



Call Me Priya:
Empowering young women and girls in Tamil Nadu
through a film-based curriculum

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PRAXIS

THE FREEDOM FUND

Executive summary

The garment industry in Tamil Nadu, in the south of India, has a central role in local employment. However, local spinning mills, power looms and handloom units can be sites of **harassment and abuse** for their **young female workforce**, with some employees working in conditions of **bonded labour**. For the women and girls working in these sites of exploitation, it is difficult to demand safe and equitable working conditions. To address this, the Freedom Fund supported local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Tamil Nadu to deliver a Film-Based Curriculum (FBC) to local communities in order **to discuss issues** that girls face at home and in the workplace and **to develop common solutions** together.

Developed by Novo Film in close consultation with the Freedom Fund and local NGOs, the **“Call Me Priya”** Film-Based Curriculum was carried out for 17 sessions over 12 months and consisted of purpose-made videos mixed with participatory activities. The FBC focused on topics of **employment and exploitation**, including knowledge of basic worker rights; avoiding risky recruitment; addressing unsafe conditions in the mills; and accessing further education and training. The program also focused on topics of **self-worth and resilience**, such as self-awareness and self-esteem; ways to reduce and cope with psychological distress; making choices on the basis of personal beliefs; communication skills; and basic reproductive health awareness and health risks. At the time of writing, 11,000 girls and young women have participated in the FBC, with a further 14,000 adults and adolescent boys also participating in adapted versions of the FBC.

An evaluation by Praxis India of the FBC found that the course had a clear impact on the **knowledge, attitudes and propensity to take action** of female participants. The evaluation randomly sampled **630 participants at baseline and 639** at the end of the FBC, as well as collecting feedback from communities, and found attendees demonstrated **greater knowledge of wage entitlements** (from 19.2% to 48.4% of participants) and **attitudes shifting towards seeking gender-equitable employment** (36.8% increase) and **safer working conditions** (34.2% increase). 59.9% of participants were more likely to take action in the face of employer bullying and 36.8% were more likely to address sexual harassment in the workplace. Attendees also learned to recognise avenues for dealing with harassment, including informing peer networks and reporting to senior management. Parents and community member also reported a greater understanding of the hazardous conditions and exploitation in the mills.

The success of the “Call Me Priya” FBC reflects its effective targeting. The film was made locally in Tamil Nadu and depicts situations that both participants and their communities can relate to their own experiences. The FBC demonstrates the value of providing high quality, context specific interventions to support young women and girls in learning about their rights and inspire them to take action to secure equitable and safe working conditions. A full report is available at <https://freedomfund.org/newsroom/category/our-reports/>

Background

Context

In Tamil Nadu, spinning mills producing for domestic and international markets are major employers, with a large proportion of their workforce comprised of **young women and girls aged 14 to 20**. Many of these women and girls work in conditions of **bonded labour** and can be subject to **harassment, abuse and infringement of labour rights**. Women and girls from Dalit or other scheduled caste communities often have compounded risks of exploitation in the industry. To address these issues of **trafficking and bonded labour** in these communities, the Freedom Fund commissioned a Film Based Curriculum (FBC) and supported grassroots non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to deliver the intervention.

The “Call Me Priya” film-based curriculum

Titled “**Call Me Priya**”, the FBC was created with community-based groups in Tamil Nadu to promote discussions on labour exploitation, gender rights, social norms and challenges facing local communities. The FBC was initially served to local adolescent girl community groups with the goal of **promoting action to secure better working conditions** for local communities.

The FBC was developed using previously collected life stories of 308 current/former mill workers. Feedback from over 60 current/former mill workers across Tamil Nadu was then incorporated to refine the film narrative. The film and associated toolkit were further guided by human rights and development outreach experts based in Tamil Nadu, and piloted through partner NGOs. The toolkit was first developed for adolescent girls and later tailored to adult groups and adolescent boys’ groups. The toolkit consisted of 17 sessions with group activities and guided discussions that draw on topics raised in the film, where groups were encouraged to reflect on their own situation and set priorities for individual and group actions. Sessions took place over one year and varied in length, with some sessions requiring more than one meeting to complete.

Curriculum topics

- Self-awareness and self-esteem
- Communication skills
- Ways to reduce and cope with psychological distress
- Avoiding risky recruitment
- Addressing working conditions in the mills
- Knowledge of basic worker rights
- Basic reproductive health awareness and health risks
- Making choices on the basis of personal beliefs
- Accessing further education and training



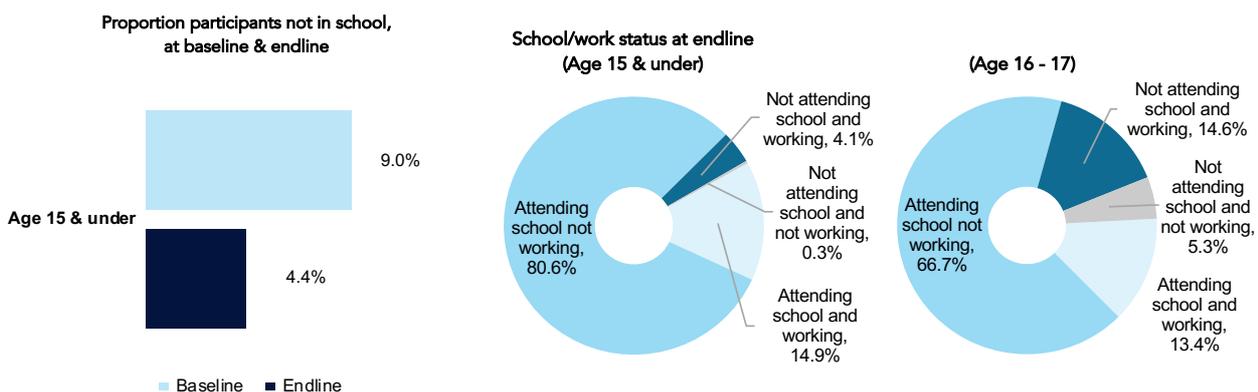
Evaluation

Methods

Praxis India carried out a pre- and post- evaluation to assess the impact of the FBC on adolescent girls' groups belonging to three NGOs in Dindigul, Tamil Nadu: Child Voice, Peace Trust and Serene Secular Social Service Society (SSSSS). Together these NGOs delivered the FBC to over 3,100 girls in 133 adolescent girl groups, from which 35 groups were selected at random for the evaluation. For each group, 18 members were randomly selected for interviews and surveys before commencement, and after completion, of the FBC. A total of 630 individual responses were gathered at baseline, versus 639 at endline, of which 128 respondents were not part of the baseline survey, but were demographically similar to baseline sample. Interviews and surveys were conducted in the Tamil language, and informed consent was sought at baseline and endline. The study ran from 2017 to 2018, all responses were anonymised and stored securely. For a full description of methodology and results, please see the full report available at <https://freedomfund.org/newsroom/category/our-reports/>

Profile of participants

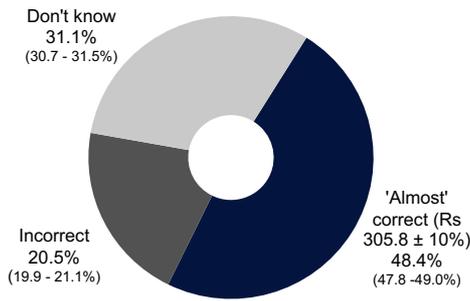
The median age of participants was 16 years across the 3 NGOs, and 44.0% of the adolescent girls were from scheduled caste/scheduled tribe (SC/ST) backgrounds (compared to the Tamil Nadu average of 23.5%). The majority of participants ended education at secondary level. At endline 80.0% of participants had attended all 17 sessions of the FBC. Between baseline and endline, the proportion of participants age 15 and under not attending school decreased from 9.0% to 4.4%.



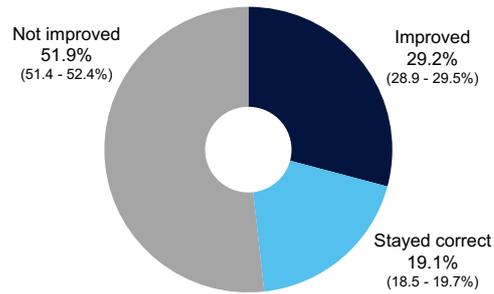
Key finding 1: gain in knowledge

The FBC provided information on workers' rights, including information on minimum wages. 48.4% of girls [95% Confidence Interval: 47.8 – 49.0%] at endline could recall the approximate amount of daily minimum wage for an apprentice including dearness allowance, with 29.2% [95% CI: 28.9 – 29.5%] adolescent girls showing improvement from baseline.

Knowledge of daily minimum wage including dearness allowance



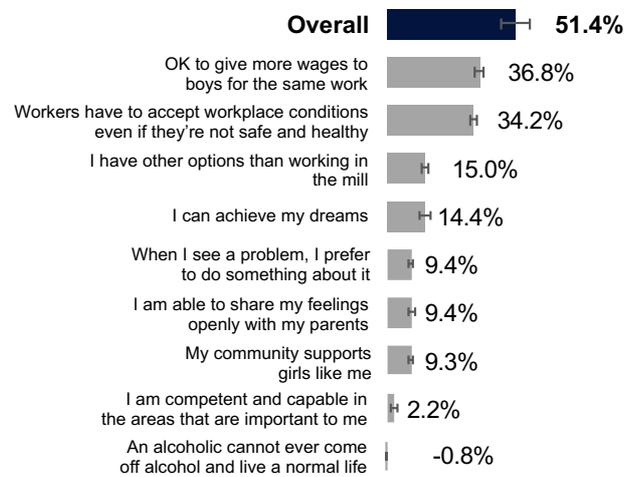
Change in knowledge between baseline & endline



Key finding 2: more gender-equitable attitudes

The curriculum promoted discussions on gender roles and working conditions. For the evaluation, participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a set of attitudinal statements at baseline and endline. Overall participants of the FBC have showed a 51.4% [95% CI: 45.3 – 57.5%] improvement in their attitudes to gender and social norms in line with the curriculum. At endline 62.0% of participants at endline strongly disagreed in boys getting more work wages for the same work and 45.7% strongly disagreed with working in unsafe and unhealthy work conditions.

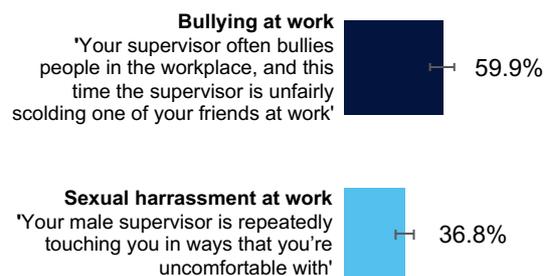
Improvements on attitudinal statements



Key finding 3: stronger propensity to take action

The curriculum also sought to inspire participants to take action against harassment and bullying in work. There was a 59.9% [95% CI: 52.8 – 67.0%] increase in the proportion of adolescent girls who would take a stronger form of action to help a friend who was being bullied by a mill supervisor at endline. There was also a 36.8% increase in proportion of participants who would take a stand against sexual harassment

Proportion of participants who showed an improvement to take stronger action between baseline & endline



Conclusion

The film-based curriculum has been successful in encouraging young women and girls to seek greater equity and security in their employment, and in warning communities of the risks of mill work. Call Me Priya shows the strength of context specific community interventions. The full report is available at: <https://freedomfund.org/newsroom/category/our-reports/>

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Cover photo is a scene from the Call Me Priya film-based curriculum / The Freedom Fund and Novo Media