

# DURGA INDIA



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## ANNUAL REPORT



# 2023-24

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# WHY DURGA?



**DURGA STRIVES TO CREATE A WORLD SAFE FOR EVERY WOMAN AND LETS HER BE.**

Stories of sexual assault and violence against women and children around the country continue to flood our news channels and social feeds daily.

Most women in India are consistently living in fear of potential or repeated harassment. This is reflected in the way a woman dresses, sits, talks, commutes, or converses.

Sadly, all these seemingly normal social interactions are predominantly influenced by negative experiences. And while these issues are often discussed, they are rarely followed with action.

**The Durga family reaches out to women makes her struggles its own.**

## **OUR MISSION**

Public Spaces are equally occupied by people of all intersectional identities for commute, leisure and other activities.

## **OUR VISION**

Enabling gender-just public spaces that are free from sexual harassment by building the capabilities of all actors who use these spaces through Theatre of the Oppressed.

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# ABOUT DURGA

We are a unique citizen's initiative to help young women and girls harness important life skills to deter crime.

Through our interventions, we help women and girls understand sexual harassment, their social environment and their response mechanism.

At Durga, we strive to identify problematic attitudes, stereotypes, and societal norms and address them from the grassroots level to ensure a collaborative effort within our society to create safe spaces for women.

**Durga strives to create a world that just lets her be.**

**We are:**

**Value Driven-** Durga's four values are Respect, Sensitivity, Trust and Empathy.

**Feminists-** Lack of the feminist lens in thinking penetrates patriarchy.

**Rights Based-** Empowering / equipping people to learn and claim their rights.

**Action Oriented-** We use theatre and interactive approaches towards interventions.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In 2023-2024, Durga dedicated itself to transforming public spaces and workplaces into safer, more inclusive environments for all. Through initiatives designed to empower marginalized women, engage male allies, and educate community members, Durga facilitated over 700 sessions, reaching women, men, and youth across various backgrounds. These programs focused on reducing harassment, fostering respect, and building resilience, with an emphasis on understanding and challenging the social norms that perpetuate gender inequality. This report details our efforts, achievements, and the lessons learned on this journey toward gender justice.

**“Empowering communities, transforming spaces, and championing gender equality—Durga’s 2023-2024 journey towards a safer, more inclusive world.”**



# PROGRAM OVERVIEW



## Empowering Women in Informal Sectors

Durga focused on providing women in informal work settings with the knowledge and tools needed to navigate their environments safely and confidently. This initiative reached over 500 women, including sanitation workers, domestic helpers, and street vendors, through sessions that covered:

- **Recognizing Workplace Harassment:** Women learned about the types of harassment prevalent in their workplaces and public spaces, along with strategies for responding safely.
- **Building Financial Confidence:** Many participants were introduced to financial literacy concepts, which helped them make informed decisions and gain independence.
- **Creating Support Networks:** Through shared experiences, women built connections that extended beyond the sessions, enabling ongoing support and community empowerment.

Participants like Seema, a domestic helper, shared how the sessions empowered her to stand up against unfair treatment in her workplace. Similarly, Geeta, a vendor, felt more equipped to address harassment in public spaces and was inspired to help other women in her community.



# PROGRAM OVERVIEW



## Strengthening Gender Awareness in Male Participants

Durga's work with male participants centered on breaking down gender stereotypes and fostering a culture of respect. We engaged over 200 men, including traffic police, bus conductors, and young men from vulnerable backgrounds, through experiential learning:

- **Exploring Gender Roles and Norms:** Sessions encouraged participants to reflect on how traditional roles limit both men and women, with discussions on emotional resilience and shared responsibility.
- **Bystander Training and Intervention:** Through theater and role-play, participants practiced scenarios of intervening in harassment situations, promoting a shift from passive to active bystander roles.
- **Legal Awareness and Responsibility:** Men learned about laws related to sexual harassment and were encouraged to become allies in promoting gender equality.

A traffic police participant named Ravi shared that he now feels more confident in addressing inappropriate behavior he witnesses, viewing himself as part of the solution. Similarly, young men reported changes in their understanding of respect and boundaries, demonstrating newfound support for women's safety.



# PROGRAM OVERVIEW



## Engaging Youth for Long-term Change

Durga also worked extensively with young people, especially boys from observation homes, to instill values of respect, empathy, and non-violence. This program engaged 382 youth through interactive sessions that addressed:

- **Gender Norms and Stereotypes:** Facilitators used stories and role-playing exercises to help participants explore how stereotypes shape their behavior and limit their potential.
- **Understanding Consent and Respect:** Youth were taught about boundaries, consent, and the importance of mutual respect in relationships.
- **Self-Reflection and Growth:** Participants engaged in exercises that encouraged self-awareness and goal setting, providing tools to help them make positive choices.

Youth participants like Amit, a young man from an observation home, spoke of his changed perspective on what it means to be a “strong” man, sharing how he has begun to challenge his friends when they perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes.



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# THE IMPACT

## Quantitative Impact:

### Diverse Community Reach and Engagement

- **Wide Demographic Reach:** Durga engaged 1,659 individuals across varied backgrounds—from street vendors to metro security staff—fostering safer, more inclusive communities.
- **Broad Age Range:** Participants spanned all ages, with a strong impact on the 30-40 age group, showcasing Durga's adaptability to diverse life experiences.

### Comprehensive Program for Real-World Challenges

- **Customized Learning for Empowerment:** Practical training covered active bystander intervention, financial independence, and beyond.
- **Bridging the Gap:** Strengthened connections between women workers and male supervisors, building a respectful, gender-sensitive work environment.

### Enduring Network of Support and Solidarity

- **Community Celebrations:** Facilitators were welcomed into participants' lives, celebrating weddings, birthdays, and festivals, reflecting trust and deep connection.
- **Continued Advocacy:** Participants formed lasting networks, supporting each other and celebrating milestones, reinforcing Durga's ongoing impact.



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# THE IMPACT

## Quantitative Impact:

### Addressing Complex Social Issues

- **Challenging Gender Norms:** Participants embraced shared responsibilities and mutual respect, shifting perspectives on traditional gender roles.
- **Legal Awareness and Workplace Rights:** Equipped with knowledge of legal rights, participants are empowered to advocate for safe, respectful spaces in both public and private spheres.

## Qualitative Impact:

### Participant Transformations:

- Women participants frequently reported newfound confidence, with many starting to advocate for their rights at home and work. Sita, a sanitation worker, shared how she feels better equipped to challenge harassment after participating in Durga's sessions.
- Male participants began to express an increased understanding of boundaries and respect. One participant, Mahesh, expressed his shift from passive observer to active ally, sharing that he has since intervened in public spaces to address inappropriate behavior.
- **Community Testimonials:** Feedback from community leaders indicates a positive shift in community dynamics, with participants advocating for safer environments in their neighborhoods and workplaces.



# “ CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

## Challenges:

- **Scheduling Constraints:** With programs operating across varied community settings, scheduling sessions required flexibility and adaptation, especially during local events and election periods.
- **Regulatory Barriers:** Securing permissions for topics like domestic violence sometimes led to delays, emphasizing the need for persistent outreach and community liaison efforts.

## Lessons Learned:

- **Importance of Flexibility:** Adjusting schedules based on community needs increased accessibility, making sessions more effective.
  - **Follow-up Support:** Continuing to provide resources and maintaining connections beyond the initial sessions proved crucial in sustaining the program's impact, allowing participants to reinforce their learning.
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# DARE



**ACTIVE, ENGAGED, SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS CITIZENS**

## **What is DARE ?**

A 21-days intervention is designed to engage with ordinary citizens who occupy public spaces for large parts of the day.

By instilling confidence and responsibility in them to become active bystanders, the assumption is that as active, engaged, and socially conscious citizens, they can step in to deter sexual harassment and will be better equipped to take that step for survivors.



# IMPACT STORY

Leelavathi is a street vendor, who we have been engaging with. She comes from an orthodox family, where she was constantly told that women need not work, and shouldn't either. However, she set up a small dairy booth when financial difficulties started to affect her life. It is unfortunate that as women, we innately identify with other women in situations of distress.

Given her own family background, Leelavati was no stranger to the sorts of discrimination and violence that women faced. It was her vigilance and strong willed nature that allowed our facilitators to go deeper in our engagements with her.

Our sessions began slowly, with small talk one day, and getting to know about her background and values, the next. Slowly, we began to explore topics such as identification of harassment, what harassment entailed, and how one could respond to situations of distress.

Shortly after our sessions concluded, Leelavathi shared with us what her newfound confidence had led her to do.

"One of my regular customers was a young girl, who was accompanied by a man everyday. I could sense the girl was uncomfortable around him, but due to my training, I knew how to identify this sense of discomfort, and provide support.

I spoke to the girl one day, and asked her if she was okay. I also assured her that I was a friendly face she could approach if something was wrong. Then, I provided her with the Durga helpline number, and I was assertive with the man who accompanied her, and told him that I was aware of his behavior, and on watch.

It was quite a journey to do this, and of course, I was hesitant. But through Durga's conversations, I knew I had a role to play. I hope this inspires other women like me to step up and take a stand for those who can't or are unable to."

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# TAKE A STEP



**THE ONLY WAY TO STOP VIOLENCE IS TO TAKE A STEP - HOWEVER SMALL IT IS!**

## **What is TAKE A STEP ?**

Take A Step is Durga's counselling service extended to all survivors of violence and abuse.

Durga works with survivors, step by step.

A range of pro bono services are offered at Durga; from counselling to legal aid as well as all the way case work.

**Our motto behind this initiative is:**

**The only way to stop violence is to Take A Step however small it is!**

## **What kind of cases do we handle?**

Domestic violence, Abuse- physical, sexual, emotional and financial, Dowry Harassment, Cyber Harassment such as stalking or bullying, Emotional Distress, IPV (Intimate Partner Violence) cases, POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) cases, Sexual Harassment at the workplace (POSH).

# IMPACT STORY

Our participants, of whom 20% are pourakarmikas, come from extremely vulnerable backgrounds with intersecting marginalities of caste, class, religion and age. For them, workplaces are not gated buildings, instead they are public spaces - roads, parks, footpaths and narrow lanes, which many people navigate on the daily. How does one ensure their safety in a place which is ever changing, where threat could be around the corner one day, and gone the next?

In our sessions with pourakarmikas, we stress on the following: i) the subtle and nuanced forms of harassment, ii) how to identify harassment, iii) workplace rights, and how to access them promptly, and iv) how they can become active bystanders and proactively deter harassment.

In our recent session, the facilitators conducted a session with BBMP pourakarmikas on empathy, which they resonated with, knowing that so many women they knew had encountered some form of violence.

When we resumed our sessions next week, a pourakarmika,

Munirathamma, narrated the following incident to our facilitators:

“I was in Gottigere, going about my daily tasks when I saw a woman in distress. She was surrounded by a group of men, who were uncomfortably close to her. I knew that something would happen if no one intervened. I yelled at the men as I waved my broomstick in hand. The men stood there, a bit surprised at the fact that I was making some noise about the issue. I think they saw that I was determined to cause a scene, so they retreated.

As soon as the men weren't in sight, my colleagues and I went to the woman to see if she was okay. She told us how she had fled her home to seek refuge from her husband, but found herself lost in the city, with no one to guide her. Her maternal family was in Bihar, but she was far from home. On hearing this, we felt it was best that we reach out to the woman's family and bring her to safety. We worked together on this, and made sure she got herself on a train that took her back home. If it hadn't been for our engagement with Durga, we don't know if we would have even realized that the woman was in danger in the first place. We are thankful to the facilitators for making us feel confident in our judgment and for boosting our self confidence.”

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# COMMUNITIES



**PLACING POWER IN THE HANDS OF THE PEOPLE!**

At Durga we work to equip people to take control over their own safety.

Interventions are identified assuming that open conversations on gender, stereotypes, power imbalance and safety will bring awareness and realization in them to identify and address safety issues and make their communities safe.

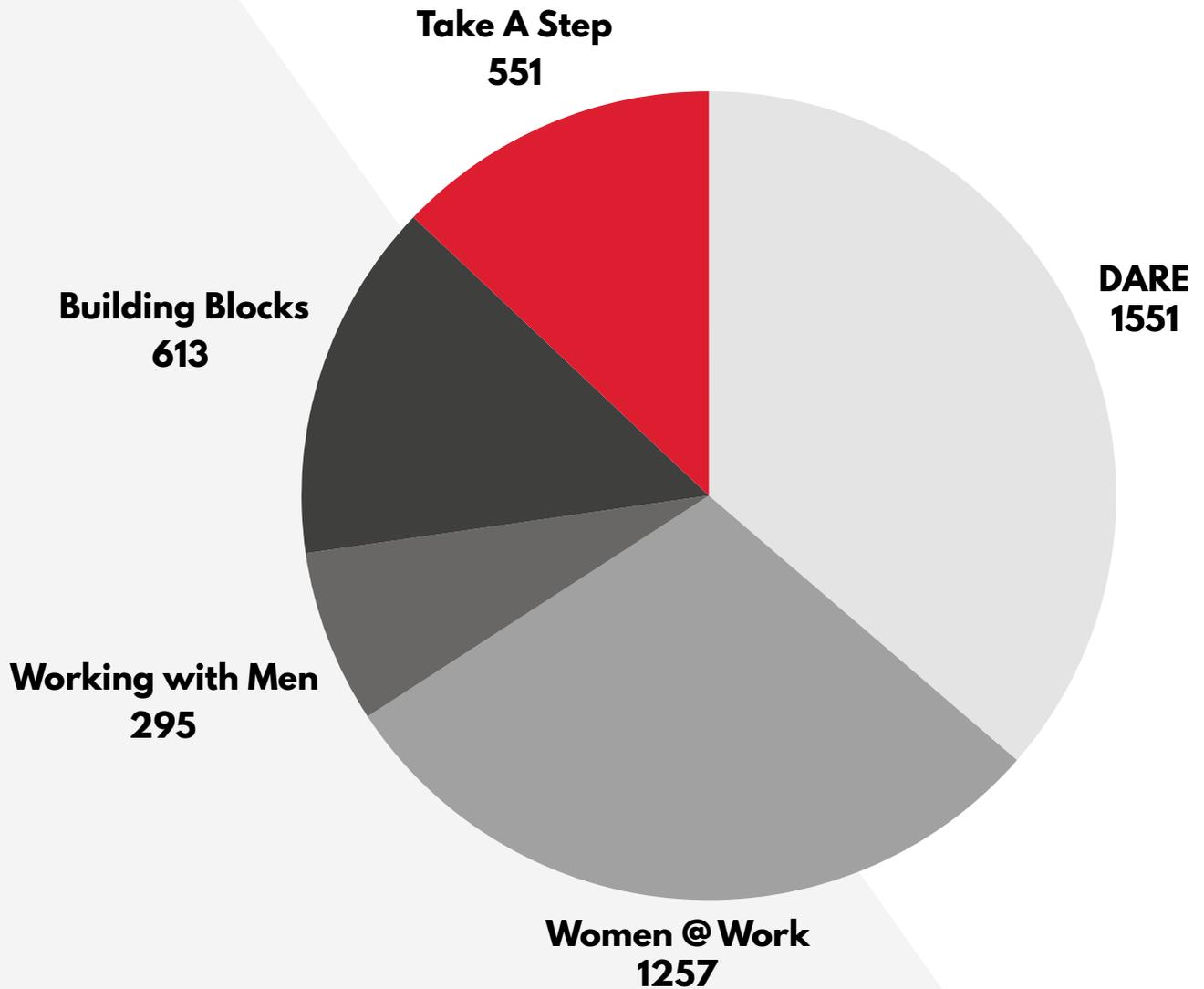
Here, We Are Working With:

- Pourakarmikas
- BMTC bus drivers, conductors, staff,
- Construction workers
- Domestic workers
- Garment factory workers
- Sex workers
- Asha and Anganwadi workers.





# PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED



# “ FUTURE GOALS AND STRATEGIC PLANS

## **Deepening Community Engagement:**

- Durga plans to establish Voice Labs to create consistent support structures, offering spaces where community members can access counseling, share experiences, and find resources to combat gender-based violence.

## **Expanded Male Engagement:**

- The Work with Men initiative will continue to evolve, with plans to create modules specifically for boys in schools and youth centers, fostering a culture of respect and non-violence from a young age.

## **Broadening the Impact of Empowerment Programs:**

- Durga aims to broaden its reach to include additional marginalized groups, such as migrant workers, to promote inclusive participation in creating safer public spaces. The goal is to empower community members to take active roles in advocating for safety and equality.

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# CONCLUSION

Durga's commitment to fostering gender-just spaces continues to evolve as we adapt our approaches to meet the needs of diverse community members. In collaboration with community leaders, youth, and dedicated facilitators, Durga has made substantial strides toward breaking down harmful norms and empowering individuals to challenge inequality. The achievements of this year reflect a shared journey toward a more equitable world, one where everyone has the right to feel safe and respected.

## Acknowledgments:

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the community members, facilitators, and participants whose dedication drives this work forward. Together, we are not only envisioning a more just society but actively building it.

