workplace. Through the testimony of participant women workers, many of whom are domestic violence survivors, the study investigates the notion that women's employment and workforce participation reduces the prevalence of violence in their lives, particularly in the domestic sphere, as a result of gaining empowerment and agency.

On probing, this linear positive correlation between women's employment and reduced risk of violence did not hold up, revealing that often women's choice to seek and retain employment becomes occasion for renewed and vicious attacks against them, especially in the domestic sphere. Women who enter the workforce by rupturing the cycle of structural denial are in turn faced with a more difficult to grasp resentment and violence in the personal sphere that plays out due to their newfound independence and choice to exercise agency. The violence in such instances function both as a deterrent for women's workforce participation as well as diminishing the sense of accomplishment and identity women gain when they choose employment and financial self-sustenance. Such abuse, hostility and violence are motivated by a need to restore the patriarchal status quo within families and communities, when faced with the social rearrangement taking place as a result of women becoming gainfully employed and independent. Social scientists who have studied this aspect of women's work anticipate that this kind of patriarchal backlash could dissipate or reorganize with time, as either the woman who faces violence will walk out of the abusive relationship as she now has the financial means to do so or the families and communities will move the needle on their norms and adjust to revised gender relations.

The study reveals the need for network and support spaces to address this under articulated aspect of women's work, so that women and also families and communities can better negotiate such social transitions, with the aim of aiding more women to choose employment without having to put themselves through retaliatory abuse and violence.

The study was conducted among women engaged in Non-Traditional Livelihood (NTL) as drivers and mechanics in Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, Ahmedabad and Indore. Interviews and focus group discussions were also conducted with men and young boys from the community where the women worked to understand more broadly the issue of gender-based violence against women workers, especially NTL workers.

The major findings of the study include discrediting popular notions that once employed, the major source of violence faced by women occurs in the public realm – in factories and offices, on roads and markets. While women participants in this study also narrated instances of violence encountered in the public while navigating for work, they emphasised the violence they faced at home and within intimate relationships as taking a decidedly heavier toll on their wellbeing. This opened up the avenue for examining the shape shifting nature of violence, especially emotional violence inflicted by family in the form of curtailments and resentments directed at women.

The other major finding was that the threat of violence against women was reduced to some extent when the opportunity for employment, arrived through familial or community networks, where the immediate social fraternity endorsed the woman seeking work, even in NTL. However, in the study women who chose training and employment of their own volition and resourcefulness were met with censure, ridicule and outrage. Even in such cases where women proactively chose to work in NTL, the approval of neighbours and extended family went a long way in helping families and spouses accept the woman's choice. It was illustrative to note that some families and men were willing to course correct when their community assured them that they will not be socially penalised if women in their families deviated from patriarchal scripts such as seeking unconventional employment. In fact, on gaining such assurances and their anxieties assuaged, a few men turned

from being violent and belligerent to actively supportive of the choices of the women. This finding shines a light on the fragile nature of patriarchal performance and toxic masculinities that is motivated by a competition to appear as champions of cultural norms and driven by a fear of social ostracising. When the community and neighbours were willing to advocate and encourage even the choice of women to work as mechanics and drivers, many families hitherto opposed were willing to shift their stance to fit the new standard. It is likely that some of these families and men were already fence sitters and likely more malleable and open to reason. Nonetheless, the finding underlines the need for community and neighbourhood outreach on gender and violence, to address and convert the context that silently sanctions violence against women.

The other finding, as clearly stated by a few testimonies, was that women struggled to understand the violence that they experienced within families, especially emotional abuse and battering. With no support available or safe networks to share, many of the women participants of the study reiterated that they did not identify their harmful experiences as violence until much later. This is both due to the normalisation of a culture of violence against women as well as the commonly perceived, narrow definition of violence against woman which excludes emotional violence and the toll it takes on women. Moreover, women spoke of often feeling confused when they encountered emotional hostility from their families and husbands after starting work, unable to entirely understand the shift in relational dynamics, only to see it gradually progress to physical violence. This indicates the need to shed light on shifting gender dynamics when women join the workforce, so that women especially are better informed and prepared to identify their experiences of violence.

The lack of meaningful redressal mechanisms for addressing violence against women is the other finding that was reiterated by both women participants as well as men. Lodging a complaint in a police station, especially in the case of Intimate Partner Violence, was seen as the last recourse, to be avoided as much as possible, even if it meant tolerating abusive and violent behaviour without any external intervention to stop it. One of the participants spoke of One Stop Sakhi Centres for assisting women, but its effectiveness and reach among working class women is still nascent when compared to the magnitude of the problem of Gender based violence faced by women. While state mechanisms for redressal are faulty at best, women also struggle with the lack of support in privately owned workplaces. Every organisation by law is mandated to institute a sexual harassment committee following the Vishaka Guidelines and later the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. These lay down the responsibilities of the employer in forming the internal complaints committee (ICC) and the rules and process to be complied in the instance of a complaint of sexual harassment. Yet, a 2015 study by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and EY found 36% of Indian companies and 25% of multinational corporations in India were not compliant with the Act. Since latest figures are not available, it is likely that the compliance figures have improved marginally. However, this still places a lot of questions on companies that employ women, for example as drivers. How is workplace safety ensured, especially when the women workers travel across the city as part of their work. In the instance of violence and harassment, what mechanism of redress are available to the workers and how have they been made aware of it? What modalities have companies devised to address situations when management disregard their role as impartial arbitrators, as a result of their prejudice, and failed to provide women with a workplace environment driven by equality and safety. In most instances, women workers have few or no trusted avenues for recourse. The overwhelming institutional and structural apathy forces women to lose faith in the possibility of redressal in the event of complaint, fear retaliation and social stigma, and augur self-doubt.

In such an absence of mechanisms of support, women emphasised the need for more informal community support and counselling processes. The counselling they received in organisations where they trained as mechanics and drivers helped them identify their experiences and gain agency in the community of other women who were facing similar circumstances in life. It also provided them with a space to make friends, whom they could rely on for camaraderie, advice and assistance. This

feeling of collective support has been mentioned by most participants as the most significant sustenance and infrastructure to fight gender-based violence against women, and one that they acquired as a result of joining employment.

In summary, the study notes that any easy correlation between work and violence against women threw up more questions than certitudes, thus indicating the need for more analysis and community-based work in this regard.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Women's experience in the world of work is marked by various forms of structural discrimination and violence leading to stark inequalities in employment outcomes that in turn perpetuate a cycle of violence. Manifested in various forms, physical, emotional as well as economic, violence is an instrument to reinforce the patriarchal hegemony which rests on an unequal power structure. In India, 52 percent of the women in the country have been victims of at least one incidence of physical or psychological assault in their lifetime (ICRW, 2000).

Social norms, traditions and patriarchal structures are the overarching factors creating conditions for women's subjugation. The private-public and reproductive-productive divides have defined gendered spaces, gendered roles, and sexual division of labour, leading to lack of access to resources, services, and opportunities. Denial of access to decent work¹ for women is a form of discrimination as it emerges from structural denials that limit women's access to mobility and decision-making power. More manifest forms of violence become visible when women transgress these structural norms i.e go out without taking permission of men of the household, don't perform their household duties or want to work outside.

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in 1995 envisioned that access to economic resources, knowledge of economic structures, and acquiring economic decision-making power helps women challenge inequalities against them. India is amongst the few countries in the world that has a declining female labour force participation rate (LFPR) (37% in 2006- 18% in 2019² and which has further declined due to COVID19). An overwhelming 90% of women working are employed in low paid, low skilled and even unpaid and unrecognised jobs.

This falling workforce participation of women is the result of structural denials that constitute violence against women in the form of withheld opportunities and gatekeeping in the name of honour. A corollary also appears to be true whereby women who enter the workforce by rupturing the cycle of structural denial are in turn faced with a more difficult to grasp resentment and violence that plays out due to their newfound independence and choice to exercise agency. It has been illustrative during Azad Foundation's ³work that violence, regardless of rootage, has profound impact on women challenging the structural inequalities stacked against them. Hence, this current study by Azad seeks to apply the lens of violence to understand its correlations using narratives of women choosing to join and sustaining themselves in the workforce. Borrowing from the scholarly work and relying on the interviews conducted, the study tries to understand the trajectory of the latter situation and finds that the road to gender equity and safety from violence is not linear. During the study, we have been able to better understand the nature of this violence that plays out within relationships, families, neighbourhoods and communities for women who have also recommended ways to organise support to address it.

¹ILO defines decent work as "Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

² SDG India Index 2019

³ Azad Foundation aims to provide livelihoods with dignity to resource poor women by engaging them in viable and remunerative non-traditional livelihood options like commercial driving. Azad's flagship program **Women with Wheels** trains and prepares women with low economic and social capital to become professional and commercial drivers providing a rights based training for self-empowerment. Qualified women drivers are provided employment opportunities in partnership with Sakha, a social enterprise and strategic partner organization of Azad Foundation. Azad and Sakha (a hybrid social enterprise) work together to enable women access "livelihoods with dignity" and 'Decent Work'. Azad also works at the community level to create women leaders through their feminist leadership program and engages with men in the same communities to talk about notions of masculinity and patriarchy in their Men for Gender Justice Program.

While livelihood options are limited for women, and despite on average being mostly of the traditional kind, Azad's work, has shown that women from working class communities can opt for non-traditional livelihood opportunities like driving. These choices are fraught with barriers like opposition from families and communities, infrastructural deficiencies in cities that don't support working women on the move and the challenge of overcoming limitations that are the result of social conditioning. In a post-pandemic world, these stresses have been amplified and compounded by shrinking work opportunities. It is in this context that Azad has conducted this study to understand the role of violence in the context of women's employment, specifically in non-traditional livelihoods. The aim is to record not just women's experiences of violence in public as a result of being in employment roles previously considered masculine, but also experiences of domestic violence and abuse which accompanies women's choice to seek employment. The study seeks to add to the literature which can help us better plot and articulate the shadow of violence that accompanies women's entry into the workforce and in turn debilitates women, men and their communities.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter elucidates the methodology by which the research was conducted. It is divided into two parts. The first part describes the rationale, objectives, theoretical framework and the guiding principles of the research. It details the sampling, profile selection and data analysis of the research. The limitations encountered during the conduct of the research have been explained at the end.

Study Objectives-

Objective 1- To understand how violence and discrimination impact women's access to decent work and how the cycle is perpetuated by violence in public and private spaces

Exploratory Questions-

1. To understand how various forms of violence restrict urban resource poor women's access to opportunities for education, training and decent jobs, and lack of access perpetuates a cycle of continued violence and how this has been impacted during COVID19 lockdown – (private and public)
2. To understand how violence at work, at home and in public spaces impacts women's access and sustenance of work (this will explore how structural violence- backlash at work/home at workspaces eg denying work to women due to their gender and intersections or non-acceptance of women in markets i.e women drivers, women in e-commerce, non-conducive workspaces impact access and substance of women in workspaces)

Objective 2-To understand mechanisms/enablers that facilitate women's choice to access decent work and education and how decent work can also be an enabler for women to challenge violence in their lives

Exploratory Questions-

1. How can access to decent work enable women to challenge violence in their lives
2. Explore how access to and knowledge of mechanisms of violence redressal, supportive community spaces, support from community feminist leaders, peer-groups help women challenge violence and access decent work, or challenge violations at workspaces
3. How can engaging with men support women in their communities/ families to challenge violence in their lives and ensure access to decent work
4. What is the role of institutionalized social infrastructure working women hostels – safe homes – safe transport and women's access to decent work in breaking the cycle of violence at home and workspaces

Research Design

This is an exploratory study to understand the complex interrelationship between violence and women's work. Hence, the study used the methodology of in-depth interviews and Focus group discussions to explore multiple points of interrelationships between violence and women's work for more participative approach in this research.

Selection of Study participants

The participants in the study were chosen purposively from across Azad's different programs, namely feminist leaders, men community change agents and women in non-traditional livelihoods, namely women drivers and mechanics who have challenged different forms of violence, community leaders who have engaged in supporting women survivors and men who are challenging their notions of violence against women to give a rich experiential narrative and build the interrelations between violence and women's work. We confined the study to community participants from Azad's

various programs given the paucity of time and ease of access of community members who are already part of Azad. For taking stories of women in transport and women mechanics we spoke to Sakha drivers (Azad’s livelihood partner) and partner organisations in Lucknow, Ahmedabad and Indore. While selecting participants, diversity in mapping city experiences, marital status and community diversity was observed.

The profile of study participants is shared below

Methodology of data collection

The methodology for the research began with identifying participants for in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions, that were held in the three cities of Delhi, Jaipur and Indore.

Sample Proposed	Sample Achieved*	Location
6 in-depth with survivors	7 Additionally, 1 IDI with Azad team member engaging on Gender based violence work on the ground	Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, Indore, Ahmedabad
1 FGD with men leaders who are currently active in the communities across Azad and have in the past 6 months supported/ faced any cases of violence	2 Additionally, 1 IDI with Azad team member engaging on work with young boys and men and 2 IDIs with young boys from the Men for Gender Justice Program at Azad	Delhi, Jaipur
2 FGDs with women who are working including those in transportation sector and those in different Non-traditional livelihoods	1 For the FGD with women in different NTL we were able not able to conduct an FGD, therefore 1 IDI with a female mechanic was conducted	Delhi, Kolkata, Indore

The interviews were conducted over a period of two months from November-January 2022 of women participants in a mix of face to face and virtual meetings, keeping in mind the evolving pandemic situation. Since many of the participants were domestic survivors who had undergone harrowing experiences, the interviews were conducted keeping in mind their health and wellbeing by discussing consent for the conversation, possible triggers and building a safe space where participants can withdraw from the conversation in case of discomfort. For this study, an additional aspect on conversations with men and boys from the communities of the women workers has been incorporated. This approach is in line with the emerging body of work that observes working with men on gender as a key component for combatting violence against women. These conversations with the boys were in the shape of two In Depth interviews and two Focus Group Discussions. Main identifier for these participants was the age group they belonged to, and the section is designed to inquire gender notions held by young men from the community. This material is intended to serve future work with the boys in the direction of developing male allyship that will in turn help in building a supporting environment for women from the community to make independent and empowering choices.

Profile of Participants

The study has been conducted with survivors of violence who are working in NTL, young men and boys and women in transport and other NTLs. For the first category we have conducted in-depth interviews with 7 women who are survivors of violence (different forms). Of these 7 women 6 are

working as drivers in Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, Indore and Ahmedabad and one is working as a mechanic in Indore. From them, 2 are unmarried 2 are separated and 3 are divorced from their partners. 4 women are between the age 18-23 years and the other are 3 are between the age 28-29 years. 5 women are from the Hindu community, 1 from Muslim and 1 from Sikh community. Most respondents did not want to share their caste, therefore it has not been presented in the profile.

Further two FDGs were conducted with women working in NTL in Delhi and Kolkata. All women are working as drivers with Sakha. In choosing participants for the FGD, it was not necessary if they have faced any violence at home or outside.

Two FDGs were conducted with young boys and men in Delhi and Jaipur. The group in Delhi consisted of boys between the age group 15-18 years, they all have enrolled with the Men for Gender Justice program in the year 2021. The group in Jaipur consisted of boys in the age group 18-22 years and included boys who have been with the program for two years. This was done to understand the difference in perspectives of boys in terms of age and the level of intervention at Azad. An in-depth interview was also conducted with a community leader under the MGJ program, who is 19 years old and just passed his class 12th.

An in-depth interview was done with a woman mechanic in Indore, she is married and 28 years in age.

Two additional interviews have been done with Azad team members who work on issues of gender-based violence on ground. One of the team members working in the community and with community leaders on enrolling women for NTL training as well as addressing cases of violence. The other member is part of the Men for Gender Justice program and works with young men and boys on gender, masculinities, gender based violence and unpaid care work.

The names of all participants have been changed to maintain anonymity of identity.

Data Analysis

This is an exploratory research, which used grounded theory to understand the complex interconnections between women's access to work and how experience of different forms of violence impacts such access. Based on interviews with women participants who are engaged in non-traditional livelihood and men and women change agents in communities, we have mapped themes and narratives about the complex portrait of choices, barriers crossed and persisting challenges of experiences of violence and the difficult connections between employment, women's agency and violence.

Once the material was collected, the data was sorted in an Excel sheet into profile layers of age, education, marital status, religion, city of the participants, and then further sorted based on study questions of experiences of seeking training and employment, forms of violence encountered, support structures found. This helped to show the overarching patterns in the lives of the participants in the form of encountering and combatting violence because of their decision to work, specifically in NTL. a tool kit was developed to analyse the emerging patterns from the conversations. Once sorted, Azad held a virtual workshop for one day on the 9th of March 2022 where the observations were presented to members of Zubaan and affiliates of Azad. This was intended as a collective, participatory analysis borrowing from Feminist Participatory Action Research methodology, and helped further elaborate on the key themes of analysis that were emerging and to join the dots between patterns that the researchers might have overlooked.

Confidentiality

To maintain confidentiality of the data collected and ensure anonymity and privacy of the research participants, the interviews and group discussions have been coded with changed names. Confidentiality in storage of data was also ensured, as all consent forms, recordings and final

transcribed interviews are stored separately so that they are accessed only by the researchers and used strictly for research purposes only.

Limitations

This is an exploratory study which is an attempt to fill a gap in the research that links various forms of structural violence faced by women with their access and ability to sustain livelihoods. Therefore, the study while it brings out a very niche and intersectional area of enquiry was limited in its attempt to explore the area in-depth given the timeline of the deliverables and also the context of COVID which did impact face-to-face narratives especially with survivors. The findings of the study can become a basis for much deeper enquiry in this area.

To locate the study within a broader body of work, the following guiding frameworks of feminist movements and scholarly work were adopted for the study.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Despite a growing economy, women's workforce participation in India has seen a steady decline. As per NSSO data (2010 and 2012), the female labour force participation had shown a steady decline from 29.4% in 2004-05 to 22.5% in 2011-12⁴. But further aggravated by demonetisation in 2016 and the harsh COVID lockdown of 2020, the FLFPR fell to 16.1% in the July-September 2020 quarter, with missing consensus on the current yearly rate. Despite being home to 17% of the world's women population⁵, India bucks the trend of developing nations with this fall in female participation in the workforce, while neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh (30.63%, 2020) and Sri Lanka (34%, 2019) show much better indices. Currently, India is ranked among the ten lowest countries (145 of 153 countries covered) for women's workforce participation.⁶

This is an alarming decline and has been attributed to a complex set of factors, such as that likely more number of girls are getting an education instead of joining the workforce during this period; mechanisation in the manufacturing market is diverting work to men; the structural transformation of the Indian economy has shrunk agricultural work, plummeting rural women's workforce participation drastically, alongside the shrinking of small scale cottage industries which too have traditionally employed women in large numbers.

Despite the reasons being complex, the decline of the workforce participation of women in the country is a matter of grave concern. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy data shows that while 67% of all men of working age are employed only 9% of all women of working age are employed. Furthermore, CMIE data also revealed that among the diminished percentage of women who are entering the labour force, more numbers of them were faced with unemployment in comparison to men. "Women accounted for 10.7 per cent of the workforce in 2019-20 but, they suffered 13.9 per cent of the job losses in April 2020, the first month of the lockdown shock. By November 2020, men recovered most of their lost jobs but women were less fortunate. 49 per cent of the job losses by November were of women."⁷ Among those employed, there is severe wage disparity between men and women. As per the World Inequality Report 2022, men in India account for 82% of the income, while women earn just 18% which is much lower than the Asia average of 27% in 2019.⁸

In effect, fewer women are joining the workforce, and those who do find it harder to get employed in comparison to men. And when they do find employment, they take back a lesser share of the income than their male counterparts, and are at a greater risk of losing employment in the event of an economic shock.

This places women in an extremely precarious position and the economy as structurally unable to adequately employ half of its labour force. It's against such a backdrop that the call for increasing women's training and participation in non-traditional livelihood is gaining momentum.

In 2017, a coalition of organisations and individuals formed the Non-Traditional Livelihood Network (NTLN) in an effort to address the continuing marginalisation of Indian women from the workforce as well as women workers restricted to traditionally feminised livelihood roles that are both severely underpaid and de facto invisibilised in their contribution to the economy.

⁴ Sandhya Rani Mahapatro, *Changing Trends in Female Labour Force Participation in India: An Age-Period-Cohort Analysis* (Indian Journal of Human Development, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2013)

⁵ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/no-place-for-women-what-drives-indias-ever-declining-female-labour-force/articleshow/83480203.cms?from=mdr>

⁶ <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>

⁷ CMIE data - <https://www.cmie.com/kommon/bin/sr.php?kall=warticle&dt=2020-12-14%2012:48:29&msec=703>

⁸ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/female-labour-income-in-india-is-at-18-says-world-inequality-report/article37934239.ece>

As per NTLN's 2017 charter, non-traditional livelihoods are defined as "livelihood practices that help women break stereotypes emerging from the intersections of gender, caste, class, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities and other marginalities and oppressive structures, within a dynamic context of space and time. Non-traditional livelihoods increase the set of viable livelihood choices available to women and give them access and control over skills, technology, market, mobility and resources. They create economic stability along with psychological, social and political empowerment. Some examples of the same include training women to become drivers, masons, electricians, etc."

Besides being a source of empowerment for women, the effect on society at large is manifold when women in non-traditional work occupy public spaces as professionals fashioning a new optic for women at work. But this entry of women in employment that are traditionally considered male bastions also trigger unstable social reactions, as communities, families and individuals grapple with shifting cultural mores around work and possibilities hitherto un(der)considered. This study specifically traces the circuitous relationship that work, specifically non-traditional work, has with gender-based violence.

Inter-relation between Work and Violence for Working Women

Naila Kabeer writes, "Violence against women... is more usefully conceptualized in terms of 'relational vulnerabilities', forms embedded in highly asymmetrical social relations and the associated dependencies. It is thus endemic to women's experience of everyday life rather than the episodic shocks that feature in a great deal of the vulnerability literature."⁹

Sendhil Mullainathan writes, "The working world is unfair to many women, yet even when they succeed, they must confront another series of challenges. Their hard-won successes are taxed in ways that men's are not. The taxes I'm talking about aren't paid in dollars and cents or imposed by the government. They take the form of annoyance and misery and are levied by individuals, very often by loved ones. I call these impositions taxes because they take away some of what an individual earns, diminishing the joys of success."¹⁰

Recent studies have analysed the complex relationship between work and violence that women encounter once they make a choice to step outside the domestic space for employment. In this study, 'relational violence' inflicted against working women and the 'hidden tax' levied on them by intimate partners and families inside the domestic sphere - over and beyond the violence they encounter in public sites - has emerged as a dominant factor in women's experience of life and work. While women's workforce participation has been rightly associated with greater financial independence and agency, it also seemingly shares a correlation to increased domestic violence. In some studies, men as intimate partners have been shown to turn to violence to restate the status quo at home and over working women's lives "because emotional costs (for men) are elevated due to deviation from exercising the traditional controlling role."¹¹

As women step out for work, navigating public spaces and bringing back income, their identity and roles in the domestic sphere undergoes a shift. This shift is being studied as a trigger and upheaval in men's perception of their own role as the sole breadwinner of the household and in performing the role of 'protector' responsible for keeping track of women's movement outside the home. The loss of power and challenge to norms of male authority is contributing or leading to violence, where the method of violence gets strategically deployed for reasserting control over household resources and to dislodge women from their newfound enhanced bargaining power. This has been described as

⁹ Kabeer, N. Violence against Women as 'Relational' Vulnerability: Engendering the Sustainable Human Development Agenda (2014 UNDP Human Development Report Office)

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/02/business/women-hidden-taxes.html>

¹¹ Shohini Paul, Women's Labour Force Participation and Domestic Violence: Evidence from India (Journal of South Asian Development, June 2016)

“male backlash” variously. While this is overarchingly attributed to the threat to traditional masculinity, the more granular reasons also emphasised are male anxieties of economic uncertainty, sexual jealousy, fear of disintegration of the marital relationship and a resentment of the woman acquiring an individuality that is separate from their home lives.¹²

These factors acquire an additional layer when women seek and find non-traditional sources of employment. The non-gender normative nature of non-traditional livelihood, where women are employed as drivers, mechanics etc., reflects the changing status of women as well as a societal alteration that is willing to accept and even encourage breaks from rigidly defined gender labour roles. This arguably also provokes an imagination for men of a future where they will be increasingly expected to share in roles that women have traditionally performed, setting off a patriarchal backlash. Alongside domestic violence, the societal shift in acceptance of women in the public space performing tasks traditionally performed by men is also fraught with hostility, in the form of active harassment or passive discouragement, besides the infrastructure of cities not designed to suit the needs of women workers. Unlike an explosion of patriarchal backlash, some of these embedded malevolent barriers are steady limiters to women’s entry and progress at work, especially in non-traditional employment. The current study adds to these discourses based on experiences of the women interviewed.

¹² Erwin Bulte, Robert Lensink, Empowerment and intimate partner violence: Domestic abuse when household income is uncertain (2020)

Chapter 4: Major Findings

4.1 Importance of Women in work

India is amongst the few countries in the world that has a consistently declining female labour force participation, presently at 18%¹³. Thus, in India, majority of the women are deprived of their human right to access work. 90% of those who are working are in low paid, low skilled and even unpaid and unrecognized (like agricultural labour) jobs. Many economists as well as gender theorists have established women's participation in the labour force to be an important indicator of women's status in a society. Recognising women's work is often an essential part of recognising the contribution of women to the economy and society and is associated with greater autonomy and agency of women (Chandrashekhar & Ghosh, 2013).

On the other hand, gender-based violence (or the threat of it) has been used as a tool to subjugate women from ages. It is a tool of patriarchy to reinforce coercion on women and marginalized people all over the world. Women from marginalized communities such as religious minority or Bahujan communities, disabled women, or women from LGBTQA+ community face multiple marginalization as well as violence due to their gender identity and identities related to caste/religion/sexual choice and orientation. Violence, in its every forms of physical, emotional, sexual, economic and its manifestation to deprivation of opportunities and entitlements, denial to education and skill building, pressure of unpaid care work, early marriage, restriction in mobility and denial to workforce participation ensure women's situation and position lower than men. This structural denial of rights and entitlements increase women's vulnerability to physical, sexual, emotional, and economic violence. According to UN Women report (2010), "**Violence against women reduces productivity and drains public budgets**. Violence against women has enormous direct and indirect costs for survivors, employers, and the public sector in terms of health, police, legal and related expenditures as well as lost wages and productivity" In the same report it also says that in India, "a woman loses an average of at least 5 paid workdays for each incident of intimate partner violence". Fear of violence in public spaces is also used as a deterrent to restrict women's mobility that impacts their access to training, education, and jobs. While these aspects are visibly related there is need to understand the correlation of these multiple forms of violence with women's access to and ability to sustain their participation in the workforce.

Drawing from the experience of one of the respondent's, we understand that first instance of women's entry into work (any form of work which allows her to be outside home or have an income of her own) is an enabler to identify, if not take action, against violence. The respondent who at present works as a commercial driver in Delhi, shares that her first job, which she took up to make ends meet, was at yoga studio as a cleaner, and this is where through interaction with other women did, she understands that what was happening to her was not the norm, but violence.

"I was married at the age of 16. From the beginning itself my husband used to beat and abuse me. I used to think this is how it is, that it is my duty to put up with this. When I started going to the Yoga studio, I got a chance to come out of my house for the first time and meet people who were not my family. When I used to go with marks from beating on my face, hands etc. the women used to ask and tell me that is not normal or right, and that I can take action if I wanted to"

While the exposure through this job enabled her understanding gender-based violence and its different forms, it was only when she began her training as a professional driver and started work, she was able to act. The latter job ensured her dignified livelihood, financial stability, an understanding on gender, providing her an identity empowering her to take action.

¹³ SDG India Index 2019

“When I joined Azad to begin my training as driver, meeting other women, learning about gender, legal rights, violence opened an entirely new domain for me, enabling me to see myself as a person who has rights. Once I started work, the income, the identity, and stability from the job facilitated my gradual action against violence, which had not stopped for the past five-six years”.

In our interactions with survivors, all of whom are NTL practitioners working as drivers and other NTL practitioners - drivers and mechanic, financial independence came up as the foremost reason for and as benefit of taking up employment. The study establishes that entering work, more specifically NTL, generates economic resources for a woman, enhances their bargaining power, enables an identity and sense of pride among other innumerable impacts.

Financial Independence

Renu, 29 years old, is a domestic violence survivor. She was born into a conservative family where none of the women were allowed to work outside of home, and she was not educated beyond 2nd standard. She left her marriage when her husband’s family turned violent towards her. The violence had left her with a broken foot and body covered in bruises to the point the doctor denied her treatment, insisting it be made a Police case. With 3 children and no means to support them, she came back to live with her ailing father who soon passed away. She was faced with a point in her life when she had to borrow money even for doing the final rites of her father. Renu who has now been working with Sakha as a commercial driver for the last 6 years, is grateful for what the financial stability has brought to her life. As a result, she was eventually able to bring back 2 of her children – both daughters- from her husband’s family home and is now able to provide for them. Arguably, Renu’s financial independence has propelled her to make independent choices in her personal life as well, as she now lives with her two children and also has a partner who was an acquaintance.

“I take care of my children. I have enrolled them in a good school. I bought an LED TV, scooty, and even got my partner a mobile phone.”

Hina is a driver with Sakha for the last 1.5 years. She belongs to a family of 7, with two sisters, two brothers and parents. She and her elder sister heard of Azad when they used to study in the local NGO. Her sister joined first as a driver and eventually moved on to work in a bank. Currently, her father, elder sister and she are the earning members of the household.

“My mother is very ambitious for us. She wants us to be financially independent unlike her. She has always asked my father for money but she did not want us to depend on anyone.”

When Hina was 1 years old, her father asked her mother to leave the house because Hina was born a girl. They only came back 8 years to live with her father 8 years later when his extended family swindled him financially. The ache of abandonment and the resolve to avoid such vulnerability in the future is clear in Hina’s testimony. For her, financial independence is a primary way to achieve that.

“Financial independence even changes people’s outlook towards you. My father used to make me feel like I am good for nothing, but I made sure to prove him wrong. He has changed his attitude towards me.”

Today, Hina takes care of her mother’s LIC instalment payments, utility bills of the house and even her siblings’ education. She recently got her sister admitted to a private school after her father suggested the young girl drop her education. Her mother, Hina says, also feels more secure in the knowledge that she will be taken care of in case she is forced to leave the house again. Hina has become a decision-making member of her family. She also aspires to study law in the future.

With this financial independence also comes respect and a degree of freedom. Hina says her father no longer quizzes her about coming home late from work or the choices she makes.

“Elders cannot take the correct decisions always. Once children grow up, their opinions must be taken into consideration.”

Mahima, 28 who works with Sakha as a driver also views financial independence as a means for being an equal partner in the household.

“When we women want to be treated equal with men, then it is important that we step out and earn so we can contribute to the family expenditure,” she says. For many women like Mahima, the domestic work women perform at their homes, despite being substantial and strenuous, does not add up as equal contribution to the household. The act of stepping outside the home for employment and getting a salary or wage is seen as principle for being an equal to the man. With paid work comes discretionary powers on how to spend it too. “Financial independence ensures that we don’t have to ask others for money and meet our needs ourselves.”

Durga, who is 31 years old agrees. She lives with her husband and 11-year-old son. She has a particular fixation for buying clothes and trinkets. Her husband did not favour her in this, and would tell her to finish wearing what she has before buying any new clothes, or would keep remark that a single person does not need as many clothes. This attitude interfered with Durga’s ideas on how she wanted to spend on herself, and eventually took up work in order to not depend of her husband for her indulgences.

Mira, on the other hand has been able to take care of her husband and her own illness, and today runs her family as a result of being a financially independent woman.

Rebellion, Accomplishment and the Joys of Exploring

To gain financial stability, independence and discretionary powers over resources is almost always a hard-fought battle for women, and most have to make radical decisions in their lives in order to obtain it. But besides gaining financial independence, women speak of acquiring numerous other intangible emancipatory elements as a result of choosing to take up employment, such as pride and a sense of accomplishment. These emotions are enhanced with additional layers in the context of women taking up non-traditional livelihood, where the breaching or demolishing of patriarchal norms is even more apparent. While many have found their way to organisations training women for NTL at a time when their lives were in dire straits, it is also revealing how some of the women participants narrate their formative inclination or aspirations for going against the grain and doing something that sets them apart.

Lata [AGE] currently works as a mechanic. She says her desire to do something that would make her stand apart goes a long way back. “Women lawyer and police officers were my idols. I always wanted to be like them. Their uniforms fascinated me. I wanted to do the kind of work that no women had ever done before. When this mechanic job was offered to me, I wondered if I as a women could do it. However, slowly when many challenges at home and society cropped up, I took this job to prove myself.” Like Lata, Devi, Bhavya and Hina also speak of a need to stand apart from the crowd and having been drawn to non-traditional work perhaps as a result of this instinctive need. In the case of Hina, she did not even know how to ride a bicycle, however, the draw of doing something unconventional propelled her in the direction she eventually took.

An inherent rebellious streak also runs in common among most of the women interviewed. Devi, 36 says that she has always done what her parents have told her not to because they have consistently discouraged and demotivated her in her life. Hina too is driven by her need to rebel against her father who abandoned her as a child. She says she makes it a point to do what her father denies her. This approach of challenge and tenacity against intimate power structures spills into the way the women navigate the outside world as well. In Hina’s case, due to her father’s name being spelt wrong on her birth certificate, she experienced a delay in registering for a license. By the time she sorted her certificate paperwork, she was met with red tape in the police station which she did not

intend to indulge. Her father accompanied her a few times, but eventually she took charge. "The threw my papers away at the station and I was really disappointed. But when I stepped out, I saw that the MLA office was the adjacent building. I walked into the office, somehow managed to meet the MLA and took his help to get my work done. I then took the test and passed it. I was very happy that day." For all women interviewed, the choice to work and moreover work in NTL has ultimately been a show of rebellion and sheer gumption. And all regard that choice as supremely gainful for their sense of self.

Sanjana dropped out of school in 8th standard, but enrolled in distance learning to study for two more years. She was married off at the age of 18 to someone who moved gradually from forms of verbal abuse to eventually physical abuse. After she separated, she filed a case in order to get custody of her children. Today, she takes care of her children and her parents. Her father is a fruit seller who takes pride in telling his customers that his daughter works as a driver. Her children too are happy that their mother has a job. "Lagta hai jaise jahaan jeet liya. (I feel as though I have won a place in heaven)," says Sanjana.

Working helps clarify for many women any internalised misconceptions they carry and offers a different perspective to the world. "I used to consider that driving a car is too difficult and that only men can do it. That it isn't a woman's cup of tea. But now it seems that it was only a very convincing myth," says Bhavya, 18. After associating with Azad's Women on Wheels initiative, she now knows how to drive and can even change a stepney, she says proudly. "When I sat in the car for first time, it felt good. Although it took some time for me to learn but I am confident that I can drive as the way any men folk drive."

For Durga, learning to drive was a huge accomplishment as she had always dreamed of driving a car whenever she saw women drivers on the road. Once she learnt to drive, she took a car for a spin in the dusty roads of her village. "Everyone was astonished and told my elder sister who is married and lives in the village." Durga replies to any naysayers that if a woman passenger can sit in a car driven by a man, then the roles can very well be reversed.

The idea of women being able to explore the city on a vehicle that they drive for employment adds, at least partially, a certain romance and sense of adventure to their work. As the first generation of working class to lower middle class women with such an option for livelihood (something entirely implausible in their mother's generation), they revel in the significant joy that their work allows them.

Lakshmi who is 28 years old "enjoys driving. It makes me happy." She says she would like to drive her son to places she has seen only in photographs. The sense of mobility suddenly expands the world beyond the home, the colony and perhaps maybe even the city and country for women whose job is to be in a constant state of travel.

Asha, 33, who is the mother of a teenaged daughter and has been with Azad for the last 6 years. She says that stepping outside the home, in her case for a week's worth of training, was one of the most cherished experiences. "My mother and father never allowed me to work because they thought that girls should stay at home. After marriage my husband never took me out for such a long period. So, staying away from home for such a length of time had never happened before."

Srishti who is 36 also connects the exposure that comes with stepping out, seeing the world and interacting with it outside the walls of the home as a mechanism for women to gain perspective on their lives and crucially address the normalised violence that they routinely experience. It can be inferred from the testimonies of the women interviewed that speaking out and speaking up for themselves becomes a more concrete possibility when allyship and support materialises from outside the contexts of their families where they may be subjected to violence and abuse. Srishti was one of the few women who spoke of having a supportive ecosystem at home, where her

husband and mother-in-law encourage her to do the kind of work she chose and ignore the criticism that was coming from some members of the family. Most other women who participated in the study did not have such a support base. On the contrary, many were subjected to violence both before and after they chose to adopt employment, in this case a non-traditional livelihood.

“If one woman goes out and works, she inspires several other women. Hence, it is very important for women to work,” says Mahima. Sanjana agrees and also believes that with more women joining non-traditional livelihood, there will be a gradual shift in society’s perception about rigidly defined gender roles of work, and that the work she and her fellows are engaging in has a crucial role to play in transforming the discourse around women’s lives and work. “I feel like an aware woman with a distinct identity,” says Sanjana.

A source of livelihood has proven to be an enabling force in multiple forms in the lives of the women interviewed, which the study acknowledges and celebrates. However, empowerment is rarely a smooth and linear route and the next chapter delves into the nuts and bolts of violence that women encounter before, during and after making the choice of employment, that co-exists with the liberating aspects of being a working woman.

4.2 Challenges of Violence to Working Women in NTL

The United Nations defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” Based on analysis of data between 2000 to 2018 from across 161 countries, conducted by WHO, it was found that nearly 1 in 3 women, or 30% of women have been subject to Gender Based Violence (GBV), and most of this is Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). The same study found that the prevalence of physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by their intimate partners on women aged between 15-49 worldwide stands at a very concerning 27%.¹⁴

While IPV is a function of numerous factors at the household and community level, a substantial number of economic and sociological studies that have analysed the determinants for prevalence of IPV have “found a strong counter-intuitive positive correlation between domestic violence and women’s labour force participation rates. States (in India) where *more* women are in the labour force are states with higher rates of domestic violence.”¹⁵ This particular study is based on analysis of National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data.

However, there is an evolving assessment on this complex co-relation. Seema Vyas and Charlotte Watts in their paper draw up the various positions articulated by theorists. Resource theory argues that “men with few economic resources (earnings, social status, education attainment) may use violence as an alternative form of resource to control their partner... and to maintain dominance within the family.” This position also articulates that when there are existing differentials of status between genders within the household - for instance when the woman is earning while the man is unemployed, or the woman is earning a higher salary/wage than the man or is more educated than her husband - then the woman is at a higher risk of violence. This position has been critiqued for not considering different cultural contexts where men may not face the pressure to be the dominant decision maker in the family or be the primary breadwinner. Vyas and Watts also cite marital dependency theory that states a woman’s economic dependence on her partner exposes her to a

¹⁴ Violence against women Prevalence Estimates, 2018. Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women. WHO: Geneva, 2021

¹⁵ Shilpa Reddy & Reeve Vanneman, the Uneasy Relationship of Domestic Violence with Women’s Empowerment in India, University of Maryland, 2018

higher risk of IPV, which in turn finds support in studies by economists who point to greater agency and negotiating power within a relationship if a woman is economically self-sufficient, allowing her the choice to leave the partnership thereby reducing the risk of violence on her. And finally, they refer to the ecological model that points to the interplay of “individual, family and community factors that influences the likelihood of whether violence may occur within a household or not.” Finally, Vyas and Watts conclude in their paper that poverty reduction and economic development for families reduces risk of violence on women.¹⁶

For the current study, the ecological model found resonance with instances where disposition of male partners, families and the neighbourhood tended to mediate, alleviate or ignite the risk of violence on working women.

“The biggest challenge faced by women is at their respective homes and not outside,” says Lata. Many of the women participating in the study would agree.

After separating from her husband, Renu received a call from her husband informing that their elder daughter has been injured. When she rushed to her husband’s home in another city, she realised it was a lie. She narrates how his family assaulted her, gave electric shocks to her body and broke her foot. When the doctor at the hospital insisted it be made a police case, her husband panicked and abandoned her at the hospital along with their youngest daughter, taking the other two children with him.

The layers of betrayal and bodily harm inflicted on women by families and intimate partners sheds light on a frightening context that women navigate routinely; one replete with danger and devoid of love and tenderness. However, violence also moves through the lives of women in less perceptible forms than physical and sexual assault.

“First of all, people think that only hitting is violence. They are not aware of the various other sufferings,” says Asha. The women interviewed shared their definition of violence. For Hina, “Violence doesn’t only mean beating a woman. Not letting women work, harassment, paying them lesser than men for the same work, not letting young girls attend school etc. are also some examples of violence on women.” Mahima agrees, and adds that “someone actively controlling a woman’s life and choices, such as pressuring her to birth sons is also violence. This is what happened with me.” For Lata, violence includes any hindrance to women living as they wish, such as being able to go out.

The act of stepping out of the house still continues to be a contentious one for many women whose families wish them to be confined to their homes. Mary is a 23-year-old who was forced to drop out after 12th standard because her family feared that she will become wayward if she gains the freedom to travel outside her house by herself. Many families continue to believe that a woman’s life can be restricted to the four walls of her father’s home with an eventual transfer to the four walls of her husband’s family home. Mary heard about Samaan society at one of their meetings organised in the local Anganwadi. Inspired by what she saw, she broached the topic of training to be a mechanic with her family. Her father and brother became very angry that she even attended the meeting, was considering training for a job and to become a mechanic no less. She was beaten up. It took the intervention of the organisers of the meeting, neighbourhood women and local teachers that eventually her family was convinced to let her train. Now, Mary works in a garage run by an all-women mechanic crew and earns Rs. 8000 a month. Now her family has turned around and is supportive of her choice, especially her brother who gets his bike serviced from their garage, but also promotes their work among people he knows.

¹⁶ Seema Vyas and Charlotte Watts, How Does Economic Empowerment Affect Women’s Risk of Intimate Partner Violence in Low and Middle Income Countries? A Systematic Review of Published Evidence. (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK, 2009)

In Mary's case, the domestic violence that was triggered by her choice to work eventually subsided and transformed into a more supportive and empowering position. Many others are not so lucky.

"My husband was completely against me driving. He beat me at several occasions meeting me on the way in anguish. He beat me every time I tried to get my license made. You can see all these marks; they are a result of him beating me," says Mahima. Lakshmi's husband would not allow her to go to work alone, forcibly accompany her and cribbing all the way for her choices in life. He would also compel her to take leave from her work, perhaps anticipating that she will either quit or will be let off.

Bhavani hid from her family that she was taking driving lessons, fearing that they would restrict her from doing so. She was running her house financially and was in desperate need of money as her younger son was undergoing treatment. She had heard that she can earn a decent salary as a driver and decided to give it a shot. Eventually though, she had to reveal news of her training and intention to take up work as a driver. Her husband initially was supportive, she says, and even attended a few meetings. But once she landed a job, his disgruntlement began to surface gradually transforming into physical and mental abuse. Bhavani initially could not fathom why he was withdrawing from her and lashing out for no perceivable reason. The gaslighting with initial support but progressive resentment and abuse left Bhavani confused and worried, until she realised her husband was angry about the job she opted for. Her husband would needle her with suspicious questioning, demanding to know who she had spent the night with. He would accuse her of having affairs, use abusive language and on one night after work beat her up severely. Sexual jealousy became ever present in her interaction with him, accompanied by abuse.

"Once, I had to work overtime late in the night. Although my employer madam suggested I stay back because it was late, I chose to take the last train and return home. My husband was furious and wouldn't let me into the house. My employer called me at the time and heard my husband yelling me and understood what was going on. That night, I did not eat anything nor change my clothes. I also used to work in a house in the morning, and when I reached there the next day, I was feeling very weak. From that day onwards, the torture reached its peak."

Bell Hooks in her *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinities and Love* writes, "One of the truths that cannot be spoken is the daily violence enacted by men of all classes and races in our society – the violence of emotional abuse.... Emotional abuse is an ongoing process in which one individual systemically diminishes and destroys the inner self of another. The essential ideas, feelings, perception, and personality characteristics of the victim are constantly belittled."

For women in torturous circumstances such as Bhavani, the sustained emotional abuse takes a heavy toll, as her friend Durga narrates. "Bhavani is my friend and when she shares her story, I feel physically drained off. Few days back, she shared some incidents that had happened to her. I found myself becoming distracted and restless." The constant anxiety and uncertainty over withdrawn affection of loved ones and abuse as a response to aspirations leaves women to sort the wreckage of personal lives thrown in disarray. Many pay a terrible price of loneliness, incapacitation and broken dreams, until the situation gets too unbearable to endure.

After the night of severe torture, Bhavani confided in a few friends and the organisation that her employer was associated with. The matter was eventually taken to the local police station and her husband was arrested. Bhavani says that she could not stop thinking of her daughter who very young at the time and also was very fond of her father. She could not reconcile what her daughter would feel if her father is behind bars, and eventually requested the police to release him. "I knew everyone was angry with me for what I had done," she says. The pressure to process the situation from multiple points of view falls uniquely on women, who are conditioned to address even their own abuse and actions against it through the prism of other's perspective of it. Sharanya

Bhattacharya, author of *Desperately Seeking SRK*¹⁷ shares a revealing insight – that women are taught to earn in the currency of love. And since women have been deprived for long in trading their skills and talents in the larger economy of money, they tend to consider any ‘failure to earn’ love as a failure of their fundamental essence and purpose in life. The decisions women make regarding their personal and professional lives is thus considerably mediated by this anxiety over love. Even if it came at the cost of prolonging their experience of violence.

Bhavani is right now temporarily separated from her husband. She says that even though physical abuse stopped after her husband was released from the police station, the emotional torture continued. He would accuse her of intending to meet a lover when she dressed for work and threatened to kick her out of the house because he thought she was fat. The aberrated narratives of both men and women, as a means to cope with feelings of failure to perform rigidly expected gender roles within a fluid economic and cultural shift, leaves individuals reeling and emotionally immobilised. Despite these massive odds, many women muster the courage to step out of abusive relationships. “Coming out of home is a form of relief. Staying away from the violent situation at least for a while feels mentally better,” says Bhavani.

Being financially self-reliant is a huge step in being able to make decisions such as leaving an abusive relationship. Having a source of income enables this independence of thought and action. However, women who participated in the interviews indicate that the road to employment and financial independence is not as straightforward.

Zeba who works as a driver has an alcoholic and abusive husband. He demands money from her earnings since she started work. “If I refuse, he will stand there till I give the money. He used to hit me too.” He has threatened to push the children out of the house and in one instance tried to strangulate Zeba. Shraddha echoes this reticence to rejoice financial independence, who is the primary breadwinner in her family. “I have realized that even if I am earning, I have no financial freedom. I have a joint account with my husband for my earnings. My husband does not suffer from addictions and he provides me with everything I require. If I want a dupatta, he will buy it for me regardless of how expensive it is. He will get good food like mutton biryani for us. If I take a Rs. 30 nail polish, he will insist I buy the costlier one. He is generous in that way. But sometimes I feel like spending some amount on my own. I can’t though because all my spendings have to be done through him.”

Shraddha is not allowed to spend even a rupee as per her wish of her own money. She would like to send money to her mother, but feels awkward about asking her husband who questions her if she earns to provide for her maternal family. Once she withdrew Rs. 1500 from the bank account prompting her husband to try and hit her. He threatened that “if I even dare to take out that money, he will damage everything. Whatever may be the reason, I feel chocked.”

Male partners intimidate to seek control over household resources in the event of wives earning better than them or become sole breadwinners. This reveals the form of patriarchal control transmuting from controlling women against seeking employment to controlling their earnings once they join employment. The notion of ‘providing’ for the family, central to male identity, is cannily adjusted to changed circumstances by withholding women from performing the provider role even if the ‘providing’ is based upon their earnings. The attack on familial status quo is thus averted and co-opted, leaving women to once again feel powerless.

Access does not always correspond with control. However, making causal relationships to women’s workforce participation and their exposure to Intimate Partner Violence needs to be made cautiously, say studies such as those researched by Shohini Paul. While the study found that women who earn more than their spouses are relatively more vulnerable to physical and emotional IPV, and

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLBmONDBpCs>

that unemployed husbands of employed wives were more likely to be abusive than employed husbands, it still recommends restraint while making correlations between working women and their exposure to violence.

“The results do not support the optimistic view of labour force participation as a route to empower women and, in turn, decrease the prevalence of domestic violence... We conclude that participation in the labour force by a woman may not act as a shield against domestic violence in the backdrop of a cultural construct of a traditional and developing society such as India. Nevertheless, this does not mean that women cannot be empowered through employment. It is possible that gender norms may respond slowly to female employment. The long-term impact of female employment on domestic violence may differ from the detrimental effect we observe here.”¹⁸

In this study, over and above what has been elaborated in Chapter 1, the long-term empowering impact of employment can be clearly plotted. Many women interviewed spoke of the support systems they encountered in the course of employment as significant in helping them make better choices. They speak specifically about accessing counselling mechanisms and friends, that helped them re-assess their experiences of violence in a new light.

Mahima’s husband was against her working as a driver, but relented to accept her as a private driver than a commercial driver. Mahima though did not want to go for private driving despite many good offers. This was primarily because she did not want to forego her association with the organisation that trained and supported her through her journey. “Sakha had become a family and I didn’t want to lose them,” she says. Mahima ultimately stuck to her guns and is now separated from her abusive husband. She says that the counselling and training sessions she received helped her understand and become certain that what she was experiencing in her home at the hands of her partner was severe domestic violence, and that she could choose to walk away from it. Maya, 22, ran away from her marital home because of her abusive husband, but her parents weren’t supportive of her decision. Her father especially was pressuring her to go back to live with her in laws. During this time, she heard of Samaan and joined work. She was eventually able to file a case against her husband for inflicting domestic violence with the help of the organisation. Members from the organisation also spoke with and counselled her parents to support her. She eventually won the court case mandating her husband to pay her Rs. 3000 every month. From her work, she earns Rs. 9000 every month allowing her the possibility of an independent and safe life. Other women such as Mira felt safe once they could access a woman’s organisation and avail counselling. Mira’s husband was supportive, but she struggled with severe depression. The supportive and kindred environment in the organisation helped her come out of her situation, she says.

The need for counselling was emphasised categorically by the women interviewed. The organisations they joined for training and work expanded to provide them with a support that the women needed desperately, but had no means of seeking. “I think counselling is very important. A woman needs to believe that she doesn’t deserve to be ill-treated and that she can come out of it. She needs to be counselled and she needs someone whom she can trust. If I hadn’t been counselled, I probably would have been beaten to death or I would have committed suicide,” says Mahima. Devi also reiterates the need for an objective perspective that can help women think through their circumstances logically. She observes that many women who endure violence on a daily basis tend to be resigned to it as their fate. Talking to someone other than family, without the fear of judgement helps them speak their mind, confide their hurts and hopelessness and in turn find the strength to negotiate their situations on their own terms.

¹⁸ Shohini Paul, Women’s Labour Force Participation and Domestic Violence: Evidence from India (Journal of South Asian Development, June 2016)

Despite the expansion of their world as a result of their work, there were also some who felt that they would not want their daughters to pursue such employment. “There are so many kinds of customers, some of them look at you inappropriately,” says Renu.

Durga also emphasises the difficulties of raising children as a woman engaged in NTL. “I appointed a caregiver for Rs. 1500 a month to take care of my son but I felt he was not taken care of well. The police van would drop me home if I have night shifts and miss the last train. This would prompt my neighbours to comment that only bad women come home this late. This had a negative effect on my son and I eventually did not renew my contract and resigned.”

For women, especially from the working class, engaging in erratic work hours outside the home is never an easy call. Besides feeling unsafe and learning to navigate cities that are not designed with the women’s safety in mind, there is also apprehensions of community censure and fear of being mischaracterised.

Women engaged in non-traditional livelihood also encounter violence, hostility and doubt of a particular slant in their workspace. Lakshmi shares experiences of men trying to harass and molest in crowded places. If not outright aggression, then there is the force of scepticism directed at women professionals performing a traditionally male work.

The big market at Gwaltoli is a rough neighbourhood where Lata says she tends to feel uncomfortable. “Drugs are sold there and men try to misbehave,” she says. “As women mechanics going there to buy parts, we would encounter harassment or sexist remarks.” Lata says she has learned to ignore this over a period of time, although it used to affect initially. Now she says she and her fellow colleagues have learnt to ignore the behaviour, especially on the road while driving. At other times, they shout retort when faced with it in shops. Lata has a pragmatic approach to this aspect of her work, and insists that “women who are working will have to make their own decisions. No matter whatever work they do they should be able to plan and decide for their future,” she says ambiguously, regarding harassment during work.

Infrastructurally too, the city does not support women workers, such as lack of enough toilets for women in the city. Shraddha shares that there are far too few toilets, and when she passes one, she maybe driving a passenger who is not comfortable with her breaking the journey. There is also the particular problem of having male attendants outside female toilets, who sometimes are drunk and make her feel uncomfortable. “Also, I am scared to go the toilet because I am confused how to manage my money, purse, mobile and myself.” Zeba also points out the women do not want to go out for problems faced during menstruation. Sanitary pads and other toiletries are not available for women to easily access in the toilets that dot the city far apart. She once forgot to have a pad on her, and ended up having to complete her trips with a towel wrapped around her the whole time.

Attention to small details and intention to make cities friendly for working women would go very far in rectifying some of the dip in urban female workforce participation, besides cultivating a social culture that appreciates and rewards women’s choice to seek employment. It is clear in this study that despite barriers and challenges, work that brings financial independence and access to a community offering emotional kinship and bureaucratic expertise has had the power to transform the lives of women the study spoke with. It has enabled women to recognise toxic and abusive behaviour meted out to them and in many cases take concrete steps to move away from it. Hence, even if women’s workforce participation may have made them more vulnerable to violence, especially in the domestic sphere, it has eventually brought them to a point of reckoning in the direction of taking action against that violence. This is in keeping with the conclusions of other studies on the subject, that in the long run, women will be able to harness the independence and support structures gained as a result of work to fight against gender-based violence. Despite the manifold attacks on women workers, both in the domestic and public realm, the participants who

shares their stories and experiences for this study are testament to the evolving possibilities for women becoming a more daring work force in the future.

4.3 Masculinities and Working Women

“The crisis facing men is not the crisis of masculinity, it is the crisis of patriarchal masculinity. Until we make this distinction clear, men will continue to fear that any critique of patriarchy represents a threat.”

“The way we “turn boys into men” is through injury... We pull them away from their own expressiveness, from their feelings, from sensitivity to others. The very phrase “Be a man” means suck it up and keep going.”

- Bell Hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love*

Arun is 19 years old and recently cleared his 12th standard. He now works with Azad, and has taken part in the organisation’s Men for Gender Justice training programme. The MGJ programme was initiated by Azad in 2014 as a knowledge and capacity developing programme for young men between the ages of 14-20 in the same working-class communities as the Women on Wheels programme trainees. It aims to help young men to better understand gender, patriarchy and masculinities with a focus on gender-based violence and unpaid care work. In the course of Azad’s work over the years, it became clear that engaging young men is crucial for the process of empowering women, especially in their journey to access non-traditional livelihoods. Growing up in a neo-liberal India during the internet era and coming of age in the backdrop of seminal national conversations such as those triggered post the December 16, 2012 rape and murder of Jyoti Singh, young men like their female counterparts are grappling with questions around gender. And unlike for women, spaces that engage men on gender are fewer. These spaces grow even more faint for men from working class background, who too are structurally denied resources and opportunities with usually absolutely no avenue for emotional support against everyday inequalities and helplessness. This in turn contributes to male violence in relationships,

Programmes like MGJ are designed to address this lack. Its processes aim to progressively transform collective notions on femininity and masculinity, thereby creating support network of male allies for women trainees in their own communities. It also intends to create a space for men to introspect and articulate their own experience of disadvantages and harm within a patriarchal order. The current study spoke to young men like Arun in focus group discussions and individual interviews, to understand their perspective on gender-based violence.

In the FGD’s, a report on the rape of a woman in UP was discussed to understand the mind frame of men about violence against women. On being asked why the criminal act of rape was committed against a woman, majority of responses ranged from revenge against the woman’s family or the woman herself to alcohol and its influence on the rapist to even that the woman must have been very beautiful and ended up enticing the crime upon herself. These answers do not cause surprise because of their common and sad prevalence, especially among men. The notion of gender-based violence as situated within individual motivations and community dynamics has an uncanny normalising effect allowing rape to be discussed and understood in an obdurate manner. However, when speaking about the action that needs to be taken against rapists, the responses tended to swing to retributive language such as that the rapist should have been killed (presumably through extra judicial methods), or that he should be put on trial and hung. These opinions, that they have likely heard spoken around them, on Television and the internet, disallow young boys to grasp gender-based violence in its complexity or the role of social orders in insidiously sanctioning such crimes. What was also illuminating was their distrust in state machinery to address such crimes sincerely. An overriding opinion was that the police cannot be relied upon to render justice and that they were negligent in taking action against the accused men. One of the participants even felt the

police was involved in the crime. “In most cases police troubles the one who tries to stop the violence or help the victim,” said another. They also pinned the disparity in police action to social bias against the victim; that her education, class and caste did not spur the wheels of justice into urgent action. However, in one of the conversations, a suggestion was put forth based on appreciation for how police in countries such as Japan utilise technology to ensure safety of women in public. “In Japan, women are provided with a QR code. In case of any untoward incident, they can update the police about their location and details.” This reflects the lack of an alternative to ultimately trusting state machinery in ensuring safety despite misgivings, alongside an uncritical acceptance of technocratic solutions to social and political problems. It also indicates a belief that foreign, chiefly western societies, do not struggle with or have better mechanisms to deal with violence against women; a belief that also came up in one of the FGD’s with women participants, and one based on loose perceptions than facts.

The men who participated in the discussion, likely due to access to gender training, were able to broaden the definition of violence, including in it not just physical abuse, but also disparate treatment between male and female children, forcing women to do all the household and care work, not letting a woman study or work and execute her own free will, mistreating with her for not birthing sons etc. Arun feels women are restricted by the force of mental pressure foisted on them. “We may not be slapping her, but not letting her step out of the house is a form of mental violence. This will keep a person physically fit but mentally weak, and that is what has been the case with the treatment of women.” he says. He feels that this is the reason behind why women are not able to break the cycles of violence around them. The boys also spoke that women are not being able to identify the violence directed at them accurately, which is an echo of what some of the women participants in the study have said. “Many women do not even recognise that they are subjected to violence. It is very important to create awareness among them so they know they are subjected to violence and can raise their voice against it,” said one of the boys in the discussion. “They should be counselled about their rights and the importance of education and financial independence,” says another. While yet another boy felt that women do not take action against violence because it is perpetrated by their families, and there is an inherent conditioning to not want family matters to be made public. Some of the young men who participated in the discussion have also witnessed violence in their homes, as one boy revealed that his father beats his mother and him under the influence of alcohol.

In these conversations, in the absence of an understanding of the structural reasons behind violence, seeking remedy against the violence was often, perhaps unknowingly, cast as solely the responsibility of women. That the women need to empower themselves and rid themselves of the violence meted to them; the women need to learn to identify violence, address and take action against it. While in itself there is value to these suggestions, it also betrays a surrender to the notion that men as perpetrators of violence cannot be resolved other than if women learn to better protect themselves. Within this perspective men tend to be invisible in the scheme of solutions. This is again likely the result of a lack of any meaningful intersectional conversation on men’s role not just as perpetrators, but as allies against and even victims of the patriarchal order. Without the bedrock of such analysis or a wide and deep rethink of gender, the ideas and perspectives around men continues to be stuck in an obsolete limbo. Another aspect of the omission in the conversations or the vague notion of men’s role in the fight for gender justice could also indicate the inadvertent effect of years of feminist discourse and movements that has drawn up the picture of militant and empowered women, who take on the system to claim justice and possess the ability as a collective to transform it. The evolution of gender norms in the country is principally owing to these feminist actions and women have time and again fought together to push against the status quo. However, this places inordinate pressure on women, stifling space for their vulnerabilities and tiredness, and allows for an imagination of reform where the burden of fighting against violence falls disparately on

women. The fight for justice could be accelerated manifold if men could better define their role in the struggle, and this requires a broader conversation in society and social theory.

In the discussions, while on the one hand participants look to women to empower and repel the violence against them with men as passive allies, on the other hand, paradoxically, they also hold the opposite view where men take charge and become the agents for delivering women from violence. When participants were probed on how they could help to stop the violence, most of the young men's imagination defaulted to the hero instinct, rendering themselves and men at large in the mould of the protector. The notion of the male protector is embedded into the traditional family DNA which in turn feeds into the violence against women, especially in the form of restricting women's movement and limiting their choices. "Once, we were coming back from school and there were a few girls with us, who were being checked out by some men. We ensured to stay with the girls so that the guys do not trouble them." Such an example could prove to be either an act of camaraderie or a gratuitous expression of moral policing.

Arun narrates an incident that occurred right after he joined Azad. "A man in my colony used to get drunk and beat his wife. We didn't have much knowledge at that time but we were taught in Azaad to stop violence whenever we encountered it. So, 5 to 6 of us boys gathered and demanded for the man to stop beating his wife. He replied that he was drinking with his own money and that she was his wife to do as he pleases. We tried to make him understand but he didn't. In a boyish way, we threatened to shoot him. We used to work out and could have easily taken him down, and this really scared him." While the man stopped beating his wife after this incidence, and their charade worked, Arun does not think he would not react in the same manner if another similar incidence comes to his notice. He acknowledges his own vulnerability and fear while addressing such violence and says that in the future he would advise people on women's rights and if the violence persists, contact the police. It is unclear if Arun would in fact go to the police because of the widespread distrust and fear of the police, especially among working class communities. However, what was illuminating about the story was the candid admission of fear and uncertainty while performing the role of the protector. This punctures a little the illusion of the protector and the one in need of protection as distinct entities, thus making space for a more interdependent imagination of safety than a top down, hierarchical version between men and women.

Manoj, who works with the MGJ programme in Azad suggests a middle ground that acknowledges the privileges men and boys enjoy on the one hand (that should be directed to make communities and families more egalitarian) as well as keep in check any assumptions about men's invulnerability as a result of their privilege. When, "families object to girls pursuing their studies, boys must stand up for them and encourage the girls to do whatever they want to do," he says, as an example of allyship.

One of the participants said that "Men should lead an example. When we do something good, we influence 10 people around us to do good too. Hence, if I change my outlook towards women, 10 more people around me could be influenced to change their outlook towards women."

In the interviews with women, the various influences on men as well as the 'shame' they experience when women in their families become independent decision makers becomes evident, revealing an inherent anxiety around drawing one's masculine identity in relation to the control he can exert on the women close to him.

When Durga decided to take up driving, she had to face the low-grade disapproval of her husband and family and the outright ridicule of her neighbours. Her husband, she says, never opposed her decision. "He never said 'no' to my face, but when I joined training, he asked if it was so essential for me to work? Can't I feed you?" Durga says her husband's friends often teased him about her choice of work that distressed him a lot. Her neighbors too "could not digest the concept of a woman driver. They asked me if I will take male passengers as customers." While Durga was able to

demolish these oppositions with her certitude in what she wanted to do with her life, her husband's journey appears to be one of isolation and confusion.

Lata too faced opposition from family, husband and neighbours. Her husband refused to let her train at first, and once he relented, he refused to give his consent for her to work as a mechanic. Women from the neighbourhood came to convince her against her decision, ridiculing her for even considering such choices. They suggested she should instead take up work in a salon or as a tailor. But once Lata became established in her work and her photograph and interview was published in a local magazine, those who opposed her changed their opinions. Many of her husband's friends now wanted their own wives to train, and her husband would get his vehicle serviced from her mechanic shop.

The pressure of performing masculinity deprives most men, even if they were not inherently regressive, the free will to align to ideas they wish. Despite their broader privileges in comparison to women, men too are bound by strict rules for conducting their relationships in society. This social code, kept in place collectively by communities, neighbourhoods and families, predetermines the course of men's lives in distinct but also similar ways to women. And the social censure of friends, colleagues and neighbours to a great degree characterises and controls how men can express solidarity and support with women's choices. When Lata was acknowledged for her achievements by the government, it percolated to an appreciation in her community and eventually within her family and to her husband. Unlike women who break conventions despite social censure for their own empowerment, men appear to be struggling with the existential choice of breaking conventions and inviting censure for the empowerment of the women who are close to them.

More research, discourse and work are needed to better understand the nature and shape of male allyship. Boys like Arun who participated in discussions have undergone gender training and are familiar with ideas and perspectives that most young men their age do not have access to. And yet, most of their observations perceived women as victims of violence and men as perpetrators. A broader conversation on men and masculinities, that could help men and boys introspect and reconstruct their identities as men, thus making room for a telling of their experiences that doesn't neatly fit into the mould of perpetrator or silent bystander has emerged as crucial for addressing gender inequity. Currently, save for small initiatives and exceptions, the conversation around men and their experiences tends to be restricted to the ill-considered and conceptually confused Men's Rights Protests¹⁹. Few avenues exist to understand the historical social construction of masculinities and maleness in India that exists in the intersection of post-colonial development, caste and class. As a consequence, most conversations and initiatives around gender are struggling to draw a more complex and truer to lived experience discourse around gender relations in families and communities. However, even nascent efforts to speak to men on gender yields results, as can be seen in the discussions. As a result of training, many of the boys spoke about changes in their demeanour and attitude towards women. Many have taken to helping with chores in their households, despite some of them being bullied or teased for their work by family members or friends. When asked if this bothered them, one of the boys says, "It does irritate me because I am also a part of the family. It does not make a difference if I am cooking or my sister is cooking. I am contributing to my own house and it should not bother anyone." Another boy added that "Some women do a lot of household work apart from their job. It causes them a lot of stress and makes them tired. I think other members of the family should help them." The sense of ownership of household work if cultivated from a young age in boys can bring forth fundamental shifts in the dynamic of the traditional Indian household, reflexively opening doors for women to seek their share of the work outside the home.

¹⁹ <https://feminisminindia.com/2019/09/13/mens-rights-activism-needs-stop-demanding-space-feminist-activism/>

Speaking of transformations, one male participant in the FGD says that he did not consider women to be equal to men before coming to Azad. Another said that being exposed to gender training had taught him to listen carefully to what people are saying. “Earlier, I used to react aggressively to even the smallest of things. Now I am more patient.”

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusion

Complicating and more broadly understanding the threat of violence that women faced when they joined the workforce is one of the major findings of this study. Any popular notion that violence and its threats reduced when women gained financial independence as a result of employment was left grappling with more questions than certitudes. The findings also discredit any beliefs that once employed, the major source of violence faced by women occurs in the public realm – in factories and offices, on roads and markets. While women participants in this study also narrated instances of violence encountered in the public while navigating for work, they emphasised the violence they faced at home and within intimate relationships as taking a decidedly heavier toll on their wellbeing. This opened up the avenue for investigating the shape shifting nature of violence, especially emotional violence inflicted by family in the form of curtailments and resentments directed at women.

The other major finding was discerned in the role of community and neighbours in assuaging anxieties of patriarchal families and men regarding choices made by the women in such families. It was illustrative to note that some families and men were willing to course correct when their community assured them that they will not be socially penalised if women in their families deviated from patriarchal scripts such as seeking unconventional employment. In fact, on gaining such assurances, some men turned from being violent and belligerent to actively supportive of the choices of the women. This shines a light on the fragile nature of patriarchal performance and toxic masculinities that is motivated by a competition to appear as champions of cultural norms and driven by a fear of social ostracising. When the community and neighbours were willing to advocate and encourage even the choice of women to work as mechanics and drivers, many families hitherto opposed were willing to shift their stance to fit the new standard. It is likely that some of these families and men were already fence sitters and likely more malleable and open to reason. Nonetheless, the finding underlines the need for community and neighbourhood outreach on gender and violence, to address and convert the context that silently sanctions violence against women.

The lack of meaningful redressal mechanisms for addressing violence against women is the other finding that was reiterated by both women participants as well as men. Lodging a complaint in a police station, especially in the case of Intimate Partner Violence, was seen as the last recourse, to be avoided as much as possible, even if it meant tolerating abusive and violent behaviour without any external intervention to stop it. One of the participants spoke of One Stop Sakhi Centres for assisting women, but its effectiveness and reach among working class women is still nascent when compared to the magnitude of the problem of Gender based violence faced by women. While state mechanisms for redressal are faulty at best, women also struggle with the lack of support in privately owned workplaces. Every organisation by law is mandated to institute a sexual harassment committee following the Vishaka Guidelines and later the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. These lay down the responsibilities of the employer in forming the internal complaints committee (ICC) and the rules and process to be complied in the instance of a complaint of sexual harassment. Yet, a 2015 study by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and EY found 36% of Indian companies and 25% of multinational corporations in India were not compliant with the Act. Since latest figures are not available, it is likely that the compliance figures have improved marginally. However, this is rarely encouraging considering regular reports of instances where management has blatantly disregarded their role as impartial arbitrators, and failed to provide women with a workplace environment driven by equality and safety. Such institutional and structural apathy forces women to lose faith in the possibility of redressal in the event of complaint, fear retaliation and social stigma, and augur self-doubt.

This absence of mechanisms of support, women emphasised the need for more informal community support and counselling processes. The counselling they received in organisations where they trained as mechanics and drivers helped them identify their experiences and gain agency in the community of other women who were facing similar circumstances in life. It also provided them with a space to make friends, whom they could rely on for camaraderie, advice and assistance. This feeling of collective support has been mentioned by most participants as the most significant sustenance and infrastructure to fight gender-based violence against women.

In specific recommendations, the women suggested the following –

- **Poster and hoarding campaigns** to make women aware about what encompasses the term violence. To make it mandatory for organisations and companies to offer information regarding the various forms of violence in easy to comprehend language so that women can better identify the experiences they undergo.
- **Community workshops** that are held once a month regarding violence addressing communities and neighbourhoods. They should also be made aware of the mechanisms for redressal that exist and the punitive action liable in case of violence against women.
- **Women reaching out and talking openly about unhappiness and troubles within families should be encouraged** “A woman should think who is she comfortable talking to in her locality, be it her friend or any of her family member. Women often tend to keep experiences and the sorrow of violence inside them and are unable to express. Women need to find confidantes or counsellors who will be able to assist them,” said one of the participants. This as a first step is more palatable for most women than stepping into the police station to register complaint.
- **To make women aware of the processes of complaint in a police station** Women fear that if they were to lodge a complaint in the police station, their husband will be put behind bars and they won't be able to face their family members. But one of the participants, affiliated with the Female Leadership programme with experience in accompanying women to the police informed that the police don't immediately arrest the husband. They generally listen to both parties, try to counsel them and allot a certain time period for improvement of behaviour. She felt Mahila Pnachayats should be involved in spreading awareness among women about how women can use complaining to the police station as a warning or deterrent against relational violence.
- **Better counselling facilities** Access to safe spaces with trusted persons and counselling facilities was mentioned numerous times as critical in ensuring the well being of women and in saving lives.

Further recommendations from the study

- **Community and neighbourhood support building** Stigma and apprehensions regarding NTL work for women significantly reduced when the work was recommended by a neighbour or someone within the family. For working mothers, the support of family and neighbours is especially invaluable since they can provide informal networks for childcare, and allow women to work erratic shifts as their job may require. Cultivating such an environment of sustenance through awareness programmes for communities as a whole will go a long way in ensuring that women's aspirations for economic and emotional independence will receive a fair chance.
- **Popularising gender training for young men and boys** Helping men learn their part in ensuring gender justice needs to become a more widespread and popular endeavour besides working with survivors, victims and women in general. Substantive and creative work needs to be initiated in engaging men regarding their place within the patriarchal matrix, their considerable privileges and significant vulnerabilities, in the long-term interest of combatting gender-based violence.

- **Awareness building on Sakhi Centres and Women's Helpline Numbers** One Stop Centres Scheme, called Sakhi centres, that began on 1st April 2015 is aimed at integrating support and assistance for women affected by violence, offering medical, legal, psychological and counselling for emergency and non-emergency needs. Spreading awareness in communities about Sakhi centres and helplines would help reach support to women who are in need.

This report aimed to understand the nature of violence that women encounter at home and in public spaces, and how it impacts their choice to work and attain independence. The study also hoped to learn mechanisms that can help women make free choices regarding work, without the fear of violence.

Within the scope of the study, the relationship between work and violence emerged as complex in the multiple ways women are penalised for desiring a life of financial and emotional independence. As mentioned in the report, making causal relationships to women's workforce participation and their exposure to intimate partner violence needs more investigation, but the testimonies of participants share evidence on how violence in the private sphere mutates and readjusts to changes in household relationship dynamics when women step out of homes for work. In such instances, the patriarchal impulses within family, neighbourhood and community kick in to restore a status quo which necessitates the woman's acquiescing and subservient position.

This will likely change if more women join the labour force and especially non-traditional work, further normalising the actuality of women working in the public sphere, particularly women performing traditionally male dominated work. However, given current indications, the relationship between women's economic and social empowerment through work does not necessarily suggest a negative relationship to relational violence within the home. As Vyas and Watts note in their study, the context of disparate socioeconomic factors of families and communities, and their association in triggering violence against women need to be understood further. Hence, a structural overhaul of the economic system based on equality and justice for both men and women, leading to poverty reduction and alleviation for families as a whole is necessary way forward to combat violence against women. Without this, policies directed singularly at women's empowerment, without a lateral approach to working with men and communities alongside, may not yield results in the long run.