



# Researched To Researcher: Reflections from the Field

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The tables it seems are turning. Slowly but surely. The researched are becoming the researchers. As it should be. This shift is particularly important in communities like sex workers whose lives and livelihoods are little understood but much written about. These communities have been researched by the outside world, often judged, criminalised or patronised. But now they are out there, gathering and excavating data from their own lived stories that they are analysing within frameworks drawn from the warp and weft of their experiences. Following Dr. Ambedkar's message that the marginalised and discriminated need to educate, agitate and organise they are bringing academia, advocacy and activism to the streets where they are living and fighting for their rights, their dignity and their personhood.

This research involving members of the National Network of Sex Workers (NNSW) across eight states of India could be considered part of this process. Conducted at the height of the lockdown in India declared in March 2020, the research saw 75 sex workers and 15 supporters who were given an orientation from the organisations they are embedded in delve deeper into their own communities to understand what was happening. A total of 2352 participants across 53 districts were interviewed.

The purpose was to find out from the community what the economic impact of COVID-19 was on their lives. This included gathering information related to the nature of their work (whether it is brothel, lodge, street or home based), changes in their work (number of clients and rates they charge etc) and their overall income and expenditure. An attempt was also made to identify whether and how they had used savings and loans to tide over the crisis. Despite the fact that the questions related to something considered impersonal, in the sex work context, given its nature which is as much intimate and personal as stigmatised, the issues had to be engaged with sensitively.

State	Districts	Participants
Andhra Pradesh	Ananthapuram, Chittoor, Krishna, Vizianagaram, Guntur, Srikakulam, West Godavari	209
Telangana	Bhuvanagiri, Karimnagar	60
Tamil Nadu	Kanyakumari, Madurai, Theni, Thiruvannamalai, Tirunelveli, Villupuram	245
Kerala	Idukki, Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta, Thrissur, Alapuzzha, Kpttayam, Ernakulam	342
Karnataka	Koppala, Bangalore Rural, Bangalore, Davangere, Gadag, Yadgir, Raichur, Bellary, Bagalkot, Chitradurga, Bidar, Ramnagar, Belgavi, Hassan, Karwar, Ramnagar	640
Maharashtra	Pune, Sangli, Nagpur, Satara, Kolhapur, Parbhani, Aurangabad, Jalgaon	670
Jharkhand	Ranchi, Gumla	60
Gujarat	Chota Udaipur, Kutch	126
Total		2352

In this context doing a process documentation with the help of some of the researchers who are part of the community being researched was important. It will hopefully help to bring in a note of reflective objectivity to the process through enabling them to analyse their own interventions and look back at the objectives, relevance and impact of the research and in doing so strengthen their own capacities to take forward the outcomes in more meaningful ways. Listening to the responses of the researchers and supporters it was clear that the process drew upon some of the core ethics of Feminist Participatory Action Research.

The elements of this approach are: consent and privacy contextualised in the lived ethics of the community; consciously attempting to listen objectively but with empathy and therefore also responding with some material support; being sensitive to ensuring the security of those being researched; representing them in ways that they wished and making them in fact participants in the process of the research that is meant to improve the quality of their own lives.

We retrace the steps taken during the research process through the perspectives and words of the sex workers who at the end of the research had evolved into researchers in their own right. Feedback from the supporters who enabled the research is included to bring in further insights.



## I. Orienting the Researchers: Building on Experience:

For most researchers this was a first-time experience, while some, as part of the HIV/AIDS movement or government programmes had some experience of being part of surveys. Almost all had basic education and were well equipped with their experience as aware sex workers and had enthusiasm to learn. Additionally, an orientation was given to them by their organisations regarding the core principles and process of the present research. However, there was also the rare researcher who had some unusual qualifications. Like Shanti (name changed) from Idukki, a peer who has a Fine Arts degree and Radha Vyshnavi from West Godavari who has done a diploma in electrical engineering after doing her intermediate in Maths, Physics and Chemistry. Radha is also a young and mobile-savvy, next generation sex worker. Having also a couple of years experience in HIV prevention work this was the second survey she was taking part in. This background perhaps enabled her to have a fair knowledge of key issues and as mentioned by her mentor, she was able to grasp the issues around sex work quickly.



Everyone is in trouble, COVID-19 has turned our lives upside down. Otherwise, we used to do our work and take care of our families and other daily activities. But now it has affected our daily life, our livelihood and even our mental health has been affected. So regarding the research many felt happy because if the reality that the sex workers are facing comes out, they felt something good might happen. Many of us know our own situation but it remains with us, so this survey report may help us to get benefits and to do advocacy."

**Radha Vyshnavi, AP**



This was my first experience of conducting survey. Good learning for me. The team of Saheli helped me a lot to understand the financial issues and problems of sex workers in a much better way than I was aware of.

**Renuka, Pune**

Sujatha, based in Vijayawada has studied upto the tenth standard after which she got married much before turning 18, after which she stopped her education. One of the community leaders nurtured by Me and My World, a CBO under Women's Initiative NGO in Tirupati she had not taken part in any survey earlier but being aware, after attending workshops and meetings has learnt much about the community and rights-based approach to work.

Anjana Valand, a Gujarati medium graduate had done a survey on reproductive health while Bala (name changed) from Kerala was an Anganwadi worker who had done some data collection for an ICDS programme in different government projects.

Muktha and Uma, the two peers from Karnataka who were part of the survey also had previous experience working with HIV prevention organisations and so had no difficulty in being part of this research.

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I had no prior training at all. I took a print out and read all the questions and started doing the survey. But during the orientation and phone calls with Devi madam and our coordinator, I understood what not to do and to write only what the participant (sex worker) is saying. I also learnt that I have to create rapport by giving them confidence that this is only for report purpose and no names or personal matter will be revealed.

**Sujatha, AP**

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Renuka Patil from Pune is the daughter of sex worker and has studied up to matriculation. Before the launch of the survey she conducted practice interviews with two board members and two peer educators of Saheli. After this exercise she was confident enough to conduct interviews with the women in brothels and on the streets.

Due to the lockdown in most cases since physical orientation and training were not possible, online discussions equipped them with basic skills to conduct the survey. However, some research sites did manage to conduct physical orientation also in addition to the online trainings.

In Kerala for instance while one level of orientation was done on the phone in two batches at which each and every question in the questionnaire was gone through, doubts were also cleared in personal meetings. Additionally, all of the researchers were requested to fill two forms initially that were then reviewed in a meeting in which errors were rectified. Additionally, the researchers also prepared a list of respondents for the survey ensuring the participation of sex workers from all the parts of the districts, in different age groups including older women with a range of health conditions.

Anjana Valand and Asha Rathwa from Gujarat spoke of how they had a meeting to discuss the idea and purpose of the survey post which they reviewed it and filled in the gaps with the help of representatives of Vikalp, the organisation they are part of.



Kavita from Tamil Nadu who has studied upto the 9<sup>th</sup> seemed to be totally in control and confident. She said “I had no preparation, I read the questions again and again. My literacy skills helped me to understand the questions.”

The researchers from Pune spoke about how Saheli organised an orientation before the survey with their staff, board members, peer educator and core group members. Subsequently a small team was designated to conduct the survey and to assist the person who would be administrating the tool and collecting data. It was decided that the survey was conducted with both women in sex work and MSM TG sex workers.

In conclusion it appears that basic literacy and educational qualifications coupled with a thorough orientation and continuous hand holding from the organisation strengthened the researchers and gave them the confidence and capacity to conduct the research.

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Before the research, I got orientation from SIAAP about how to administer the survey questions. I prepared myself as to how to talk to my peer sex workers.

**Meena, Tamil Nadu**

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## II. Evaluating the Process: Responses and Issues that Emerged

### Overcoming Initial Hesitation

Most of the researchers, though enthusiastic, were initially hesitant and nervous about stepping out to conduct the survey. The hesitation was about some of the questions they were supposed to ask and about whether they would be able to elicit answers. There was palpable excitement about going deeper into issues that were also impacting them. And so, while they got off to a slow start taking more time initially for each interview after the second and third day they gained in confidence. There were some initial teething troubles with some peers not being able to understand or manage the questions but, in some instances, like in Kerala they were replaced with others who completed the research. The fact that the interviews had to be done by and large on the phone was also an inhibiting factor since it is easier to build rapport in one-on-one interviews and elicit relevant information.



Most of the researchers felt nervous when we started the study. But they showed a will to finish the responsibility. If one had any doubts regarding the questions, they stopped for clarification and only after that they resumed the study. After the completion and review of the first two sets of survey forms, the confidence level of the researchers went higher. One peer from Idukki withdrew from the survey after seeing the questions, since she was hesitant to ask intimate questions in the community. Then we replaced another peer from the same CBO to complete the survey. From Kottayam also, one peer withdrew from the survey and we substituted her.

**Bindu, Kerala**  
(Name Changed)

Eighty percent of the women here in Jalgaon are Muslims, brothel based and specifically from the Harbasi community of traditional sex workers. When we did the study it was the month of Ramzan and their dhanda (business) had come down drastically and because festival expenses of food and festivities were high. But they were so badly impacted that they could not do anything even for normal food. Given the limitations we got fairly good data and this was thanks to the strong peer leaders who were able to get feedback on religion, caste and economic impact.

**Bharati, Jalgaon**

I have done research earlier in Samraksha which was more about HIV. But this was different since it was in the time of COVID-19 and difficult to do. At that time, we used to go and sit and talk to the women personally. Here it was on phone. This made a lot of difference. They will be in village and at home and can't speak out frankly since family and children will be around.

**Muktha, Karnataka**



### Confronting issues of confidentiality

The primary issues that confronted the researchers seemed to emerge from issues of confidentiality and privacy and that of expectations from the respondents. And some of these issues were also tied up with the fact that the researchers were from the community that they were studying.

We are asking questions about the number of partners and income, which are very private questions. Most of the respondents might not answer such questions. After the orientation, the researchers understood how relevant such questions are. For understanding the stories of the women, we needed to get answers for such questions. Most of them were showed the questions during the time of orientation, because some respondents were friends of friends even though they were not in a contact with them. In order to bridge the communication gap, their friends introduced the respondents and the survey to such sex workers. Then the presentation of questions became easier. First of all, we told them the purpose of doing this research, to identify the financial condition of sex workers after the COVID-19 outbreak. We told them that we would strictly ensure privacy. We used the close friends of the respondents to communicate for us. This is we have done to get the confidence of the community.

**Lalitha, Kerala**  
(Name Changed)

I was not simply a surveyor. I knew the community here and we all shared the same insecurity due to decline in our incomes. Yes, while these were personal questions, we shared similar situations.

**Hansa Ben, Gujarat**  
(Name Changed)



Many spoke of how the respondents were concerned about revealing their identity or intimate details related to their work and income. It was interesting to observe how the researchers engaged with and overcame these issues of privacy and confidentiality. What seems to have helped to break the ice and establish a comfortable rapport was the fact that all the researchers were themselves sex workers. And they also consciously evolved strategies of choosing and approaching respondents through known networks so that a basic degree of confidence and trust could be established. This was particularly important in the context of a community whose lives are largely shrouded in anonymity and who need to articulate these issues in ways that protect them even while making public the violence, exploitation and discrimination they face or while articulating their dreams of a better and just world.

For those who had apprehensions, the process was explained, and they were informed that their names would not be revealed giving them the confidence to go ahead with the survey. “We told them it won't cause any harm and we will keep the gopyam” (secrecy in Telugu) said Sujatha from AP.

Despite this they encountered resistance to some of the questions that obviously shocked the respondents. As for instance when Meena from Tamil Nadu asked them how many clients they had per day and whether they do lodge based or home-based sex work, some of the respondents felt bad and asked her “What kind of question is this??”

Being part of the community also ensured that the researchers had a fair idea of the average earnings since as one said “we were all in the same boat” and this increased the chances of the women being more open in their responses. The only problem seemed to be that many found it difficult to state what their exact income was given that work was so unstable in this period.

The questions were not difficult and I did not think that they violated anybody's privacy. It was important to get these details. But when earlier researchers had asked us personal questions, we had felt resentful....why do they want to know? But here we were asking our own people and so were happy that we were doing it ourselves. And sharing our experiences brought us closer to each other. We would ask a question and laugh with each other.

**Muktha, Karnataka**



Engaging with Expectations

In Andhra some of the peers felt that the questions related to earning could create problems. Not because it would violate privacy but because it would raise expectations that NNSW would come in with some kind of financial assistance. This was echoed by researchers in Gujarat.

These expectations were offset to some extent by ensuring that some emergency ration kits were given to all interviewees. As Kavitha from Tamil Nadu opined, there was no violation of ethics during the research since they not only identified problems like rental issues and debts but also intervened and resolved them to a large extent.

Difficulty in accessing street-based sex workers

By and large it appeared that it was difficult accessing the street-based sex workers in the period that the research was done since they were afraid of coming on the streets. As Bharathi P, supporter from Maharashtra said “We tried accessing them when they were at home but they could not talk since family was around. This was a challenge. We tried overcoming it in Pune but it was difficult. I don't know about the responses in other areas. In Jalgoan too we were unable to reach out to street-based sex workers.”



“The survey created expectation of getting 'something' 'some sahyog' /support because we did explain that this survey was being done to assess the impact of COVID-19. Especially because the adverse impact of COVID-19 was widely experienced by the community it created an expectation. This expectation was more visible amongst the older sex workers. For us this created a problem of how best to answer the question.”

Anjana Valand, Gujarat

Confirming this, Seema from Nagpur also said that almost all the ones spoken to were brothel based. Although they did notice that migrants from outside in the brothels like those from Gwalior and Chhattisgarh were reluctant to speak while the few street-based ones spoken to were more willing. Perhaps because their earnings were impacted more than those living in the brothels.

On the whole however there seems to have been a positive response to the survey since many researchers said that it provided a welcome opportunity for the sex workers to talk about the issues facing them at a moment when it seemed that all systems of support and solidarity had crumbled around them. And so even if a few had initial hesitations most opened their hearts and spoke in detail about their problems that included how they had to migrate from their home towns to another place for sex work; the advantages and disadvantages of being a sex worker etc. COVID-19 therefore seems to have created a heightened sense of vulnerability within which women were more willing to come out and speak about things they would have normally not shared publicly.



We had no problem asking these questions since we were talking to women we knew. Some of course asked if we would give them money to answer questions. There were expectations. But some were under tensions and were rude but would later apologise and talk. Earlier when we did surveys on HIV the women would run away from us saying oh they are coming to give medicines...this time they were more open to talk about their problems. And in the process we were also able to give them moral support and advice.

Uma, Karnataka

Perspective from supporters

While the supporters were by and large positive about the collection of the data there were some limitations that were detailed:

Some of the peers were not able to elicit answers on issues of economic impact or details about religion and caste as for instance from Parbani. In places like Nagpur the questionnaires had to be sent back since the economic data never came.

In some cases the peers themselves felt awkward to elicit information related to caste saying that we don't believe in it. They had to be oriented specially on why it was important to get this information since we needed to understand what the impact was on different castes.

Interviews by phone impacted on the quality of data obtained. In some cases the peers had left huge gaps in the questionnaire since they could not probe further on the phone. On the other hand in places where personal interviews were possible they were able to get better quality data.

Women were finding it difficult to give answers about loans since there was confusion about whether loans from friends /SHGs would constitute loan and therefore this might not have given a correct picture about the extent of loans taken. Unfortunately, this was realised only in the end after the data entry which was outsourced was completed. In some cases they were able to get back and collect the correct data but this was limited.



III. Revisiting the Questionnaire

Looking back at the questionnaire they had administered almost all the researchers felt that all the questions were necessary even if they did appear –on the face of it– to violate the privacy of women. While some of the researchers from Andhra Pradesh initially wondered why they should ask questions related to the amount of loans they had taken they came around to realising that discussing such issues openly would help the community take them forward through advocacy. Some of the researchers from Tamil Nadu felt that there were other issues brought up by the women during the interviews that could have been included in the questionnaire, such as violence by police and goons; domestic violence; issues regarding children; customer violence; decline in clients during lockdown and the need to explore alternative small-scale businesses to improve their incomes. Inclusion of these they felt would have helped to provide appropriate protection or support.

The researchers from Gujarat felt that the questions although framed with inputs from the community itself seemed to be focused more on urban areas and did not reflect the reality of rural sex workers. For instance the question asked about rent did not apply to sex workers in rural areas most of who live in huts often located on other people's land for which they do not pay any rent.



Umesh Chavan from Pune who interviewed transgender sex workers who were not able to earn either from sex work or “mangti” (alms) during the lockdown also found some difficulties in administrating the questionnaire. He conducted practice interviews with two transgender and one male sex worker and then started survey interviews with another group. As he said “Some questions were easy to understand and elicit answers but some questions were repetitive and complex. A few questions did not have sufficient options so I asked those in an open-ended format.”

There were some questions which we had difficulty understanding and in some cases there was resistance in sharing all the details.

There was some confusion regarding loans they took before and during the lockdown. If they had taken 30,000 before lockdown this got repeated and documented during the lockdown too. Expenses of children also seem to have increased which we could not clarify either through the supporters or the peers. The questionnaire asked for data that was both qualitative and quantitative and so it got a bit confusing.

**Bharti Shukla, Maharashtra**

For instance one question asked, “Did anyone help you financially?” Most of us thought of the question as support without attaching any pre-conditions. So our answer was no. Then there was another question that asked “Did you take a loan?” which we presumed was from banks. On revisiting the forms we realized that loan did not necessarily mean loan from a bank. Then it came out that several women had taken loans from friends and from money lenders, Dhakka Bank run by local person who provides loan at 5 percent etc. Others had taken loans from SHG group formed by Bandan Bank. COVID-19 created hurdles in repayment of interest and loans. The question on rent initially got a response that they did not pay any rent. Our visits however showed that most lived in kuccha houses in villages often on other people's land and while they do not pay rent, there were other ways in which they had to pay. Like offering free sexual services. The houses they lived in were dilapidated, with rain and winds often causing a tear in plastic sheets used as a roof. Getting that cover is costly. The question on 'other work', often fetched the answer of manual labour 'chutak mazdoori' but the earning question did not specify if it was daily wage or monthly wage.

**Rakhi, Gujarat**  
(Name Changed)

Overall it appeared that while the content of the questions was acceptable both to the researcher and the researched perhaps there could have been more clarity in their framing and more inclusive of the multiple realities of sex workers to elicit better quality information.

#### IV. Blurring Lines: Reflections of the researcher as the researched

Being part of the research exposed the peers to new ways of conducting surveys. However as most of them expressed they had done it as part of their job whereas in this instance it was a crisis they were going through themselves. Furthermore, as the researchers from Kerala said, they had always felt distanced from the surveys they had done earlier as they considered them part of bigger academic research but now after this experience, they have the confidence that they too can be part of such research. They also learnt new skills about being objective even while being part of a research in which they were both the researcher and the researched.

When we went to do the research many of the women were facing a lot of difficulties and I myself cried, looking at their situation. Especially one family of two sisters both of whom were positive and with positive kids. I still cry thinking of their plight of being unable to get any food or go to hospital. Before COVID-19 somehow women managed but during the lockdown and even after they was a lot of fear and they would not go out. In this context we explained to them the reason for the research and got their confidence. We also reassured them about how to handle themselves with safety. Wear mask, gloves etc and use protection. We also gave them masks. We did interviews personally in some accessible places and on the phone in others.

**Uma, Karnataka**



Being part of the community helped me as well as also put some limitation on responses from the transgenders and male sex workers. I struggled a bit on the study ethics, as I was strictly informed that I should insist that the respondent answer all the questions even though I know their background and issues in detail. I have learned how an ethical and correct study needs to be e conducted.

**Umesh Chavan, Pune**



Comparing this time with when they had been interviewed earlier some felt they too had spoken as openly and without inhibition about sex work in the way that the respondents here did, while many felt otherwise. Some like Kavitha from Tamil Nadu felt no difference in the way that she approached the study when she was either the researched earlier or was the researcher now. “Just like how I was interviewed by others before, I conducted this survey” she says.

Uma, Karnataka

I have spoken earlier in the media covering my face so as to not expose myself. They challenged me asking why we did this work and not coolie work and I had responded saying this is my work and it is my right. Yes, many researchers earlier did come to ask me about my work and I used to get angry or scared to answer them. I could see here that the women were not scared since they saw me as one of them.

When I was interviewed, I was hesitant and felt shy. I wondered why they were asking such questions. After seeing my respondents being fearless and open, I asked myself why I was not bold enough when I was a respondent.

Meena, Tamil Nadu

Not many people come to ask questions about our lives. When some do, they often do not know the full reality of our lives. So the questions sometimes anger us but sometimes it makes us laugh also!

Anjana Valand, Gujarat

I have given interviews long back, I used to be hesitant about whether they would blackmail or threaten me after the interview or publish my interview in the newspaper.

Sailaja, Tamil Nadu

Having been aware of their own inhibitions in the past it appears that the researchers this time, as fellow sex workers were able to put the respondents at ease and take them into confidence while questioning them and getting appropriate responses even while ensuring that they did not force any answers out of them.

This research was entirely different from others. Others are doing this research for their purposes. Most of them are doing for their academic purpose. But we respond because no one will speak for us. But this research is being done by us, for us. It was a great pleasure to do something for us. We can definitely say it is our thing. We belong to the sex worker community and we can know each other, the problems we are facing, the feelings we have.

Usha, Kerala  
(Name Changed)



This perhaps was possible since they were aware that this research was markedly different from those that they had been part of earlier – either as surveyors or the surveyed.

Yes, my approach was different. In general, we sex workers will not say everything to everybody. We hide half of our information and provide only half correct responses. But when I did the surveys, my peers were friendly, open, honest and had no fear while responding, they felt comfortable with me because I am one among them, and responded as though they were replying to a madam or colleague in their office.

Sailaja, Tamil Nadu

This is very different; I am doing independently and with my own sex workers. No boss is there while doing the survey. The approach is definitely more friendly and not in an uncomfortable atmosphere.

Radha Vyshnavi, Andhra Pradesh

But obviously being a sex worker doing research on and within the community also brought its own set of problems. As Potluri Devi, Secretary of NNSW, and the leader from AP who nurtured these peers said about Sujatha, one of the researchers, “Many gave short cut answers but she patiently did the surveys since she has a good understanding of the community. One community member drank and started abusing her. You take all our details for years and now you have come to do survey. Why are you asking us, why should we tell you...she asked. But Sujatha patiently handled such issues and managed to complete the survey.

## V.Reviewing Relevance and Impact of Research

All the researchers spoken to who had successfully completed their surveys felt that it left a very positive impact on them. Some felt that they understood their own community members better including the conflict of coming out to the streets to earn their livelihood and yet keep it a secret from their own families. Many felt happy that they had acquired new skills such as that of leadership, writing or engaging with diverse communities with more confidence and courage.

However the impact on the community is a little more complex since the research has obviously generated a lot of expectations along with cynicism too. In terms of taking this forward there is some scepticism about any positive response from the government. On the other hand, most of the researchers spoken to felt that NNSW and its partner organisations should now build on the bonds that have been created through the research and take up issues of entitlement and needs that have been expressed by the community. COVID-19 was an eye opener in terms of laying bare the extent of vulnerability of sex workers in an economic and health crisis. It also opened up the need even within the community to look at issues like savings and money management, alternative job opportunities to bolster incomes, ensuring entitlements like Aadhaar card, ration card, problems of homelessness etc as agendas for sex worker collectives, CBO, unions and support groups. One of the concrete outcomes of this study has been that NNSW has set up help desks to give information about various schemes that will help the women.



The survey has given sex workers the hope that we are supporting them. After this survey, if we are able to arrange entitlements like AADHAAR card, ration card etc., there will be more trust and cooperation from peers. Although our peers are in TI, they did not receive any support from NGO's/CBO's during the COVID-19 crisis. But since we helped our peers during the crisis, connected them with police, lawyers etc when needed, provided them with safety tips like informing peers about client locations and their contact numbers, precautions to be taken in public places etc the sex workers trust us and opened up about their issues without inhibition. The surveys have helped sex workers to speak up about their issues without fear. We can take this forward by helping peers with social entitlements and government welfare schemes for the homeless sex workers.

**Meena, Tamil Nadu**

At one level while bonds became stronger, as a community of sex workers we did not feel much would come out of this research if it was released to the government. The government is not on our side but we felt good that we as a team we would have something to tell the government about our difficulty when they come as they do to always ask for numbers and facts. So this time we hope to have a document that we can give them.

**Anjana Valand, Gujarat**

The findings of the research can be used as evidence for moving forward to access welfare activities and our rights. We only surveyed a random sample from each CBO. It can be used as a trend from there. COVID-19 impacted each sex worker differently even if they were part of the same CBO. Sex workers are earning much money when they are in work. They live their life happily with that income without thinking about their future. Only if there is a break in their earnings do they begin to feel insecure. COVID-19 outbreak is really an eye opener for the sex workers for how to manage their income. If we manage our money in a systematic way, we can easily face this such crisis in future, especially since we are getting older too.

**Sama, Kerala**  
(Name Changed)

It was a good experience for me, I feel I can do surveys easily in future, and my writing skills in Tamil have improved after this research experience. I must thank you for this opportunity.

**Meena, Tamil Nadu**

COVID-19 had clearly torn apart the daily life and world of the sex workers impacting it in fundamental ways. In this context the relevance and impact of the research was clear in the minds of the researchers. It not only enhanced their individual skills, but enhanced the credibility of their organisations, made the community more visible and the outcomes they hoped would have a positive impact on advocacy and policy level changes.

This was also echoed by the supporters who saw great changes in the peers who did the research which they felt would impact positively not only on the community but also the organisations they were part of. As Bharati S.R. supporter from Saheli, Pune summed up, “During the process the skill development of peers was very high – whether it was to probe, analyse and study. Community impact was also good since we did get some relief and therefore the credibility of organisations went up. Long term this research should definitely impact on the formulation of better disaster management strategies. It would also help in highlighting to the government that this work needs legal protection and therefore needs to be legalised as work.”

The next step could be to begin a centre for our peers to reach out to more sex workers in need; help them with social entitlements like ration card, community certificate, support for the homeless and those who are evicted by house owners by advocating with the tahsildar or the district collector.

Beema, Tamil Nadu



List of Researchers

● Tamilnadu

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Pothumani P  
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D Sujatha  
Padmavathi  
S Radhavaishnavi  
O Lakshmi  
Rayapaka Shyamala

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Mini Babu  
Mini Jacob  
Sharmila Devi  
Suja Ibrahim  
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Omakaramma  
Lakshmavva Pujar  
Latha uruf Yallamma Abigerei  
Manjula ST  
Shreeedevi  
Geetha M  
Shanthamma D R  
Savithakumari M C  
Shalavva Hanamanth Salamantapi  
Shobha  
Mattur Shanta Anand  
Mahananda  
Shridevi Gopla Dharmatti  
Lalitha V Kumar

● Gujrat

Rathwa Asha R  
Pallav Pandurang Lokhande  
Anjana N Valand  
Minaxi K Rohit  
Gajjar Chetan  
Uperia Kaushalyaben  
Amrutbhai  
Kajbanu Ramesh Koli

● Maharashtra, Aurangabad

Bapurao Ramhari vakle  
Maya Bhagwan Divekar  
Ruksana Altaf Beg

● Maharashtra, Parbhani

Arti Maroti Zodpe  
Meena A Dhapse  
Santosh Gandhare

● Maharashtra, Jalgaon

Bharati Sharad Patil  
Ashwini B.Suraywanshi  
Faridabee Raju Kazi  
Yasmin Salim Shaikh

● Maharashtra, Nagpur

Hemlata Lohave  
Seema Gajanan Sharma  
Dipali Samadhan Ingle

● Maharshtra, Pune

Renuka Shinde  
Umesh Chauhan

● Maharashtra, Sangli, Satara, Kolhapur

Amol Salunkhe  
Sujata Jadhav  
Amar Bhondave  
Amit Bhopade  
Raju Naik  
Kiran Deshmukh  
Kavita Mali  
Mahesh Manoji  
Jayashri Koli  
Renuka Kale  
Neonats Rai  
Amruta Sutar  
Jaydeep Ubale  
Afjal Shaikh  
Rahul Sakat  
Ravi Jadhav  
Samir Shaikh  
Umesh Rawal  
Noorie Shaikh  
Rajendra Patil  
Meerasaheb Kamble  
Mahadev Koli  
Rahul Jamdar  
Puja Kale  
Sanjay Yamgar  
Sudarshan Nigade  
Sanjay Desai  
Rajak Shaikh

