THE LIVES OF WOMEN IN ASSEMBLY LINES.

Report on the violations of C - 190 Convention on Violence and Harassment [2019] of the International Labor Organization FTZs in Gampaha District

DABINDU COLLECTIVE

2023

Acknowledgement

Dabindu Collective is a non-profit organization which has stood as a beacon of hope since its establishment in 1984. Over the course of 39 years, Dabindu has worked actively and tirelessly to mobilize and collectivize women workers; empower workers with knowledge about human rights, women's rights and labor rights; and strengthen women workers' leadership in the Free Trade Zones of Katunayake, Biyagama and other industrial areas. The process of drafting this report has allowed Dabindu Collective to reflect current violations of the C-190 with particular attention to gender-based violence in and outside the workplace and the impacts of this violence on women working in the FTZs. This report serves as the reflection of the situation of women workers in the garment sector through this research to help the policy makers to use the measures in various fields to improve the resources and mechanisms of the women workers.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to Ms. Vraie Cally Balthazaar and Ms. Madhulika Gunawardena, who authored this report with unwavering enthusiasm, contributing to the successful completion of this task. We extend our sincerest gratitude to The USAID MSI - Increased Demand and Engagement for Accountability for their financial support, which has been instrumental in our endeavors. We would also like to express our special thanks to Mr. Gowthaman Balachandran and Mr. Shanka Dharmapala, and Ms. Rashomi Silva for their unwavering guidance and support, from conceptualization to fruition. Executive Director Ms. Chamila Thushari and Project Manager Ms. Jayani Fernando have lent their expertise and professional competence, playing a vital role in the accomplishment of this project. Project Officer Ms. Madhumali Sirawardana deserves special recognition for her steadfast support and coordination throughout the report's development. We thank all other supporting personnel who worked diligently to ensure the efficient execution of this project.

With deep appreciation and gratitude,
Dabindu Collective

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Introduction

Women working in Free Trade Zones continue to face violence and harassment in and outside the workplace without adequate recourse and redressal mechanisms. In the last two years, in particular, the economic crisis heightened the burden on women's labour both at work and home.
With escalating reports of violence and harassment, Dabindu identifies the urgency of ratifying C190 - Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) that obligates the state to assure a 'safe and violent free world of work' for workers of all genders.

Over the years Dabindu has attempted to eliminate gender-based violence among women working in the FTZ by deploying many projects and initiatives that led to creating dialogue among government stakeholders including public health and safety-related officials. Dabindu understands the importance of documenting gender-based violence and issues reported within and outside the factory level and presenting evidence for the discussions with stakeholders.

This report presents the current violations of the C-190 with particular attention to gender-based violence in and outside the workplace and the impacts of this violence on women working in the FTZs in the Gampaha District and covers the Biyagama and Katunayake Zones. The evidence presented is indicative of the low protection and support that women workers receive and the problems this creates. Furthermore, this report provides considerations on addressing issues of violence and harassment in the world of work.

We believe the availability of this evidence-based briefing report on C-190 violations will help strengthen the CSO collective advocacy in the Gampaha district as it will be presented at stakeholder meetings, specifically at the advocacy planning workshops meetings of the CSO collective in Katunayake.

Background

The research took place during the time of the 'Aragalaya' (the Struggle) in 2022. Long years of political mismanagement and leadership led to a collapse in the economy and was visibly affecting citizens by the latter part of 2021. With shortages of essential services such as gas and fuel affecting people's mobility and work, lengthy power cuts, some as long as 15 hours, left the country in disarray. By February 2022, many people across the island, particularly in Colombo, began to gather in small pockets, to show their displeasure against the government and the President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa. A people's revolt began in March 2022 and was amplified in April as citizens began an Occupy protest, bringing millions of people to Galle Face in Colombo, for nearly 4 months.

These socio-economic changes heavily impacted the industry, including factories based in the FTZs. Given the ongoing global economic downturn, the Joint Apparel Association Forum (JAAF) claimed that there was a 15-20% drop in Apparel industry orders during the 4th quarter of 2022 and that the decline in economic activity would continue through the second half of 2023 (Dias, 2022). As a result, workers experienced shorter working hours and job cuts.

The Government of Sri Lanka defaulted on its debt obligations in April 2022. The nation's foreign exchange reserves almost came to depletion, and it limited the nation's ability to buy imports thus raising domestic costs for goods. The Sri Lankan Rupee depreciated against the U.S. Dollar from LKR 209 in March 2022, to LKR 364.76 in June. The Year-on-Year National inflation in January 2022 stood at 16.8 per cent, and it was recorded at 53.2 per cent in January 2023 (NCPI). The people continue to face crippling food and non-food inflation, the rising cost of living, food insecurity, and heightened unemployment, amidst the harsh government's tax and tariff hikes and the plunging social safety nets.

By September the International Monetary Fund and the Sri Lankan authorities reached a staff-level agreement to support Sri Lanka's economic policies with a 48-month arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) of about US$2.9 billion. Increasing women's labour force

participation was among the reforms proposed for economic and financial recovery. Women's participation in FTZ has been prominent for years and their issues are longstanding, Thus, it is crucial to initially address these prevalent issues women face while working in the FTZ.

Methodology

This report collates qualitative evidence from focus group discussions. This comprised of

1. Focus group discussion with Public Health Midwives (PHM)
2. 4 focus group discussions with **62** workers from Katunayake and Biyagama (15 per group).

The women workers groups comprised both permanent employees of companies based in FTZs as well as daily wage "manpower" workers. The workers were connected to Dabindu Collective, through the many programs that the Collective organises, including C190 awareness programmes.

The meetings with the workers were held in safe spaces in which the women were able to speak about their experiences. Care was taken to explain the objective of the research and how data and analysis were to be used. The privacy and confidentiality of participants were assured. Consent was taken from the participants to record the discussions. The names of participants have been anonymised to maintain privacy and to help avoid conflict at their workplaces. Before and after the discussion, we reiterated the importance of maintaining confidentiality within the group, of the stories shared, as these lived experiences were sensitive information. The employees were both Sinhala and Tamil speaking and responded in a language of their choice to the questions asked (translations were provided when necessary).

The health sector FGDs included 23 Public Health Midwives (hereafter referred to as PHMs), including two Public Health Nurses and 5 Medical Health Officers (doctors in charge) from the Katunayake Medical Office of Health. Although the initial discussion was supposed to take place with only the PHMs, having the 5 male medical health officers skewed the dynamic of the space and limited meaningful discussion as many of the questions asked were answered predominantly

by the doctors themselves or were met with silence by the PHMs. Given the vast knowledge of the PHMs, we can only assume that their discomfort in speaking with us frankly about a topic they know well, was linked directly to their seniors being present. Although some interaction did take place, the conversation could have been more nuanced and informative.

The FDGs were approximately one and a half hours long (sometimes extending to two hours), and included questions on, family, care work, support mechanisms (within and outside the workplace), commute to work, working conditions and facilities, experiences of violence and harassment, mechanisms of redressal, perceptions of violence, knowledge of laws and support, the impact of the economic crisis (on work and home) and recommendations on how to create better and safer spaces.

Findings and Analysis

The C-190 employs a broad approach to violence and harassment in the world of work, thus applying to violence and harassment in the course of work, that is linked with or arises out of work. It reiterates that such violence can be committed in the workplace, in places where the worker is paid, takes a rest break or a meal, or uses sanitary, washing and changing facilities, and even when commuting to and from work. (Article 3).

The issues identified through the FDGs will be analysed in seven parts; perceptions of violence and harassment, intersectional violence, economic violence, working conditions, the 2022 crisis and its impact on the lives of women, work-life negotiations and mechanism of reporting redress and support.

Perceptions of violence and harassment

"Athapatha gaana ewa, balen weda ganna ewa, raa 10 wenakan thiyaganna ewa"

As per the C-190 convention, the term "violence and harassment" in the world of work refers to a range of unacceptable behaviour and practices or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aims at, results in, or is likely to result in physical, physiological, sexual, or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment (ILO, 2019).

However, the systemic nature of violence and harassment against women has resulted in social apathy, wherein women are sometimes unable to identify violence and harassment. Many of the respondents understood violence and harassment as something inflicted physically. Some spoke of verbal harassment. Very few respondents were able to talk about economic violence and structural violence. However, as the conversations expanded, the respondents were able to share some of their personal experiences, although not being able to directly connect and identify their experiences as examples of violence and/ or harassment. The respondents also spoke of the triple load – their labour and negotiations in their workplace, home and society and how this ties in with the violence they endure.

The discussion with Health sector professionals highlighted critical perceptions on this subject. A doctor in charge of the BOI health stated that women do not share their problems in the open, repeatedly using the term "*windagannawa"*, insinuating that women internalise the violence through this notion of "suffering."

As the Preamble of the Convention states, addressing the underlying causes and risk factors of the gender-based violence and harassment that working women face, requires recognition of gender stereotypes, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and unequal gender-based power relations.

In the discussions with the PHMs, as per their understanding, the root causes of violence against women in the zone were identified as economic burdens that women endure, inadequate levels of education, early marriage and childbearing, and male drug addiction. According to the PHMs' estimation, "economic issues are the major reason for the problems that women face". These circumstances have pushed women to work night shifts and 12-hour shifts, to meet non-negotiable large targets. Multiple PHMs stated that on their visits they see husbands/men who remain without work and are dependent on women's income to purchase drugs. Health sector workers stated that women's work outside the household has "long-term effects on the family", especially in cases where both parents worked day and night.

Intersectional violence

"They behave as if they are above us, and we feel like we are being stood on" - Manpower worker on Permanent workers in the same factory

The violence and harassment women face is not homogenous and women of different backgrounds face different degrees and forms of violence. Such factors that emerged were that ethnicity, language, age and most importantly, type of employment and contractual status (Article 2(1)).

During the research, it was evident that there were differences in the work and the lives of women working as daily wage workers and those permanently employed. Man-power workers are daily wage labourers that factories employ to meet their daily targets flexibly. Man-power workers often had many more complaints about how they were treated within their workplaces. This comparison

was more visible in places that employed both manpower and permanent workers in the same factories, as benefits, perks and overall well-being of permanent workers were met differently to those who were manpower workers. However, respondents who worked in factories that only employed man-power workers also complained of how little they were cared for,

"We have no support. We go to work. They make us work. And there's nothing else beyond that" - Manpower worker

"They won't even give us a panadol if we're sick" - Manpower worker

"Permanent workers receive pads at a concession. Manpower workers have nothing" Manpower worker

Man-power workers were also concerned about their job security during the pandemic lockdown with many of them not being called to work, leaving them high and dry. Many workers claimed their family and children as the reason for picking daily wage over permanent status, stating they prefer the "freedom" they have with picking their days of work. Ironically, they worked longer hours, and more days than many of the permanent workers, to make up for the lesser pay.

Permanent employees among the respondents also highlighted their experiences of discrimination. In a factory in Biyagama, respondents were told to be prepared to resign. The factory, which had a contract near expiration with a larger company, asked permanent employees who had worked for less than 2 years to be ready to move out. However, this discussion was only verbal with no official letter to the workers, leaving them in a precarious situation and no assurance of severance or support.

Incidents of discrimination based on ethnicity and language also emerged in the conversations, in which the workers acknowledged that Tamil-speaking workers were sidelined, bullied and harassed more.

Economic violence

"*We increased your salary… now you need to work harder"* - Manager to workers whose salary was increased due to inflation

Wages are highly contentious issues for those working in the industry. The Department of Census and Statistics recorded the official poverty line for the Gampaha district at Rs. 14,783 in December 2022. However as the WFP reported, in August 2022, average food expenditure alone was identified as RS. 41,661.96 (Based on the August NCPI food inflation rate) (WFP, 2022). Moreover, the living cost needed for a reasonably healthy life; which includes food, gas, water and electricity, kerosene, transport, education, rent, communication, and non-food essentials, for a family of four was Rs. 53,661 in April 2022 (Frontier Research, 2022). Wages and incentives must therefore be looked at within this context.

Given the fact that many factories also downsized, decreasing the number of workers (both manpower and permanent), the targets of those in the factories increased considerably. However, despite the increase in workload, wages did not increase. Some permanent cadres felt that they were given false promises but had little room to negotiate due to the lack of support in the factories.

Manpower workers receive little to no incentives. With a maximum daily pay of Rs. 1,500 (as of August 2022) many workers made much less due to the crisis. Some as low as Rs. 300 on days with no electricity in the factories. In one factory, manpower workers were not paid for two weeks and were only paid up when the workers threatened to make a complaint to the police.
Monthly wages for manpower workers averaged Rs. 30,000.

Permanent workers received approximately Rs.30,000-45,000 with overtime payments. However, with less overtime, many workers were earning much less. They also felt that the targets they were asked to meet were unreasonable, and often structured that way so that they would not receive any additional incentives. In a factory in Biyagama, workers are not given any incentives if they make more than 10 mistakes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, an employee of a prominent Apparel company who contracted COVID received paid leave and an incentive for 3 months. Employees from another prominent industry received a pack of food worth Rs 10,000. This same company also negotiated with the workers, cancelling the annual party and trip in exchange for a pack of rations.

During the crisis, a handful of permanent workers received increased "livelihood expenses" ranging from Rs.2,500 to Rs.7,500. However, for most, these were not permanent increases but rather temporary ones, to deal with the rising cost of living. Respondents also said they felt pressured that despite their salaries being increased due to inflation and the rising cost of living, the factories expected them to "work harder"-- something they felt they were already doing.

Working conditions

"Tea time for toilet breaks"

Some of the manpower workers in Biyagama worked double shifts with an accumulated break time of 2.5 hrs in 24 hours. Many of them do this, to pay less for transport, allowing them a full day of rest (despite not having rest at home). Manpower workers complained of sleep deprivation, candidly sharing information on how to best stay awake –washing their faces, applying *Siddhalepa* on the eyes to stay awake, and using their tea break to sleep.

Respondents complained that this was particularly hard when they were menstruating as they would experience difficulty at night. Some respondents complained that they were not permitted regular bathroom breaks as supervisors would shout at them reminding them that "tea time was for toilet breaks." In one factory, respondents have to ask HR's permission to go to their bags to get their own sanitary napkins. They have to ask security personnel for a token for their bags—which means the guards would know who was menstruating.

Too few toilets in some factories mean that women are unable to use the toilets during break time as the queues are long. One factory hands out to workers what they refer to as a "*choo* token" (translating to a urine token). Each sewing line has one token, hence only one person is permitted to leave and use it.

"In the last hour of work, the supervisor does not hand out the token as work is almost over"

The supervisor then checks if workers have a phone in hand and will body search for phones before they hand over the token.

Respondents complained of unclean washrooms and no sick room. If they are ill, they have to leave immediately as there is no place to rest. However, as one respondent pointed out, *"no matter what illness, we have to come to work"*. Workers complained that they often work when sick as their incentives are cut. In some cases, the factory will ask for a letter from a doctor—since the women are unable to rest and stand in line for the letter from a doctor in a public hospital, they are forced to pay a doctor who works in private practice for their medical note.

Respondents in Biyagama complained that they have no leave – many work on Sundays and also on public holidays to make ends meet.

In Katunayake, respondents from one factory complained that the lunch break is not long enough - once they turn their machines off and stand in line for food, they have no time to consume their meal, often leading them to not eat properly, miss their meals, or get verbally harassed for not being back in the assembly line on time.

One respondent complained that because she gave birth and she had to leave early to nurse her child (permitted milk hour), she was removed from the line, despite her being an experienced worker. Moreover, she had to stand and work even after childbirth and was not given a chair to sit down, resulting in fatigue.

Commute to work

Fearing "the zipper man"

The majority of the respondents complained about harassment during their commute to work; their modes of transport included walking, public transport and office transport. Harassment against women in public transport was repeatedly highlighted. The women stated that they are likely to face less harassment in employee-provided transport services. However, irrespective of the mode of transport, the respondents cited personal experiences they faced. One respondent spoke of how the driver of her office transport solicited her contact number.

Others complained about having to arrange their own transportation when they have to work late-night shifts, and fear having their jewellery stolen while walking by themselves, especially in badly lit or unlit streets during the night. Respondents also complained of meeting "Zipper men" on the road (both day and night). These men would strategically wait outside and expose their genitalia to women passing by or would drive past them, and do the same.

With the fuel crisis, this fear was heightened as the transportation services provided by the employee began dropping workers at a central location rather than directly at their respective accommodations. Walking to their boarding houses at night was daunting, especially for a Tamil-speaking respondent who shared her inability to communicate with the office-transport driver.

The 2022 crisis and its impacts on the lives of women

"Corona was better…" - Worker on living through the economic crisis

The pandemic followed by the economic crisis clearly had a direct impact on the industry, on all the respondents, their work and their homes. Lengthy daily power cuts, often unscheduled and haphazard, meant that workers had to stay in the factories till late at night, to be able to meet

targets. With fewer orders coming in, factories downsized, pressuring workers to work harder, longer and faster.

Respondents, especially manpower workers in Biyagama, complained of having to go to work in the morning, not knowing if there would be electricity, and would have to wait till the power supply was restored. This would sometimes mean having to work very long shifts, as they were unable to clock out at 6 pm. If they were to leave early, they would have to go home with Rs. 300 on some days, which is far too little to meet their needs and that of their families. Workers in Katunayake, mostly permanent employees, stated that their hours were longer—now working from 8.30 am to 8.30 pm in order to deal with the erratic power supply, workforce constraints and target requirements.

Due to the shortages in fuel, many manpower agencies in Biyagama also stopped providing transport for the workers, resulting in less work, and more issues with travel. The fuel shortages also affected the factories as many factories ran on generators which required fuel. A few respondents stated that they had to stay on overnight, as a result of this crisis. One worker from a company in Katunayake spoke about not being able to use the office transport that she was technically allocated by the company, as there were too many workers being crammed into the

night transport vehicles. This situation left her feeling unmotivated and unhappy, as she began to resent others who worked in the factory with her.

The lives of the workers were deeply affected at home too. Manpower workers are unable to pay boarding fees due to the lack of work and struggled through the months while some claimed that many who worked with them eventually went back to their villages.

Essential needs, such as food, became laborious tasks in the absence of gas tanks and kerosene. Women who often live in shared spaces, reliant on store-bought food, often went hungry and were not able to have home-cooked meals (they had biscuits and tea). Some used rice cookers to cook one-pot meals for their families instead of regular rice and curry meals.

Many of the factories also stopped providing meals due to various issues and so the workers had to deal with additional costs as they were compelled to pay for meals. Workers in Katunayake said their food was inedible—they were served packs with no curries, poor nutrients and sometimes stale food. This was a result of the fact that many of the food suppliers(caterers) to the factories were making do with the old budgets for meals despite the massive inflation in the cost of food items.

During the Aragalaya, trade unions and other groups also organised strike action. Some factories retaliated by deducting salaries on these days.

"When we went on strike, they said we were wrong for doing so. They didn't want to pay the salary. We were afraid to participate in the hartal. We know some people were even fired for taking part in the strike"

This is a violation of Article 14 of the Fundamental Rights; recognises the citizens' freedom of speech and expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, and the freedom to form and join a trade

union. Furthermore, as per the C-190, such retaliation violates fundamental principles and rights at work, namely freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining (Article 5).

Work-life negotiations

"A woman works 12 hours, and comes back home, to work more. She works at work. She works at home" - Worker in Katunayake

The workers all described their care workload as affecting their life and work. Often saddled with having to manage the work of the home entirely, the women whose husbands also worked, said that they would still do more work in their homes than their husbands would, despite working similar hours.

Some women worked in the zone, having left their children in the care of parents and relatives in the village. Those with younger children, enrol them in daycare or leave them in the care of other children's mothers in the vicinity of the zone. A few respondents said their husbands cared for their children during the day and worked the night shift (when they returned). These negotiations were especially hard in a time of crisis. One respondent spoke of how last-minute requests to work late meant that there would be no one to take care of the children. This created many problems at her home as the family also could not afford for the husband to miss his shift—he made more money than her.

Noting the effects of domestic violence on employment and the world of work, productivity and health and safety, Article 10 (f) of the Convention asserts the stakeholder commitment to mitigate these impacts. Such impacts were identified in the conversations with the working women.

Respondents complained of harassment and violence in their homes—for not having been "good wives" and "good mothers"—for not cooking for their children as they were coming home late.

Manpower workers, in many factories, are unable to take their bags into the factories and are required to leave them at the security counter. This also means they are unable to inform their families of any urgent changes in time, and of their return home. The PHMs added that they believe many men suspect their wives of having extramarital affairs when their wives come home late.

One respondent shared a case of harassment to her female friend and coworker by a male coworker. Her husband grew suspicious of her because she did not tell him of the incident. He eventually left his wife stating "if you can hide this incident from me, you can hide anything". Many of the respondents felt that they were very often unfairly judged by family, husbands, relatives, parents back home in the village, boarding owners and people in their workplaces.

Many of the workers felt their workplaces were not receptive to the problems they dealt with in their homes. Especially problems that cropped up directly due to decisions made by their workplaces. In fact, they felt that they were pressured even more because of it by their workplaces and line managers, would to "leave (their) home problems at home" and to "Leave (their) problems at the gate." Many of the respondents spoke about the mental pressure they dealt with as a result.

Mechanisms of reporting, redress and support

Article 10 of the Convention asserts easily accessible independent, fair protective measures that ensure the privacy and confidentiality of all workers, without the risk of suffering retaliation or other undue consequences. Regarding this subject, a severe lack of confidence in redressal and support mechanisms inside and outside the workplace was observed among the respondents.

Within the workplace

"They are all friends. They'll shout at whoever is doing something wrong in front of us but will be on 'machan' level when we leave the room," - Manpower worker in Katunayake

Many of the respondents spoke of harassment from superiors. The focus was primarily on verbal abuse, ranging from general comments, to comments relating the work speed, to sexual comments by some. Workers also felt heavily pressured to meet targets.

In case of mistakes, supervisors shout and berate them in public. Many commented on the foul language used by supervisors. In one factory in Katunayake, a new female head of the organization helped resolve an issue that the previous management had not seen as related to work. A co-worker had pitched a pyramid scheme to many members of the factory. Despite asking for an intervention nothing had been done. However, the new management made the complaint via the office, relating this issue as something that was connected to the workplace, as opposed to considering it a personal matter, allowing the women who were duped by the scheme some legitimacy and clout in the process.

Whatever encounters of conflict and confrontation, many of the women attempt to resolve the problems internally, within their place of work, and not on the outside. While many have resorted to reporting various issues to HR, the majority felt that there was no justice to their complaints. When reporting about the behaviour of a supervisor, many of them have had negative responses, and have faced further harassment.

"When we report something we will be harassed, given to do work we don't usually do, hated... they will work us to the bone until we hate the job we do".

Respondents complained that their work was micromanaged, they were pressured to meet targets, supervisors would find damages that were not really damaged, and some claimed that supervisors would create damage on the garments out of spite. Some complained of supervisors setting unrealistic targets, and also making women work during their breaks in order to achieve targets. Respondents used words such as "revengeful", "abusive", "angry" and "menacing" to describe some of their factory supervisors.

While many of the respondents know that there are policies for workplace safety inside the zone, none of them was aware of workplace harassment and violence and the rights of workers prior to the awareness program run by Dabindu. There is some awareness amongst permanent employees that unions are able to help, but many of them are resistant to unionization due to pressure from workplaces to avoid engaging. Some also found the joint employee councils at their factories useful avenues to resolve their grievances. One respondent explained that in her workplace, newcomers are informally advised on how to raise issues. This was an exception.

Outside the workplace

"We've been asked not to take our problems outside"

No one had taken work-related problems to law enforcement. Workers are often pressured to resolve whatever issues within the workplace and are not encouraged to seek advice from law enforcement. Manpower workers complained that they felt especially vulnerable as they had very little support from anyone.

One respondent said had a very negative interaction with the Katunayake police, stating that they were trying to extort money from her. Another respondent shared her experience of dealing with the police;

"After having my chain snatched, I went to the police to make a complaint. The police asked me if I knew the number plate. They then asked me to let them know if I meet the thief again and wanted me to remember his number plate."

Interestingly enough, in the absence of clear justice, one respondent claimed that she had more faith in gods than in law enforcement. "We are willing to go to the *dewalé* (place of religious worship) rather than the police. We have more faith in that system". Women resort to seeking answers from *kattadiyas*, as they are able to give more "specific" instructions on how to recover lost money, jewellery etc, and are also able to point them in the direction of some form of justice.

In terms of healthcare, women have general access to the MOH and Public Health Midwives (PHMs) in particular, and ideally, women working in the FTZs should use these services.

However, respondents asserted their inability to access the PHMs because the PHMs are only available at the clinic in the morning hours on weekdays (2hrs). Many women do not go to the MOH; MOH asks them to go to a private dispensary for consultation, but the respondents do sometimes use the MOH pharmacy. Respondents also prefer going to a private clinic as they consider this more convenient and faster, and they cannot afford to take leave from work to stand in a queue for medication. The MOH also closes at 5 pm so women are forced to go to private hospitals by default.

In the conversations with the PHMs, there was an overwhelming collective response that despite whatever harassment and violence women faced with their partners their contending position is to "protect the family fabric and resolve the conflict" (*pawula kadannenethuwa, aarawula samadanaya karanawa)*

"iwasala innna, wisheshayenma pregnant nang…. ; puluwan uparimen eh pawula samadhanaya karanna thamayi balanne. Darunu wideya aparada wenawan (maranna kotanna) witharayi polisiyata yanne - neththan api samadhanaya karanawaa" - PHM

Recommendations and the way forward

We felt that it was necessary to make recommendations that address the economic, social, and structural violence faced by women in their world of work. Some of these recommendations came directly from the FGDs– from the respondents and the PHMs.

1) Support by Employer
    - Wages - while higher wages are necessary, the way in which workers are paid is also linked to the structural violence they experience. Manpower workers complained of having to commute to the agents to be paid for their daily work.

Being paid promptly and without hassle to the workers is as important as being paid fair wages.

- Pushing for companies to recognise harassment and violence of all types. This includes having a zero-tolerance policy with regard to sexual harassment. Companies will need to commit to action, have systems in place to monitor and support, help create awareness and create easy access for employees to share their grievances. These systems need to be in place for those who are both permanent and daily wage workers.
- Urging companies to have mechanisms in place to deal with grievances. These cannot be handled haphazardly. It is necessary to push for these systems to be in place as good practice.

2) Support by the state

- Women's police desk - the need for a 24-hour women's desk in the zone is vital to ensure the safety and security of women in Katunayake and Biyagama. The WPCs managing these complaints also needs to be sensitised to the issues that women face, and their own responses to these issues, so as to not perpetuate violence and to not re-victimize women.
- MOH - Since Sundays are often the only day off the workers receive, it is recommended that PHMs are available on Sundays for women from the zone.

- Establishing safe houses and shelters in the zones - in cases of violence, women and their children must have access to safe spaces. While this should be the responsibility of the government, other organisations may also support it.
- Ample street lights- women are unsafe and afraid as they return home. Some roads have specific issues with men exposing themselves etc. Regular patrolling in these areas is seen as helpful.
- State-run medical clinics and dental care clinics

- State to push for longer days for breastfeeding (milk hour). This is not only limited to women in the zone but for all.

3) Other support networks - CSOs and Unions
    - CSO Awareness for boarding house owners on Family planning, midwife services, MOH and sexual health.
    - Creating contact points for counselling, to talk about and resolve issues (personal, financial, violence-related problems, work problems)
    - Further sensitization and awareness programs for PHMs and Law enforcement to break stereotypical views on women, care work and violence and harassment.
    - Unions for creating a collective for manpower workers to help organise themselves within the zones so that they are encouraged to bring their grievances to organisations that are able to better support them through adversity.
    - Legal clinics to help resolve grievances
    - Creating a network of women (in factories) through awareness programs who can help support and direct women to organisations that will help support them.

Comprehensive work between these different stakeholders is essential in order to create a better world of work for women in the FTZs in the Gampaha District. There is a great necessity, for organisations such as Dabindu, to bring these stakeholders together, formulate policy and planning and also to create environments of transparency and accountability in both the state and the private sector. Multi-stakeholder approaches to resolving the problems that have arisen will help gather resources, funding and support more efficiently and productively.

The industry also needs to also focus on the workers– their knowledge and expertise is what enable change. Therefore, any sustainable plan will need to include women workers, not only as recipients of support but also as change-makers and leaders.

It is also essential that all these different stakeholders work together, in lobbying for the ratification of C190. Ratification will ensure change, not just in the legal regime, but also help increase overall awareness of violence and harassment in the world of work.

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