

POLICY BRIEF

Gender Assessment in Hydropower, Road and Bridge Construction Sites in Bhutan

Key Indicators, Findings and Recommendations



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Construction is a male-dominated industry and a major challenge to women's equal opportunities. In addition to a considerable disparity in the participation of men and women in construction projects, women face a multitude of difficulties and barriers while choosing a career in construction industry or working in it. Women are victims of sexual harassment, unfair treatment, and they lack a safe and hygienic working environment. With the ever-increasing number of non-Bhutanese male workers in the project sites, the likelihood of exacerbating the risk of sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation of female workers and women in the vicinity of the project sites is high.

The Research

The main objective of the assessment is to create a better understanding of the nature and magnitude of gender-specific issues and challenges in the hydropower, road, and construction sites.

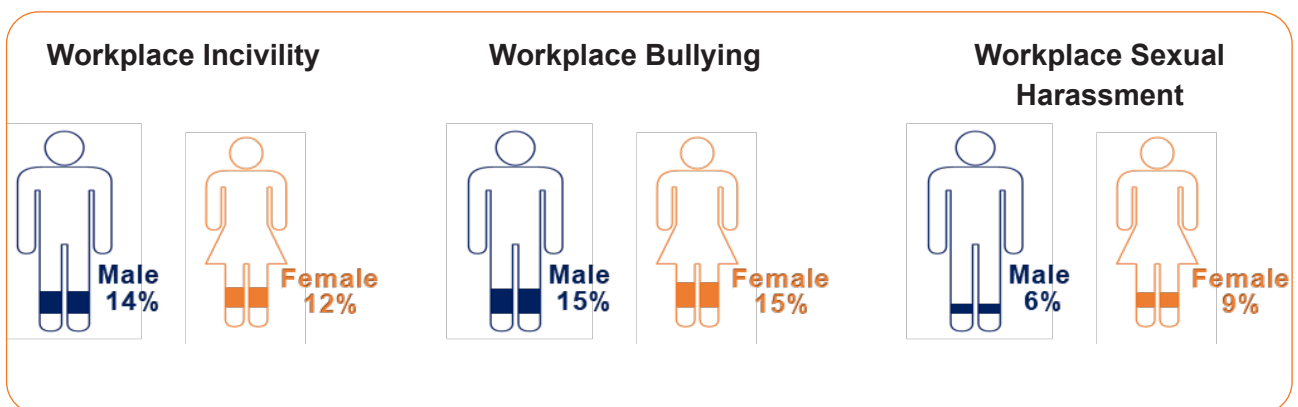
This assessment was carried out using a Concurrent Triangulation Design of Mixed-Method Research (MMR). Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently in one phase, analysed separately, and the findings were synthesised to for a final report.

The sample sites included four major hydropower construction sites (Punatsangchu Hydropower Project Authority I, Punatsangchu Hydropower Project Authority II, Kholongchhu Hydro Energy Limited and Tangsibji Hydro Energy Limited) three road construction sites (Thimphu Department of Roads, Lobeyasa Department of Roads, and Memelakha Road Improvement Site) and one bridge construction site (Pangrizampa Bridge Construction Site).

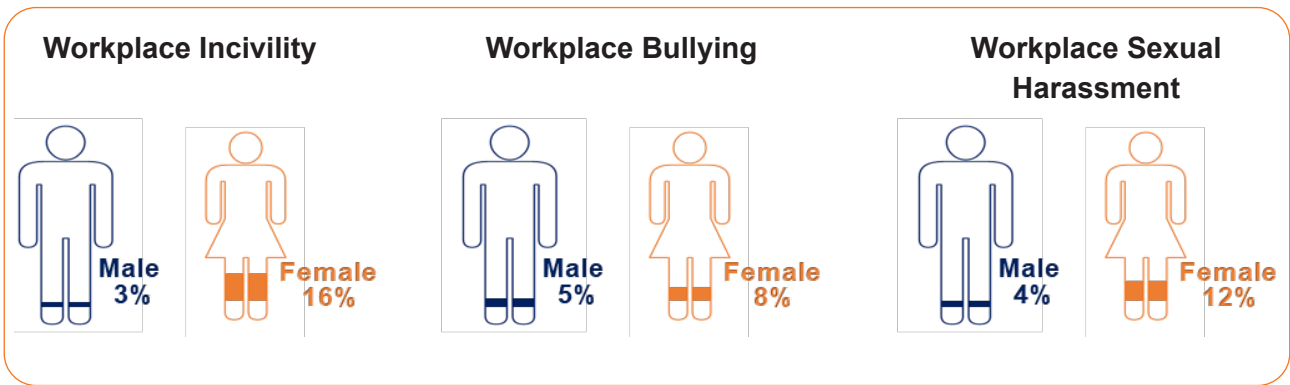
A total sample of 1,310 employees and managers from the respective sample sites (hydropower projects: 1,126; road construction projects: 143; and bridge construction projects: 41) and a total of 248 women and girls living in the vicinity of the sample sites were interviewed from 14 February 2022 to 31 May 2022.

Key Indicators

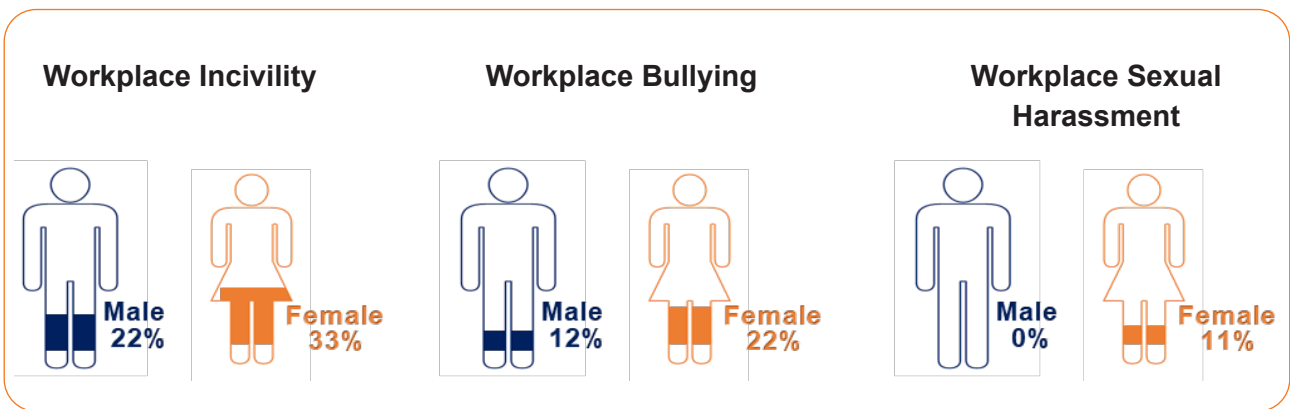
Workplace Gender-Based Violence



Infographic 1: Prevalence of gender-based violence among women and men in hydropower construction sites (n=1126: women 379; men 747)



Infographic 2: Prevalence of gender-based violence among women and men in road construction sites (n=143: women 25; men 118)



Infographic 3: Prevalence of gender-based violence among women and men in bridge construction sites (n=41: women 9; men 32)

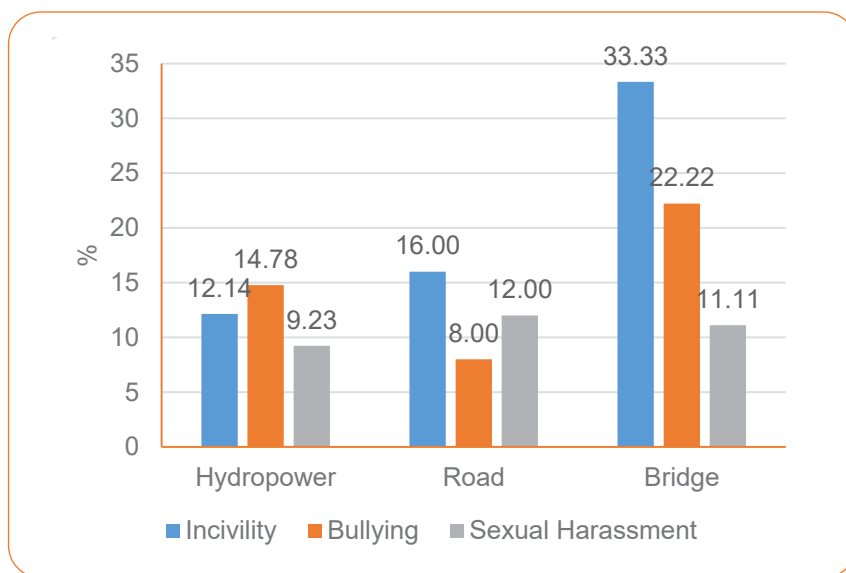


Figure 4 The proportions of women who experienced workplace incivility, bullying and sexual harassment in hydropower, road and bridge construction sites

Reporting and Responding

Workplace Incivility: Out of 147 respondents from hydropower construction sites (46 women and 101 men) who experienced workplace incivility, 20.41% (10 women and 20 men) reported the incident to the concerned individual or authority. Of the seven respondents from road construction sites (four women and three men) who experienced, 14.29% (one man) reported the incident to the concerned authority. Of 10 respondents (three women and seven men) who experienced workplace incivility in bridge construction sites, 30.00% (three men) reported the incident to the concerned individual or authority.

Workplace Bullying: Of the 170 respondents (56 women and 114 men) from hydropower construction sites who experienced workplace bullying, 20.59% (10 women and 25 men) reported the incident to the concerned authority. From eight respondents (two women and six men) from road construction sites who experienced workplace bullying, 25.00% (one woman and one man) reported the incidents to the concerned authority. From 6 respondents (two women and four men) who experienced workplace bullying in bridge construction sites, 33.33% (one woman and one man) reported the incident to the concerned authority.

Workplace Sexual Harassment: From 81 respondents (35 women and 46 men) from hydropower construction sites who experienced workplace sexual harassment, 10.20% (Two women and three men) of the respondents who went through sexual harassment incidences reported the matter with the authorities. From eight respondents (three women and five men) in road construction sites who experienced workplace sexual harassment, none took up the matter with the authorities. There was only one woman from the bridge construction site who experienced workplace sexual harassment, and she did not take up the matter with the authorities.

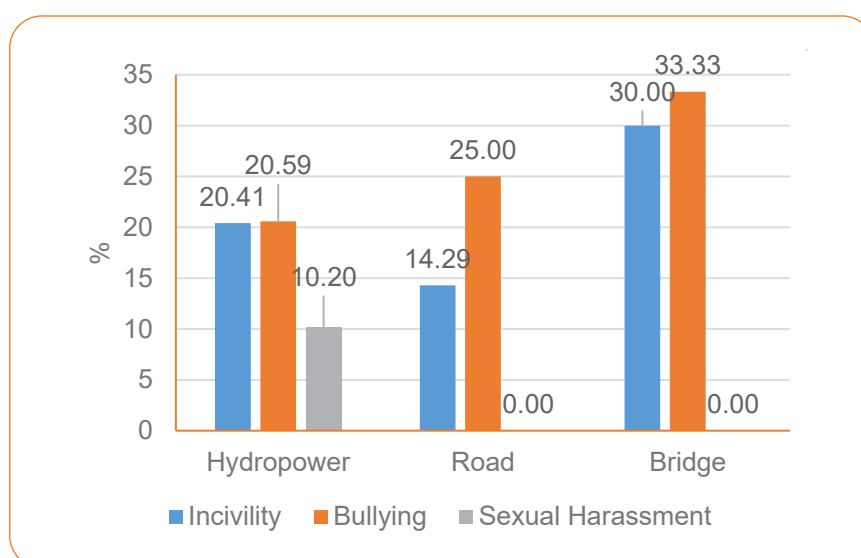


Figure 5 The proportions of the survivors of workplace incivility, bullying and sexual harassment who filed a complaint with the authorities of hydropower, road and bridge construction sites

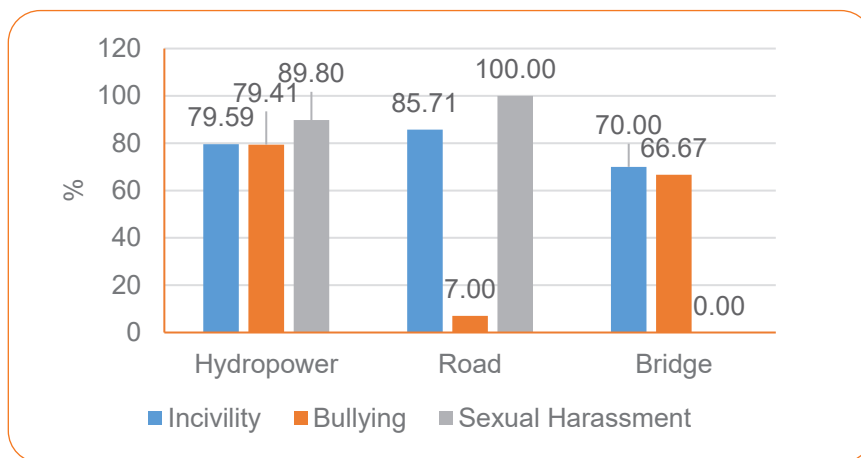
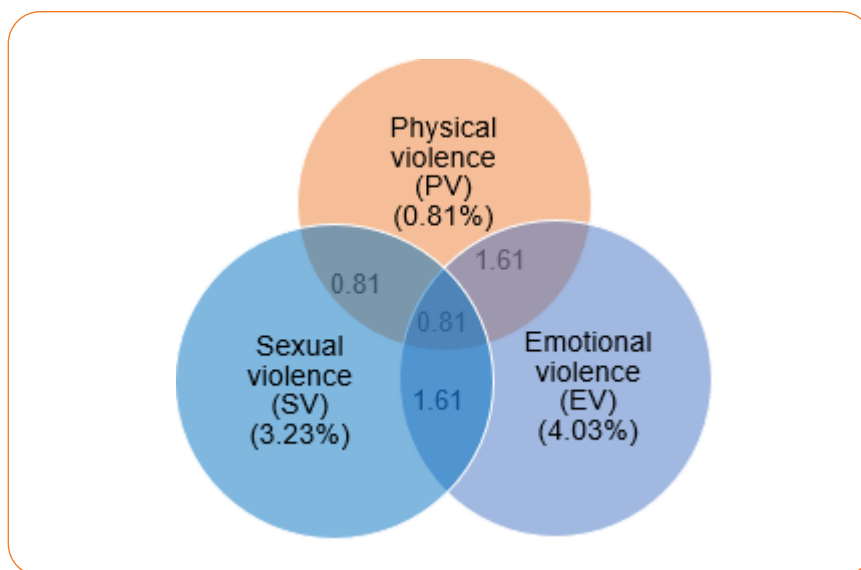


Figure 6 The proportions of the survivors of workplace incivility, bullying and sexual harassment who did not file a complaint with the authorities in hydropower, road and bridge construction sites

Violence Against Women and Girls Living Nearby Project Sites

4.03% of 248 (eight women and two girls) girls and women residing in the vicinity of hydropower construction sites experienced emotional violence. The proportions of the respondents who experienced physical and sexual violence are 0.81% (two women) and 3.23% (eight women), respectively. The highest proportion (2.82%) of the survivors are aged between 18 and 34.



Infographic 7: Prevalence of all forms of gender-based violence in the vicinity of the sample sites (n = 248)

Key Findings

- Most cited fear of repercussions like losing their jobs, indifferent responses from their supervisor, or the risks of matters escalating further as the reasons for not reporting it to the authorities. A few survivors considered the matter not grievous enough to warrant filing a complaint and some just let the subject slide away to prevent further escalations.
- There is no dedicated person, committee, or commission responsible for establishing measures to prevent, detect and act on harassment cases. More still, no records of projects monitoring and following up on incidents and harassment cases exist, let alone documented procedures for detecting and addressing sexual and workplace harassment.
- In absence of a specific institutional policy in place governing the prevention, sanction, and elimination of sexual harassment – there is no official record of sexual harassment complaints received or addressed; details of relationship between sexual harassment survivor and perpetrator; record of gender-based discrimination; and details of relationship between gender-based discrimination survivor and perpetrator.
- There is a noticeable breach of the Labour and Employment Act (LEA) as well as Occupational Health and Safety Regulation concerning night work, working hours and lifting heavy loads.
- No separate resting areas for women as well as separate toilets with required amenities like sanitary bins are provided.
- A considerable proportion of the respondents perceive that women's participation in decision-making in the areas of employees' welfare, organisation development, human resource issues and workplace safety and working environment is limited.
- No project site has ever conducted recruitment and selection processes specifically for women to balance their presence among the staff.
- A marked proportion of the respondents who experienced the abuse reported that they did not receive such post-incidence support from their organisations or elsewhere.
- Girls and women living in the vicinity of these project sites have not been provided with any GBV violence awareness program.

Policy and Program Recommendations

Hydropower, road and bridge construction sites

- Implementation, compliance and enforcement of the Labour and Employment Act, Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, and the organisation's Service Rules and Regulations, including gender-related regulations and policies to be strengthened.
- Survivor protection system/policy to be put in place so that the incidences of GBV could be reported without the fear of repercussion.
- A transparent system of keeping track of complaints received, resolved and action taken, along with the details of relationship between survivors and perpetrators to be instituted.
- A dedicated person, committee, or commission responsible for establishing measures to prevent, detect and act on GBV cases could be set up or established.
- Post-incident support such as medical care, counselling, and legal services could be provided to the survivors of GBV.
- Awareness on the Labour and Employment Act, Occupational Health and Safety Regulations and the company's Service Rules and Regulations could be created among the employees.
- Women's participation in decision-making could be increased by having recruitment targets for the promotion of gender equality at all levels; mandating women to constitute at least 30% of all new hires in any given hiring cycle as recommended by Sustainable Development Services (SDS); carrying out recruitment and selection processes aimed specifically for women to balance their presence among the employees; and designing policy for internal promotion to ensure women participate equally with men in decision-making and management at all levels.
- Gender dimensions into all stages of the budget cycle to be mainstreamed.
- Independent gender auditing may be carried out from time to time.
- Regularly collect and report gender-disaggregated data on pay; gender composition at all levels of the workforce; workplace gender-based violence; recruitment and promotion; and leave and flexibility.
- User-friendly system (smartphone app or toll-free number) for reporting workplace GBV could be established, and the survivors' support and protection mechanism to be put in place.
- Official communication between project on-site employees and the FGP of the ministry could be established/strengthened.
- Efforts could be made to ensure gender equality within processes for initiating relationships with suppliers or contractors or reviewing these to fit with the organisation's gender strategy.

Project Site Communities

- Sexual harassment awareness programs to be extended to people living in the vicinity of the construction project sites.
- Gender awareness and advocacy programs be provided to local leaders from nearby project sites.
- Targeted interventions could be suggested to address gender inequalities for people living in the vicinity of the project sites.
- Advocate, sensitise and create a resilient community around the project sites.

