

Mumbai: Session on Better Policing and Know Your Rights

Organised with the Maharashtra Kamgar Ghar Vikas Sangathana at Chuim Community centre

27 April 2019

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) was invited by the coordinator of the *Maharashtra Ghar Kamgaar Vikas Sangathana* (MGKVS -- a domestic workers Union) to conduct a session on policing and citizens' rights with members of the community in Khar, Mumbai on 27 April 2019.

The MGKVS is part of the Confederation of Free Trade Union which has 27 *Sangathanas* (collectives) across Maharashtra and is affiliated to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Advocate Vidya Patil, the MGKVS Secretary, is also a member of the City Core Group – a collective of organisations working to further women's access to justice in Mumbai. We were invited to conduct the session by Mr. Suresh Patil, the organiser and coordinator of the MGKVS.

The session was attended by 24 participants, comprising of domestic workers, community activists, homemakers and two youth from the local *bastis* (slums). We started off by introducing CHRI and CCG to the attendants. Through our interactions, we soon found that very few women had ever visited a police station. A community social worker even shared a rather negative experience of having to wait for almost two hours at the Khar Police station while trying to file a missing child complaint.

We have suggested that the MGKVS could organise a field visit to the police station to familiarise community members with its functioning.

As part of the session, we also delved into the processes of filing complaints and First Information Reports (FIR), discussed citizens' rights, the different kinds of offences, the structure and ranks of Mumbai Police personnel and distributed copies of the Mumbai Police directory. Donita Quadros, Project Associate with the CHRI Mumbai team also discussed

processes to ensure that their complaints were filed accurately, discussed their rights (since many of them were not familiar with Marathi -- the language used by the police while taking down complaints), and offered additional tips, such as the fact that a police officer was supposed to read back their statement to them after recording it, and that they should only sign it after they were satisfied that all the points they wished to make were covered.

We found that while participants were familiar with the Police Helpline 100, only a few were aware of 103 Helpline dedicated to women and children, and the ways in which it could be of help in cases of reporting violence.

We then conducted an interactive case study exercise with the group, by dividing them into four and given them two case studies which they were to discuss and present in the context of their rights and procedures.

Case 1: A 32-year-old woman was arrested by the police and taken to the police station from her house at 9 pm without being informed of the reason for her detention. At the station, she was told that the owner of the house worked at had accused her of stealing a watch and Rs 500.

Case 2: You hear noises from your neighbour's house every day, usually in the middle of the night, which sound as if a woman was being abused physically and verbally by the father-in-law and husband. What should you do?

In the first case, we found that the participants were aware that nobody could be taken away to a police station after 6:30 pm (sunset) and before 7:00 am (sunrise). In the second, the participants said that possible prosecution of the case depended on whether the victim herself wanted to pursue the case or not.

We reminded the participants that they could intervene in cases where they believed that a crime was being committed and could inform the police by dialing 103. They could also seek help from their collectives if they ever faced trouble themselves.

Towards the end of the session, Dolphy D'Souza, Project Lead, Mumbai, also discussed the work done by Para-Legal Volunteers (PLV), and how too they could be trained to become one. As a result, a few members expressed interest in enrolling for the PLV training. Overall, the session went smoothly and we received positive feedback for the information disseminated.

After the session, a women participant spoke to Donita and Dolphy about facing harassment by her husband and in-laws, who abused her physically and verbally, and kept her home-bound without any contact with her own family. Even though she had moved out and was presently living with her brother and mother, she wanted to salvage her marriage by getting counseling for her husband. We continue to be in touch with her and have informed her that we will offer her the help she needs through our networks.

On the behalf of CHRI and the CCG, we thank Mr. Patil for taking the initiative of organising this session. We have recently found that the president of the *Maharashtra Asangathit Kamgaar Sangathana* (the Maharashtra unorganised workers union), Mr. Nandkumar Mahadik, too has expressed a desire to host a similar programme for workers in the Mulund area of Mumbai.