

Enabling Access to Work Opportunities for Women in Manufacturing

Executive summary

As work opportunities in agriculture shrink, the future lies in improving women's access to jobs in manufacturing and services. In order to enhance women's economic opportunities, it is important to understand the demand- and supply-side factors that determine their participation in these sectors, which has been stagnating. This project seeks to examine the profile and background of women workers in contemporary industrial and urban landscapes – the kind of opportunities available, barriers to participation, and aspirations and expectations from industrial employment. It further aims to situate the findings within the context of existing policy and regulatory frameworks and the implications they hold for enabling/constraining women's industrial employment.

Introduction – context and rationale

As work opportunities in agriculture shrink, the future lies in improving women's access to jobs in manufacturing and services. In order to enhance women's economic opportunities, it is important to understand the demand- and supply-side factors that determine their participation in these sectors, which has been stagnating.

This project seeks to examine the profile and background of women workers in contemporary industrial and urban landscapes – the kind of opportunities available, barriers to participation, and aspirations and expectations from industrial employment. It further aims to situate the findings within the context of existing policy and regulatory frameworks and the implications they hold for enabling/constraining women's industrial employment.

The study is interested in the following sets of research questions: (a) What kinds of industrial work opportunities are available to women? What is the profile and nature (formal/informal) of these jobs, and are there specific concentrations of women in specific jobs? (b) How do women get drawn into particular kinds of industrial work? What kind of information avenues and networks facilitate this? What considerations do women take into account in taking up industrial work? (c) What constrains women from taking up industrial work? What experiences at the level of the shop-floor and of the urban neighbourhood factor into this? (d) What does the policy and regulatory climate imply for women in industrial work? What policies enable and what constrain women's participation in industrial work?

The research is based in the manufacturing areas in Delhi NCR (National Capital Region), which are mainly characterised by small-scale industries like garment and footwear, and attract large numbers of 'low-skilled' migrants. The region's industrialisation has been a contentious issue due to concerns around pollution, and emergence and growth of manufacturing activity in residential areas. Given regulations on the operation of industrial units in 'non-conforming areas' and their relocation to peripheral estates, this employment landscape is perpetually in flux.

Brief description of the study

The project, first, uses existing survey data (collected by the researchers in previous work on garment factory workers in Delhi NCR) to build a profile of a typical female worker. These existing data are supplemented by more detailed information on current/aspiring workers obtained through focus group discussions and interviews with women workers, and interviews with factory owners and managers, labour contractors, and so on. A quantitative survey of 1,613 households was also

undertaken. Second, possible interventions to enhance women's economic empowerment in the sector would be tested systematically.

Phase I: August-October 2018

The footwear manufacturing hubs of Udyog Nagar and Mangolpuri were taken up as case studies given the presence of a large share of working women in this industry, as suggested by Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) data.

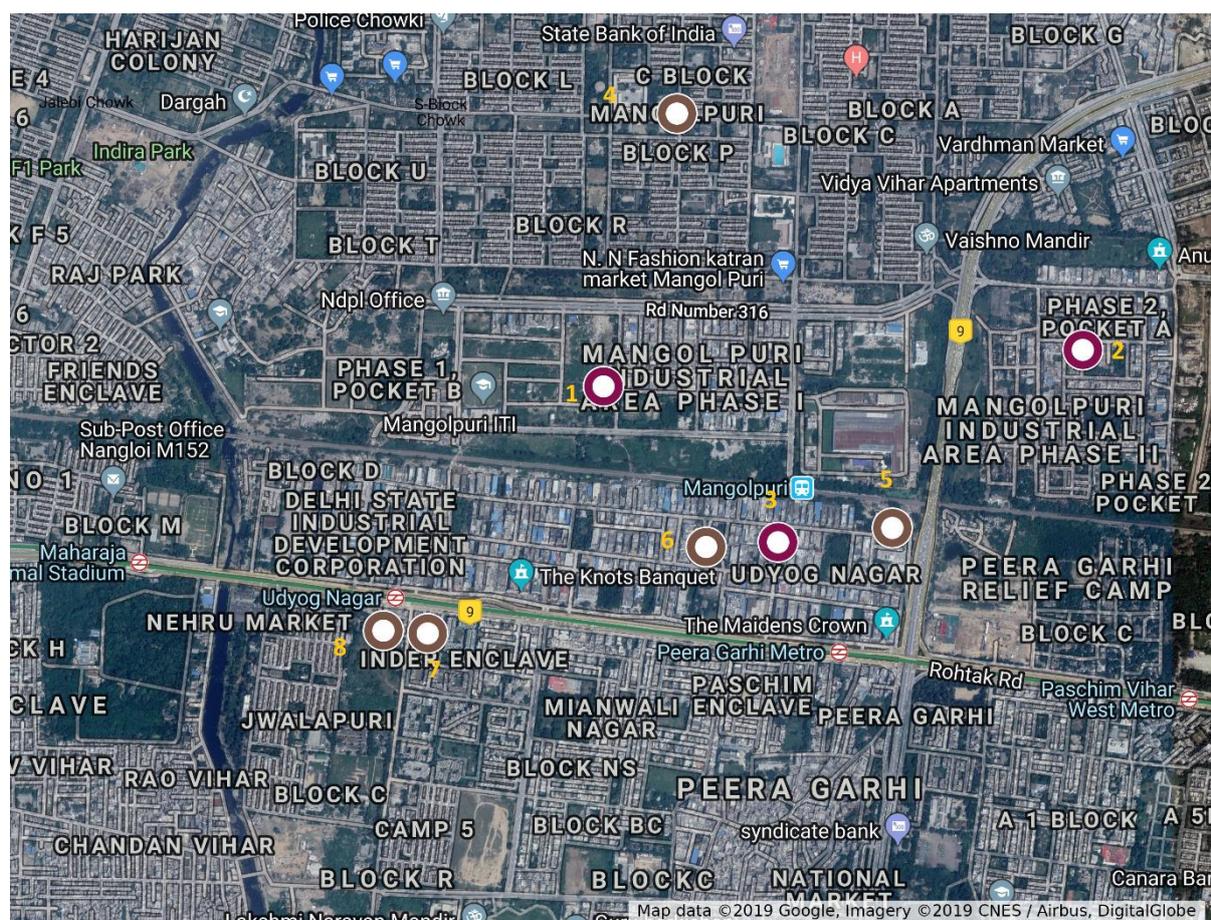
A series of scoping visits, qualitative interviews, and focus groups in residential hubs around these industrial estates were conducted. Over 60 women and about 25 men participated in this phase of fieldwork. Additionally, the research team interacted with 10 key informants including contractors, factory supervisors, and factory owners in Peeragarhi and Sultanpur Mazra (industrial areas 'notified for regularisation'). Interviews were conducted largely in the residential hubs around the industrial estate, and a map of these is shown in Figure 1.

Phase II: November 2018-January 2019

Given the research interests in policy and regulation, this phase focused on interviews to better understand the policy landscape for industrial work in Delhi. The researchers interacted with officials of the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC) and the North Delhi Municipal Corporation. A cursory review of the *Industrial Policy for Delhi: 2010–2021* and the *Master Plan for Delhi 2021* was also undertaken to foreground the information obtained through the interviews. The interviews revealed the complex landscape for industries in Delhi, marked by tension with planning and zoning regulations.

Ten factory owners were also interviewed in the industrial areas of Mangolpuri (Phases I and II), facilitated by field engineers/officials of the DSIIDC. An interview guide for enterprises was prepared, which addressed questions of firms' production process, hiring practices (contractor-driven/firm-driven), availability of workers, and the general industrial climate in Delhi.

Image 1. Industrial areas and residential hubs covered in the fieldwork



Source: Google MyMaps

Note: 1-Mangolpuri Industrial Area Phase I, 2-Mangolpuri Industrial Area Phase II, 3-Udyog Nagar Industrial Area, 4-Mangolpuri resettlement colony, 5- C-3 Udyog Nagar basti, 6-Basti near Water Tank, Udyog Nagar, 7- Hans Raj Mulk Raj Bhatta basti, Jwalapuri, 8- Jwalapuri resettlement colony.

Phase III: February-April 2019

Based on insights gathered from the qualitative fieldwork undertaken in both of the earlier phases, this phase focussed on pilot surveys and training of survey enumerators. A total of eight pilot visits were undertaken in the areas of Jahangirpuri, Bhalswa Dairy, and Khichripur, based on which the questionnaire was continually revised. This was followed by training of survey enumerators in April, which included detailed discussions over the questionnaires and experiences from the pilot. At these training sessions, the researchers also presented on the spatial profile, planning landscape, and categories of settlements in Delhi to orient field surveyors to the typologies of field areas chosen for the survey.

Phase IV: May-July 2019

Data collection was undertaken during this phase, spanning over five districts of Delhi, namely, North Delhi, North East Delhi, North west Delhi, Shahdara, and West Delhi. From these districts, 10 assembly constituencies were chosen, and from the 10 assembly constituencies 108 polling station units were chosen to constitute the primary sampling unit (PSU). From each PSU, 15 households were randomly selected for the survey. From each household one married couple was interviewed. The couple to be

interviewed was selected using the following criteria: one, the age of both individuals must be between 18 and 40; and second, if there are multiple couples for whom the age criterion is satisfied, the youngest couple is selected.

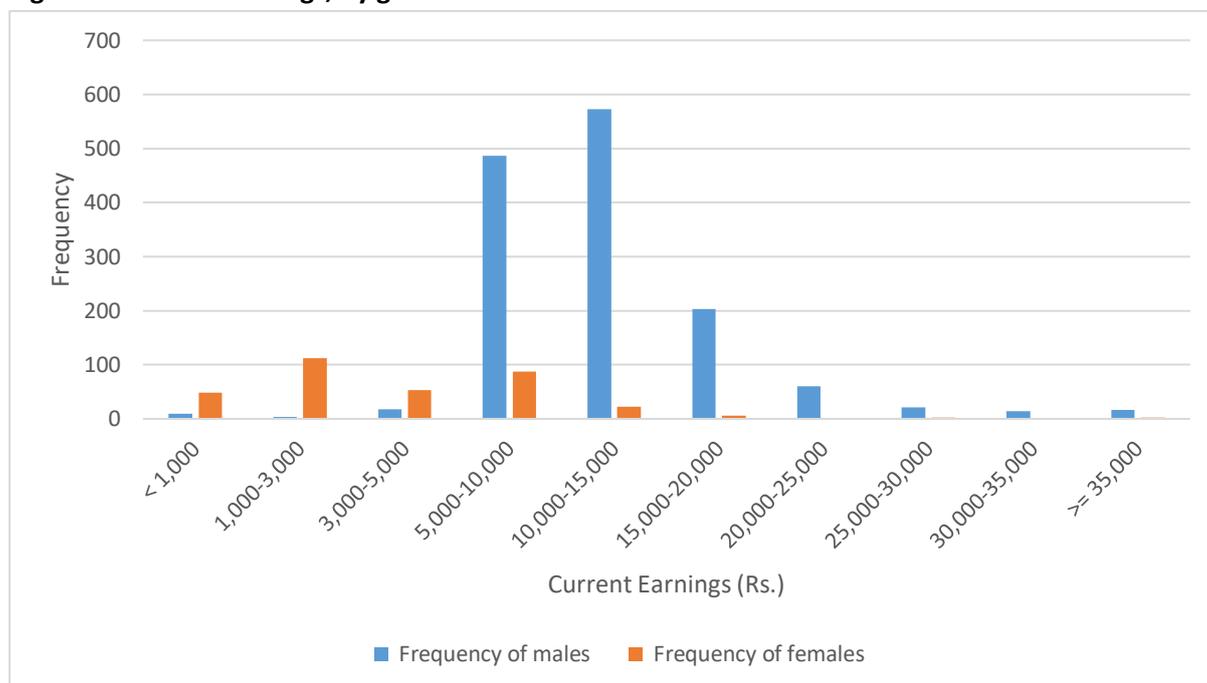
A phone survey was conducted between end May and the middle of October, for those that have been listed as friends/relatives of the couples interviewed in the main survey. For each individual in the main survey, the target was to call two friends/relatives from their network and collect some data. This was done conditional on the sharing of phone numbers of friends/relatives by the individual; hence, there are several attritions to the target.

Major findings

The following are the key findings of the qualitative fieldwork, and the survey of a sample of 1,613 households: 1,543 males, 1,584 females, and 1,514 couples. Overall, 23.6% of the women are employed (the corresponding figure for men is 95.7%); given average labour force participation rates nationally across genders, this appears to be a representative sample.

- *Occupational segregation and gender pay gaps go together:* Women are concentrated in low-end tasks in factories like packaging and machine cleaning, and are not assigned to operating machines. Therefore, they typically earn far less than male workers. While 63.2% of working men earn Rs. 10,000 or above per month, only 10.2% of working women are in this earning bracket.

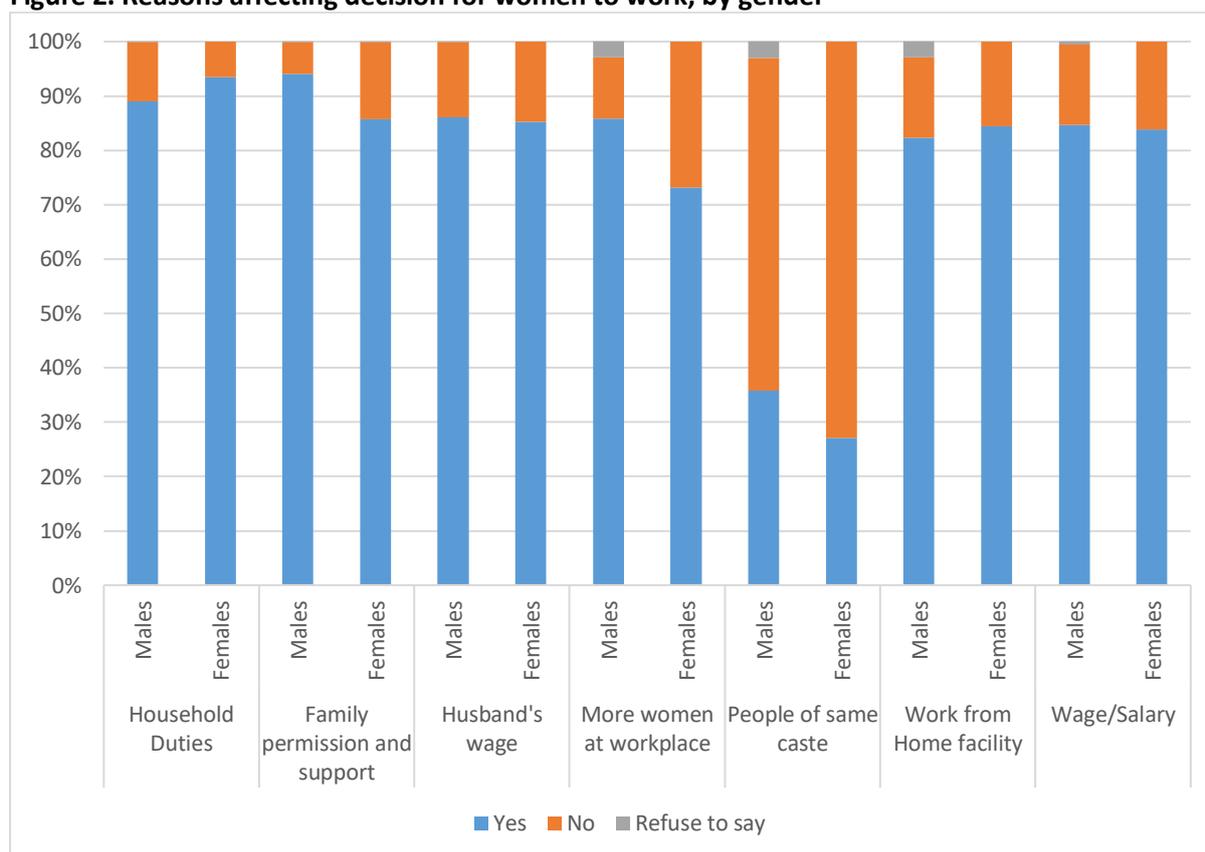
Figure 1. Current earnings, by gender



- *There are social stigmas associated with women working in factories:* Many factory owners prefer not to employ women at all as they consider it inappropriate for women and men to work together and are concerned about possible sexual harassment. The notion of factory work lacks respectability and it is believed that women work in factories only out of compulsion.

- Attitudes, norms, and beliefs within households tend to be unfavourable towards women:* Men express discomfort about their female relatives working, especially late hours; they exercise control over their workforce participation decisions and mobility on account of both customs and safety concerns. For instance, while 60% of females believe that adult women should work outside the home if they want to, only 33.2% of men agree. Similarly, more men (87.7%) than women (80%) believe that it is better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the women takes care of the home and family.
- Domestic responsibilities and lack of well-paid, safe jobs constrain women from opting for wage employment:* The top three constraints reported by females on working for a wage emerge as childcare (82.3% of women say so), low wages/salary (79.5%), and non-availability of safe jobs (76.1%). In general, the key determinants of women’s own decision to work are household duties, family permission and support, husband’s wage, work-from-home facility, and more women at the workplace.

Figure 2. Reasons affecting decision for women to work, by gender



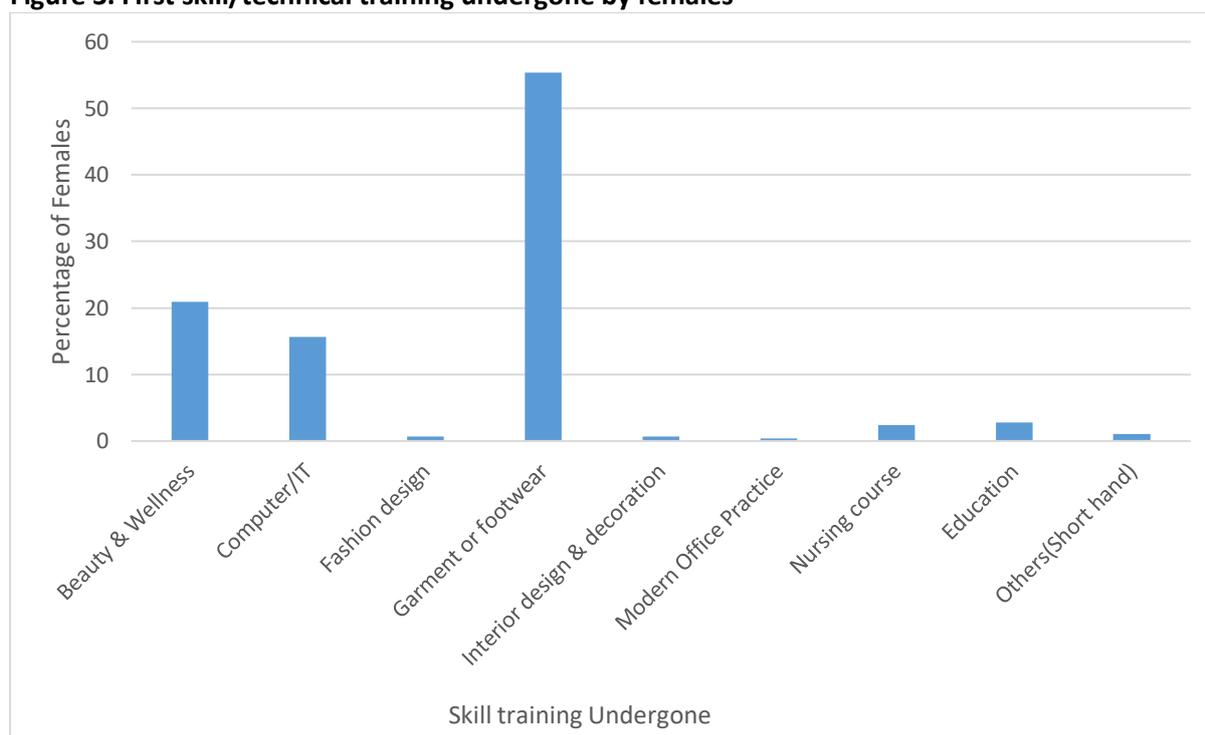
Note: Other factors reported: Males – families won't get permission, night shifts and security issues; Females – Delhi environment and safety/security concerns.

- Both men and women prefer home-based work for women:* About 78% of both women and men prefer home-based jobs for women. This is typically routed via contractors residing close by, indicating the presence of strong spatial and social networks for women’s work. Payment is piece-rated and the work is on the lowest rungs of the supply chain – unacknowledged and undervalued. Nevertheless, it enables women to manage household responsibilities alongside

undertaking some form of paid work, and may positively influence intra-household gender relations. Conditional on employed status, 37.4% of females are doing piece-rate work versus 8.6% of males.

- *Women are more likely to have undergone technical training or hold a diploma, but among individuals with training/diploma women are much less likely to work than men: 18.2% of females versus 4.7% of males claim to have undergone technical training/hold a diploma. However, conditional upon holding skills/diploma, a much smaller proportion of women (27.9%) work relative to men (91.8%).*

Figure 3. First skill/technical training undergone by females



- *Women’s networks are closer to home vis-à-vis men:* The average number of friends/relatives that one may reach out to in an emergency is 3.4 for women and 2.8 for men. However, women’s networks are closer to home – given their limited mobility – and hence, access to information about jobs via networks is restricted. The average number of friends/relatives with whom activities are done around home is 2.3 for women and 0.6 for men, and the corresponding figures for work are 0.2 for women and 0.3 for men.
- *Shifting and contentious industrial landscape of Delhi:* At the time of fieldwork, factories were in a process of being gradually sealed on the orders of the Supreme Court, for various reasons like misuse of plot, not following pollution norms, encroachment, etc. The fieldwork experience points towards an approach entirely focused on sealing and/or relocation, instead of regularisation and/or redevelopment of unauthorised areas as per the guidelines of the Master Plan for Delhi 2021. Linkages exist between planned and unplanned areas in the sense of flow of intermediate products and labour circulation. Several factories chose to shift out of Delhi after sealing for reasons including greater space availability and agglomeration benefits in the new locations, tax benefits, and lower minimum wages.

Policy recommendations

- *Strengthening women's presence on the shop-floor:* While social stigmas associated with women working in factories cannot disappear easily, implementation and strengthening of laws and legal redress mechanisms for female factory workers can at the least enable a process of change and counterbalance. Firstly, it is imperative that all factories have an Internal Complaints Committee as mandated by the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. Gender sensitisation programmes are required not only for factory workers, but also for owners and industry associations which seem to have a resistance to hiring women workers. Secondly, while the recently passed Code on Wages Bill, 2019 upholds principles of equal remuneration for equal work, such measures stand no good if women continue to be concentrated in low-end occupations. Upskilling and an expansion of work opportunities for women on the shop-floor are critical to bolster their workforce participation.
- *Wage regulations and social protections for home-based workers:* Regulations to ensure minimum wages and social protection (for example, maternity benefits, health insurance, child care) for home-based workers are key to ensuring that their contributions to supply chains do not remain unacknowledged. The calculation of minimum wages for piece-rated workers would require a different approach than the usual time-rated notion of minimum wage. In this, one can draw upon SEWA's experiences of working closely with government authorities, workers' representatives and employers to facilitate time-motion studies as the basis of minimum wage calculations for *agarbatti* (incense sticks) workers. While the proposed Code on Social Security recognises home-based workers as a category of unorganised workers, efforts should be made to address concerns around coverage, outreach, and implementation.
- *Neighbourhood interventions for home-based workers:* There is a need to recognise the multi-faceted nature of urban neighbourhoods which goes beyond residential uses, and develop neighbourhood amenities for home-based work. Portions of common spaces like community halls can be redeveloped to incorporate a shared space for home-based workers with facilities like water, toilets, electricity, and ventilation. It is essential to sensitise and empower local bodies about the need for such redevelopment.
- *Improve public service delivery and provision of amenities to alleviate constraints on women's work participation related to mobility and the burden of the care economy:* Safe and adequate public transport facilities need to be provided for women for commuting between home and workplace. Every home should be provided drinking water, and steps should be taken to eliminate the use of *chulhas* for cooking, in order to enable women to effectively manage their work and home duties effectively.
- *Redevelopment of unplanned industrial areas:* It is important to move away from sealing of unplanned industrial spaces as the main mode of practice in the context of Delhi's complex industrial landscape. Regularisation of unplanned industrial areas is critical from a gender perspective: these factories provide flexible work opportunities for women, and also create significant home-based work alongside having connections to planned manufacturing spaces.

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Within the initiative, four projects are being led by Prof. Farzana Afridi at the Indian Statistical Institute. This research has been conducted under one of the projects.