



2025-26 ANNUAL REPORT





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Who Are We?

I'm Every Woman Trust (Durga) was founded in 2013, with a vision of witnessing public spaces as equally occupied by people of all intersectional identities for commute, leisure and other activities. We co-create safe public spaces by building the capabilities of all actors who use these spaces so they can operationalise collective care to shift the responsibility of safety from the individual to the collective.

We do this through Theatre of the Oppressed methodology to foster care, solidarity and action while providing experiential support in deterring acts of sexual harassment, violence and gender-based discrimination.

We have collaborated with informal workers, government systems, private unions and educational institutions and work directly with various communities who face multiple vulnerabilities and ensure we leave them with power to address their issues in their own way.

Our GBV response is rooted in collective care and anti-carcerality, keeping people at the centre for safe public spaces.

Our Approach

Our approach is rooted in the principles of **Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)**, a participatory and embodied method, developed by Augusto Boal, to move beyond awareness towards collective action against gender-based violence.

Borrowing from feminist pedagogy (hooks, 1994 and Harraway, 1988), TO validates the partial and embodied nature of feminist knowing.

Through **feminist, experiential learning**, participants critically examine power and safety through an **intersectional lens**, rehearse **bystander intervention**, and build the confidence to act in situations of harm. These exercises surface internalised norms and reveal how fear, silence, and complicity can live in the body, but they also allow participants to rehearse courage, to test what intervention and care could look like. In this way, Durga transforms the abstract idea of bystander intervention and anti-carcerality into a lived, embodied practice of solidarity.



A Letter from the Founder

~ Priya Varadarajan

Safety I guess at its most definite, yet in its abstraction, is a feeling of belonging and abandon. We experience this feeling when we really don't worry about anything and can completely “just be”.

The focus through all of our work through the year is to get closer to this feeling of “abandon”. There are two ways I look at it. For me firstly, while through all of the work we do, will people experience being carefree with a sense of that abandon in public spaces? Maybe a few? Maybe in a few years? And secondly are we reimagining a workplace that is gradually building the same feeling among all of us as colleagues? One without the other will not be.

The last year has been one of reflection and reframing for us as a team. We have been reflecting on the results of our work with our communities, analysing the shifts for people who occupy public spaces differently, for different reasons and from different civic systems.

It's fascinating to think about the layers of power and social norms that require peeling while working with communities in transport departments vis-a-vis the municipality. And also the approach and responses we get when we work with women, as against our work with men. Reflections enable our reframing on the approach, our ideological standpoint and our outcomes. Dominant narratives get challenged and new ones get built in their place.

Our team has grown from 15 to 25 during the year. While in absolute terms it does not seem much however, to a small team of feminists, this addition is HUGE! This means we have more champions for our work, more communities we can collaborate with and more talent to work with. It also means more chatter in the office, more birthday cake to eat and just much more fun!

As an organisation that has been fully in Bangalore all these years, it is a proud moment for us that we moved to Mysore and Kolar with KSRTC. We have built significant partnerships with CSBC, Ford Foundation and J-Pal. All this means there is a lot more trust in our work, and importantly a lot more work to do! We feel that the wicked issue of gender-based violence needs many minds, many people and several organisations collaborating to solve it. It is time to question the dominant narrative and it is best to do this together!

~ Priya Varadarajan



"RAISE YOUR HAND. STOP HARASSMENT"



NO
HARASSMENT



ACTIVE BYSTANDER INTERVENTION



Active Bystander Intervention

Active bystanders are community members who are active agents of community safety. We engage people who spend over nine hours a day in public spaces—such as drivers, delivery partners, street vendors, municipality workers, and security staff—because they are uniquely positioned to witness and deter harassment. The programme enables to put power back in the hands of the people, in an attempt to also deviate the power that systems hold.

Participants are trained to recognise early signs of harassment, and encourage to directly and/or indirectly intervene, and support survivors in real time. Over time, these bystanders become community allies, dismantling the culture of silence and complicity and creating public spaces that are more caring, safer, equitable, and accountable.

Creating public spaces where communities look after each other, shifting the culture of public spaces from one of silence and complicity to one of accountability and solidarity.

Why collective care is a need to enable safe spaces

Intervening is not a neutral act. To step in, name harm, or disrupt violence is to challenge power, especially when that violence is normalised, trivialised, or dismissed as 'just how things are'. Silence is often mistaken for neutrality, but as feminist thinkers remind us, silence almost always sides with power (Ahmed, 2017). Bystanders, then, are never just witnesses. They are potential agents of social change.

Bystander intervention challenges a deeply embedded idea: that safety is an individual responsibility. We are told to protect ourselves, manage risk, and stay out of harm's way. In contrast, bystander action reframes safety as collective, relational, and political. When people intervene, through de-escalation, distraction, accompaniment, or support, they disrupt the conditions that allow harm to continue. This disruption matters because it directly contests hierarchies of gender, caste, class, religion, and sexuality that determine whose bodies are protected and whose are left exposed.

For too long, the burden of safety has been placed on those most at risk. Women, queer people, marginalised caste and religion people, working-class communities and people with disabilities are taught to adjust rather than resist: dress differently, avoid certain spaces, speak carefully, don't provoke. Violence is framed as a consequence of individual behaviour rather than a product of unequal systems (Crenshaw, 1991). Bystander intervention attempts to flip this script. It insists that responsibility does not lie with those experiencing harm alone, it belongs to everyone present.

What this looks like in practice is often unspectacular yet deeply powerful.

One evening around 8 pm in Bangalore, Krishnamma, a pourakarmika (wastepicker), noticed a young girl lying near a parked car. The girl had consumed alcohol and appeared disoriented. A group of five or six boys stood around her, saying they would take her to the hospital. Nothing overtly violent was happening but something felt wrong. Krishnamma trusted her instinct. She woke the girl, took her phone, and called her roommate. Within thirty minutes, the roommate arrived with friends and safely took the girl home. Enabling safety, she realised, is not about authority or strength; it's about attention and care.

Research backs this up. Studies on active bystander approaches show that when people are equipped to recognise risk and intervene safely, harassment decreases and collective accountability grows (Banyard, 2011). More importantly, intervention shifts how we understand violence. It is no longer a “private matter” between individuals, but a public concern that demands collective response.

Safety, then, is not simply the absence of harm. It is a democratic practice. Justice requires shared responsibility, especially in the face of structural violence (Young, 2000). This is particularly urgent in public spaces, where power operates through visibility and control. Who can move freely without fear? Who is watched, policed, or threatened? Intervening in everyday moments—catcalling, moral policing, communal harassment, intimidation—is a way of reclaiming public space as shared, rather than dominated.

Suresh, a street vendor who runs a medical store, experienced this one evening when he noticed a man verbally abusing a woman in a dark, unlit corner of the street. What alarmed him was not only the aggression, but the isolation. He hesitated, recognising a familiar pattern: people intervene quickly when two men argue, but look away when a man and a woman are involved, calling it “private.”

Despite his hesitation, Suresh stepped in. He approached the pair, and both insisted that it was a “private matter.” Suresh responded that even if it was private, there was no need for it to take place in the dark—especially when the woman was crying and sitting in a corner of the pavement. When the man became increasingly aggressive and attempted to physically harm both the woman and Suresh, he acted decisively. Suresh immediately sought support from nearby bystanders and the situation de-escalated, not because someone used force, but because care became collective.

Care is often dismissed as soft or apolitical. In reality, care is disruptive. It is a political ethic that exposes interdependence and the failures of institutions to protect those most vulnerable (Tronto, 1993). When practiced collectively, care breaks the isolation that violence depends on.

De-escalation is not passive. It requires awareness, emotional intelligence, and strategic action. Collective responses calling out harm together, accompanying someone home, offering support after, show that violence will not be met with silence.

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WOMEN AT WORK



Women at Work

The *Women at Work* (WAW) programme is dedicated to ensuring workplaces are safe, nurturing, and enabling for women and girls. Sexual harassment remains one of the most significant deterrents to women's participation in the workforce, particularly in the informal sector, where protections are weakest.

We work with flower vendors, wastepickers (pourakarmikas), domestic workers, etc. Through WAW, women gain the tools to understand how social systems enable violence and exclusion in the workplace.

They build awareness of **human rights and labour rights**, address **mental health challenges** stemming from unsafe environments, and learn to **critically examine power relations** to resist and dismantle harmful dynamics that exist at the intersections of gender, caste and labour. As a result, women not only learn how to address sexual harassment and gender-based violence but also how to hold their ground, demand accountability, and advocate for systemic change. Workplace safety is not just protection, it is the foundation of **economic justice and long-term financial security**.

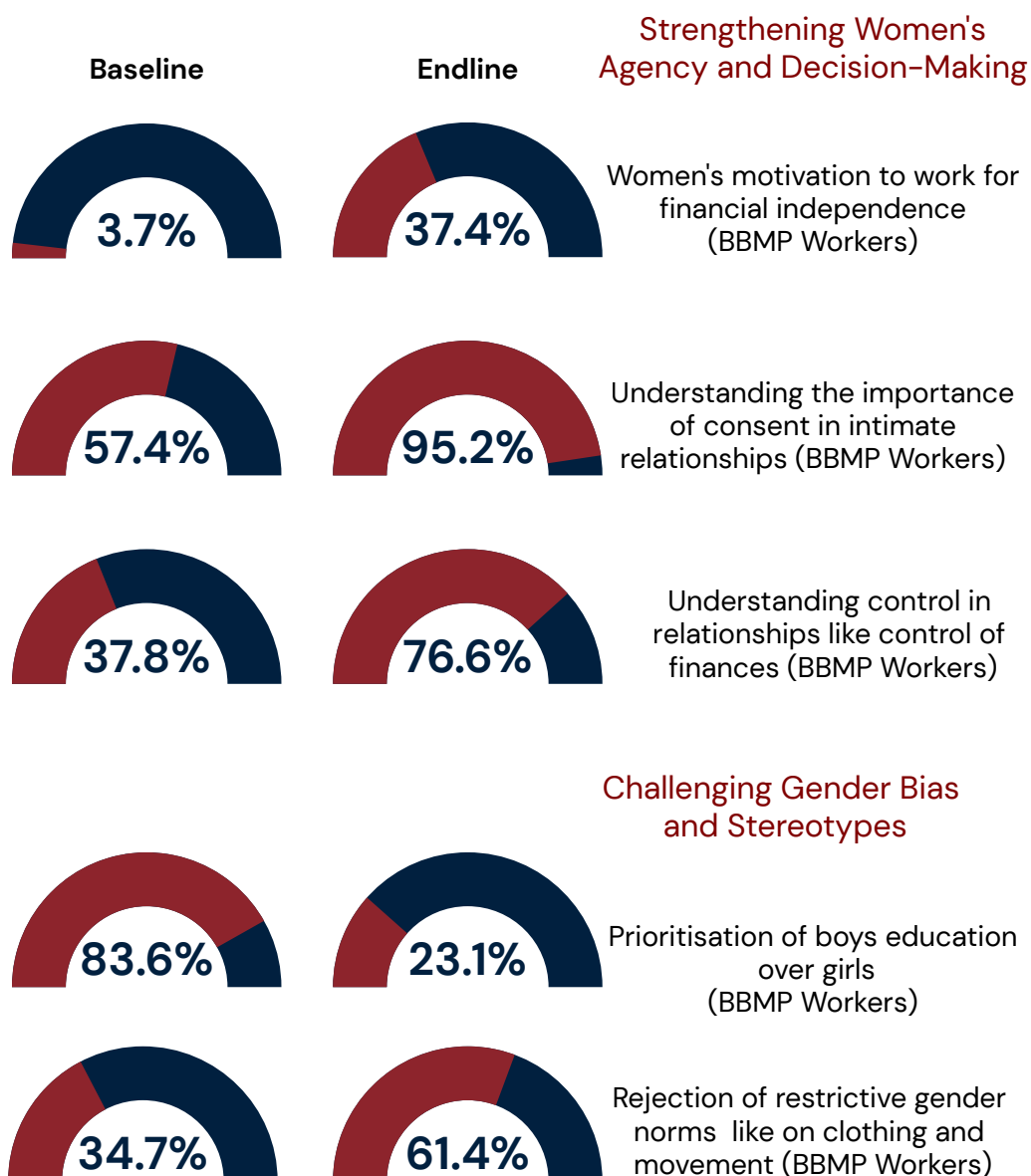
Centering safety, inclusion and rights at the centre of women's economic opportunity.

Impact

Outcome

Indicators

Women realise their potential through enhanced knowledge and skills to negotiate better in work and life, leading to greater confidence in decision-making.

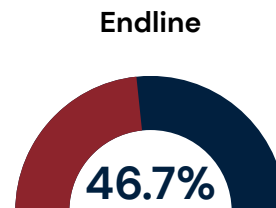
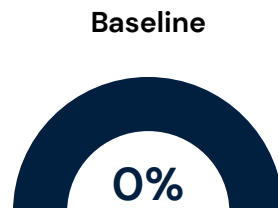


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Outcome

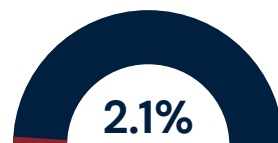
Indicators

Women identify sexual harassment, understand their legal rights and know the available reporting and support systems.



Improving Recognition of Sexual Harassment

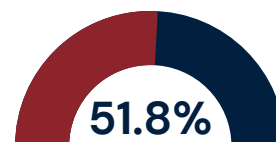
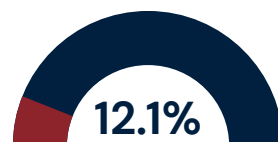
Understanding that unwanted physical contact is also sexual harassment (BBMP Workers)



Strengthening Legal Awareness

Legal awareness on action against workplace harassment including PoSH Act (BBMP Workers)

Women demonstrate the confidence to create safer workplaces and communities through active bystander action.



Strengthening Active Bystander Behaviour

Recognition of the responsibility to intervene in situations of harassment (BBMP Workers)

Building Confidence to Take Action

demonstration of action-oriented behaviour, showing readiness to intervene in situations of harassment, support women in public spaces and practise Active Bystander Action. (BBMP Workers)



Impact

Story of Change

One evening, while returning from her native place with her family, Venkatalakshmi noticed a young girl at the railway station. The girl looked frightened, lost, and unsure of what to do. Concerned, Venkatalakshmi approached her gently and asked if something was wrong. With teary eyes, the girl explained that she had forgotten her address and didn't know how to reach her parents.

Realising the seriousness of the situation, Venkatalakshmi and her family immediately stepped in to help. They first checked the train timings to the girl's native place, but the next train was only scheduled for the following day. Without hesitation, they took down her parents' phone number, spoke to them directly, and even let the girl speak with her parents to reassure them she was safe.

Since she could not travel that night, Venkatalakshmi brought the girl home. She was given food, clothes, and a place to rest. Venkatalakshmi and her family cared for her that night.

The next morning, Venkatalakshmi's son personally accompanied the girl to the railway station. He ensured she boarded the correct train and safely began her journey back home. The family also informed her parents, giving them peace of mind that their daughter was on her way.



WORK WITH MEN



Work with Men

The Work with Men program seeks to shift the responsibility for violence away from survivors and onto the environments and social structures that perpetuate it.

Public spaces, historically created by hegemonic, gendered, caste, and class-based power structures, remain inaccessible and unsafe for marginalised communities. By engaging men as allies and active bystanders, we challenge the harmful norms of masculinity, and dominance that underpin harassment and violence. Men are equipped to understand how intersectional identities shape dynamics, to take action as allies, and to challenge harmful gender norms. These men simply are first responders and not 'saviours' or 'heroes' of safety.

Our work began in public spaces, but today extends to institutions such as the BBMP, BMTC, Traffic Police, security guards, auto and cab drivers, delivery partners, childcare institutions, observation homes, and the Delhi Transport Corporation. Our deliberate, non-antagonistic approach fosters responsibility and solidarity, ensuring men become empowered allies and change-makers.

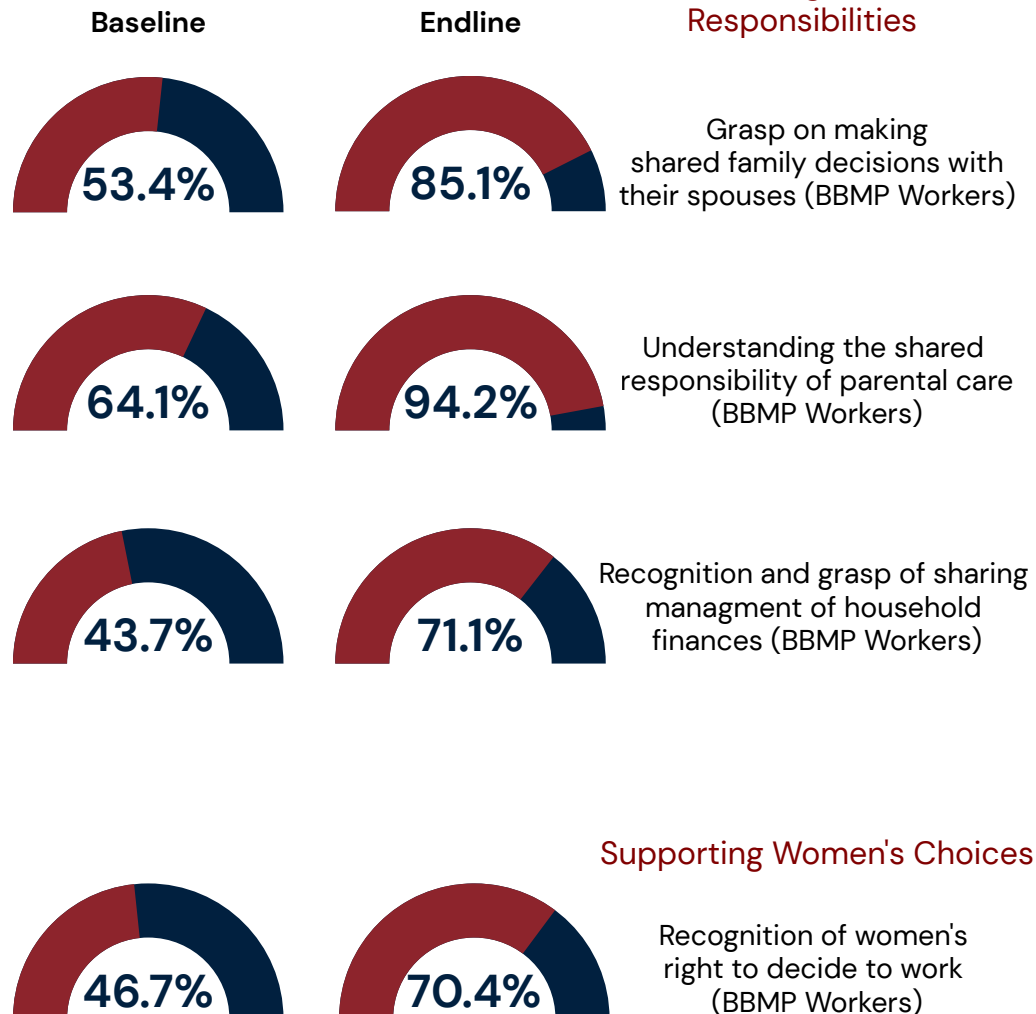
Building allyship and nurturing care in men while keeping intersectionality at the forefront for safer public spaces.

Impact

Outcome

Indicators

Promoting Shared Responsibilities



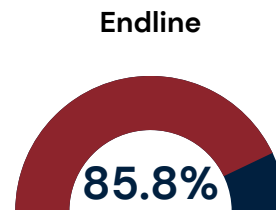
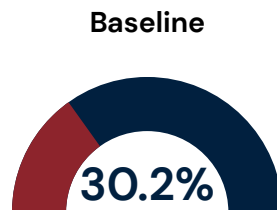
Men enhance their knowledge and skills to co-create safer public and work spaces for all.

Impact

Outcomes

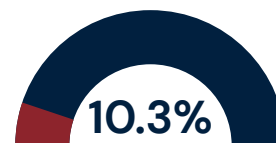
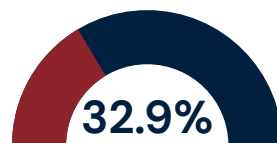
Indicators

Participants demonstrate increased awareness of sexual harassment, relevant laws and available support services.



Increasing Awareness of Laws and Support Services

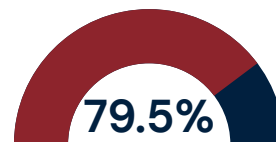
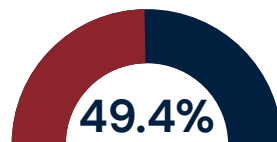
Knowledge of workplace sexual harassment laws including POSH Act (BMTc Workers)



Challenging Victim-Blaming Attitudes

Belief that women and girls should not step out after evening (Traffic Police)

Participants showed greater confidence and willingness to act as Active Bystanders, creating safer workplaces and public spaces through community allyship.



Creating More Inclusive Workplaces

Practise allyship by listening and providing spaces for women colleagues to express themselves (BBMP Workers)



Strengthening Active Bystander Practices

demonstration of action-oriented behaviour, showing readiness to intervene in situations of harassment, support women in public spaces and practise Active Bystander Action. (BBMP Workers)

Impact

Story of Change

Graduation Day marks the end of the learning journey for any cohort and it's also an opportunity for participants to be reflective.

In one such graduation, a bus conductor from BMTC – Depot 2 one participant stood up to share a message with his colleagues. He spoke about women who travel alone late at night, and the responsibility transport staff have in helping them feel safe.

Addressing his colleagues, he said: "If you ever have a woman passenger travelling alone late at night, and her stop is in a lonely street, we should make the effort to ensure she gets down at a spot she finds to be safer. A few extra minutes for us could really make a big difference to her. We are often the last people passengers see before reaching home and so, we should make that last part of their journey safe."

He urged his colleagues to make this a shared commitment amongst them. The discussion that followed highlighted how small acts of care and responsibility can strengthen passengers' trust in public transport.

This moment reflected that creating safer public spaces is not always about taking extraordinary action but about recognising everyday opportunities to support others.

Research Methodology

MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Across the community cohorts, participants improved their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, helping to create safer and more inclusive workplaces and public spaces. Findings are presented thematically to capture changes observed among men across diverse community contexts. While common assessment questions were used, differences in participants' socio-economic, educational social backgrounds and work roles make it more appropriate to present findings as contextual evidence of change rather than as a combined overall score.

STUDY DESIGN

The programme adopted a **mixed-method** Monitoring & Evaluation framework combining quantitative pre-post assessment with qualitative KAP-based analysis to measure shifts in gender norms, power relations, consent awareness, sexual harassment understanding, and active bystander behaviour.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY



To measure increase in safe active bystander behaviours in public places



To assess changes in Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) related to consent, sexual harassment, power dynamics, and active bystander behaviour following the intervention.

MIXED-METHODS EVALUATION APPROACH

Quantitative Assessment

Method: Structured baseline and endline questionnaires

Analysis approach: Percentage comparison and shift analysis between baseline and endline responses

Qualitative Assessment KAP (Knowledge, Attitude, Practice)

Each dialogue was understood as

Knowledge: conceptual understanding

Attitude: value orientation and belief shifts

Practice: behavioural expression or intent to act

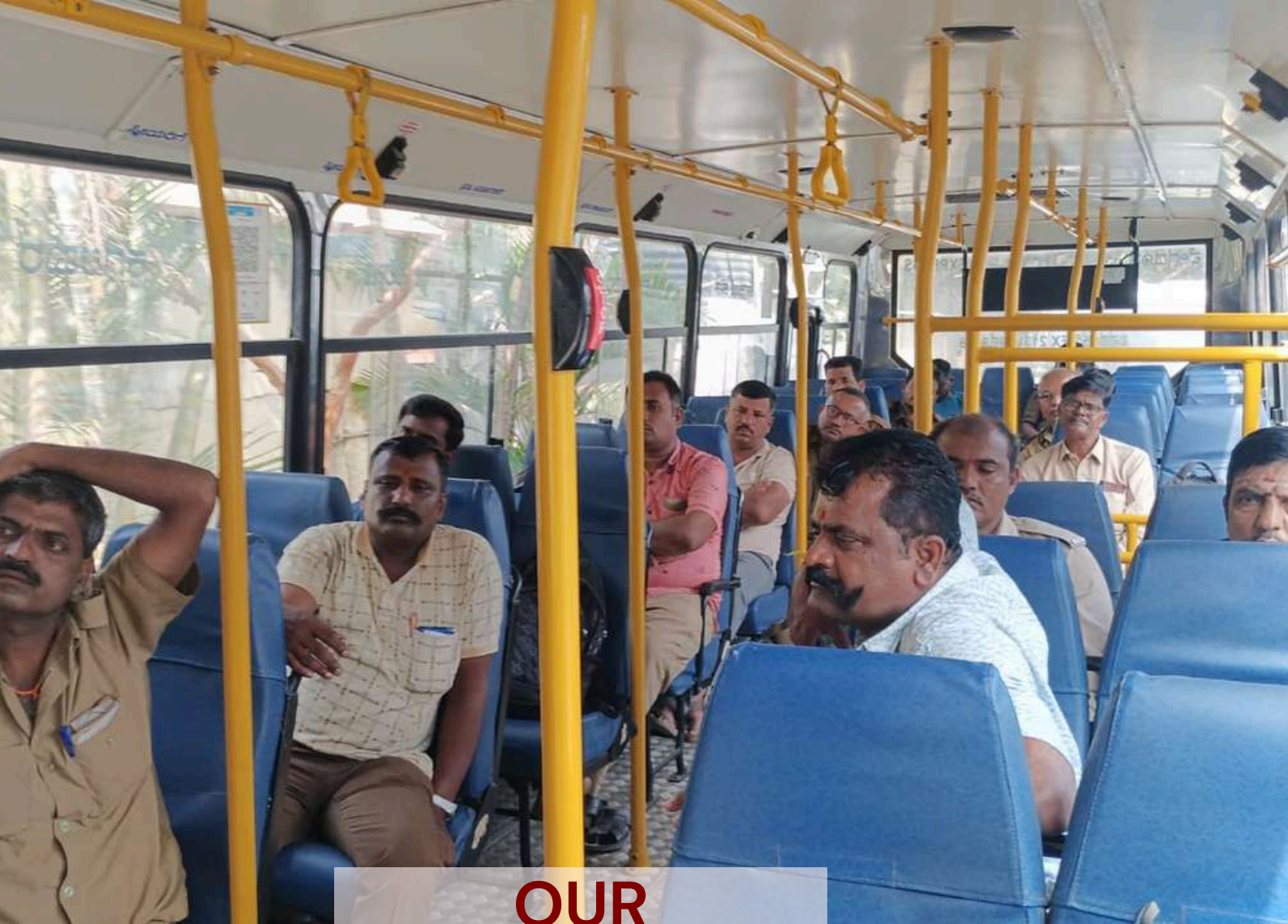
The responses were aggregated and converted into percentage scores

Data Collection and Management Tools

- KoBo tool, in-depth interviews and structured facilitator observation notes to capture thematic reflections and behavioural shifts.
- Microsoft Excel and Google Drive to organise cohort-wise with restricted access to maintain confidentiality and ethical compliance.
- Microsoft Excel was used for quantitative analysis

Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.
- Participation was voluntary and data was used solely for programme evaluation and learning purposes.
- Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained during documentation and reporting.



OUR INITIATIVES



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.

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).

This year we spent 1029 hours in supporting survivors of various forms of gender-based violence.

Mental Health sessions for BBMP women workers

Apart from counselling, we held 25 sessions on mental health for a total of 491 participants. These sessions cover self-care, caring for others, conversations around leisure, etc.

Panic Alarms

Our attempt with the panic alarm in buses in 2016, went on to be a policy in 2019 by MoRTH. It helped us make a point that safety for people in public transport was not their own responsibility, but one that needs to be addressed collectively by the passengers and importantly by the transport department themselves. Our version of this alarm was also making an important point – that collective care is more enabling to restorative justice. That Active Bystander Action in buses will mean that there are no victims of apathy or violence.

Today, while 10 cities adopted the panic alarm, millions of moneies have been invested in its infratsurcture, a city like Bangalore has 5000 plus buses with these alarms – yet no one knows it! So, no one uses it!

To resurrect this idea of care in buses, we're using the panic alarms in buses to be the trigger for people to recognise harm in buses to act. Through messaging, awareness campainings, posters, collateral and bus staff trainings as front line responders. This is being done through people-centric behaviour shift designs being built with the **Centre for Social Behaviour Change at Ashoka University.**

We are keen that Bystander Action through evidence, becomes a policy. Towards this, we have partnerd with **J-Pal** to help with an RCT to collect data on multple dimensions that backs our hypothesis that Care is a core piece of infrastructure to resolution and restoration.

Engagement with Institutions

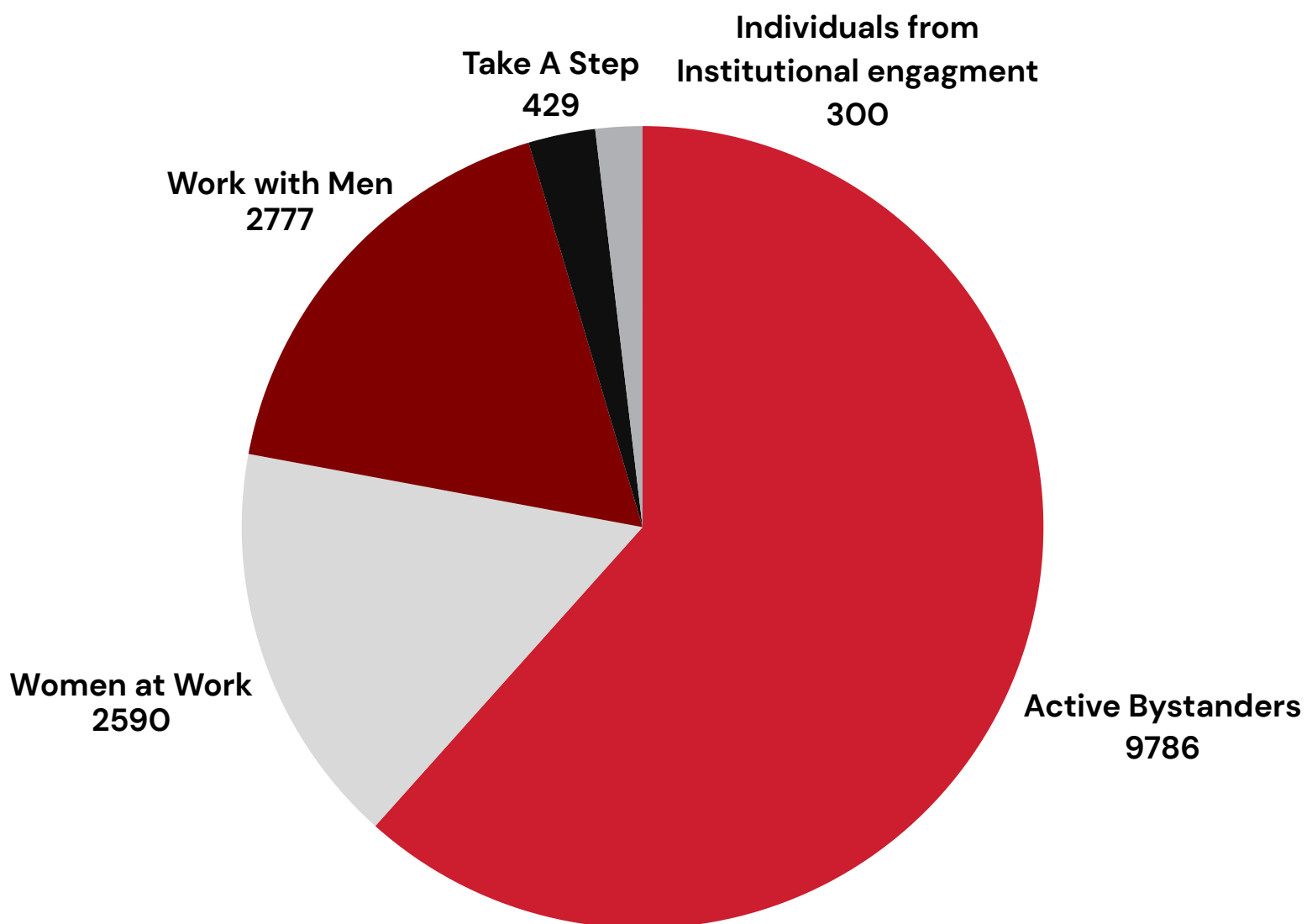
We realise that the issue we work with is extremely complex. It is to do with safety in public spaces for everyone, it is to do with accessibility and inclusion for all. Gender and the other intersectional identities that people carry in these spaces nuances the experience – who is safe, who has the right to be safe and who matters!

We are very cognisant that while our programmes primarily focus on the most marginalised communities who use public spaces, it does not want to burden them with its responsibility.

As a result, we consciously work on the caste and class dynamics that play out in public spaces and try meticulously to shift power. This is done through our work with large institutional transport providers like Uber, private transport providers for IT and commercial conglomerates like Movensync and with employees of large and small corporates. **Patriarchy, caste, capitalism and structural inequalities are to be addressed at power centres much more than at power receivers.**

This year, we worked with about 10 such organisations reaching out to over 250 people. Our work with them is on enabling a better understanding of power, both individual and structural power that they wield intertwined with complexities of gender, body purity and therefore how different people in their organisations and spaces experience harassment differently.

Participants Engaged



Programme Highlights

Expanded our reach to build safer and more inclusive communities

Engaged **5,367 individuals** through gender-transformative programmes, including **2,777 men and boys** and **2,590 women**, strengthening shared responsibility for creating safer public and community spaces.

Received recognition for advancing safer mobility

We received the **Mobility Award at the MoveInSync Symposium** for our work on the intersection of safety, mobility and justice.

Expanded Active Bystander interventions across public transport

Scaled the Active Bystander programme beyond urban transport into **KSRTC's-Kolar, inter-city transport system**, equipping drivers, conductors, and frontline staff with practical skills to prevent and respond to harassment while promoting safer journeys for passengers.

Expanded our partnership with Uber

Conducted a commuter survey to understand safety experiences and perceptions, facilitated Focus Group Discussions with women auto and cab drivers to amplify their lived experiences, and developed awareness videos to promote respectful behaviour and safer mobility.

Integrated safety messaging to strengthen public awareness.

In collaboration with **Tata Electronics and KSRTC- Kolar**, implemented safety messaging across **100 buses, 3 bus stations**, embedding everyday reminders that encourage respectful interactions and active bystander behaviour.

Strengthened evidence-based programming

Integrated **baseline-endline assessments, Knowledge-Attitude-Practice (KAP) analysis, focus group discussions, and participant reflections** to generate evidence, improve programme quality, and inform future interventions.



THE TEAM IN FOCUS



Highlights from the team

Team Retreat

As a team, we came together through two organisation-wide retreats. The first retreat focused on strategic planning, helping individual teams align their work with the organisation's long-term vision. The second retreat, our first out-of-state retreat, gave us the opportunity to pause, reflect and connect with one another beyond our roles and designations. It helped us build stronger relationships as people, making us an even stronger team.

Nurturing Talent

This year also marked important milestones in recognising and nurturing internal talent. By the end of the financial year, Pushpa M and Likhitha R were promoted to Programme Coordinators, recognising their sustained contribution and leadership. These milestones reflect our belief in creating meaningful growth opportunities within the organisation.

Durga turns 13!

The Durga birthday week, held in the last week of March, was spent with reflection. We stepped away from fieldwork to spend time together as a team—reviewing our journey, thinking through strategy, and discussing where we want to go next. These conversations allowed us to connect more deeply with each other and with the purpose that anchors our work. Durga Week was also a moment of celebration. We took time to relax, reflect, and celebrate Durga's birthday together, honouring the spirit of the organisation while looking ahead to the next chapter.

Building a Better Workplace

We were certified as a Great Place to Work® for the 4th consecutive year. We also took a few important steps towards strengthening the support we provide to our team. We introduced health and accident insurance for all employees, moved to salary bank accounts to make payroll smoother, and rolled out new leave policies, including No Labels Leave and Menstrual Leave. These changes were part of our effort to create an inclusive, thoughtful and responsive workplace.

Strengthening Capabilities

Our commitment to learning continued through exposure visits, retreats hosted by partner organisations and certification courses that enabled team members to strengthen both technical and leadership capabilities. Alongside individual growth, we also invested in building stronger collaboration across teams, creating more opportunities for cross-functional planning and shared ownership.

Learning Huddles

Learning is key to the culture at Durga. We spent an hour and a half almost every week this year dedicated to learning. Every week a team member would bring a topic of conversation they were passionate or curious about and bring it to the rest of the team for these huddles. From looking at coffee plantations and women's labour to analysing misogyny in films to building team morale, we explored so much!

Partners



**Ford
Foundation**

CGI



Highlights from partnerships

Secured a three-year partnership with the Ford Foundation

This marked a significant milestone in our journey. Building on our work to make **intra-city public transport** safer through our partnership with **BMTC**, this support also enables us to expand our efforts to **inter-city public transport**, deepening our work across the mobility ecosystem.



Tata Electronics x KSRTC

Expanded our geographic footprint by beginning work in **Kolar** in partnership with **KSRTC**, made possible through the support of **Tata Electronics**, enabling us to take our programmes to a new district.



Durga in Mysore

Extended our community engagement to **Mysore** through our partnership with **Hasiru Dala**, bringing our programmes to waste picker communities and expanding our reach beyond Bengaluru.



Governance Board



Priya Varadarajan
Managing Trustee



Neelima Karath
Trustee



Ramya Sundararajan
Trustee



Shanthi Varadarajan
Trustee



Uma Sudhindra
Trustee

Leadership Team

Our Leadership Team leads the day-to-day work of Durga. Each person brings their own expertise which enables the work we do.



Priya Varadarajan

Founder and CEO



Thejaswini H

Senior Programme Coordinator
Work with Men



Monika Rajashekar

Operations Lead



Rajalakshmi

Outcomes and Learnings Lead



Sumathi Raj

Programme Coordinator
Women at Work

Get in the bus!

A note on next steps

We dream of a city where people don't need courage to step outside, where safety is woven into everyday interactions, public systems respond with care, and ordinary people make extraordinary choices to stand up for one another.

Towards this, we're at a moment where there is hope, possibility, partnerships that can bring meaningful change – a lot that can and therefore a LOT for us to do! Over the years, we've built our work across Bangalore's public spaces, with public and private transport, streets, communities, institutions, and city systems. Today, that work is expanding. Through our partnership with KSRTC, we're extending our work to Mysore, Mandya, Mulbagal, Kolar, and other parts of Karnataka, creating opportunities to learn from and influence mobility systems across the state. At the same time, we are deepening our work in Bangalore by expanding into bus terminals, complementing our existing work with streets, private transport, and municipalities.

We've also recently co-founded a Collaborative – **Namma Bengaluru, Nammellaradu – Our Bangalore** belongs to all of us, a blueprint of how various interventions will lead to safe and accessible public space. This will help us co-learn with a lot of practitioners from across the sector, build with them and learn through and through for experiencing a better city.

We're also starting our pilot for the **RCT with J-Pal and CSBC** later in 2026 and will be collecting a lot of evidence on how people perceive the presence of positive active bystanders – where community action comes from care and not question.

New partnerships, new public spaces, new geographies. – that's the plan! This is an issue that needed solutioning as of yesterday – therefore we are on full throttle to keep going! **Do you want to get into the bus?**