

Winter Field Project

Fieldwork

Audio Transcripts

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First Interview; Anjum Parveen

1. Age

30 years

2. Are you married or unmarried?

Married.

3. What was your age when you got married?

I was fifteen or sixteen years old. I don't remember correctly.

My family has registered me to be 18 years of age to avoid legal issues in getting me married.

4. For how many years have you been married?

15 years.

5. Where do you belong to, locally or being married off here? For how many years have you been living in this place? Have you stayed anywhere else prior? Where?

I am from Mawana. I was married in Meerut. I lived in Meerut for 13.5 years and left my husband's house due to everyday fights and him beating me and my children every night.

I am living in Mawana for 2.5 years. Yes, I have lived in Himachal for work for 3 months every year since I have come back from Meerut (my in-laws' house)

Since I have been married, my husband used to send me back to my mother's place whenever I was pregnant. He had called me back around my deliveries and sent me to Mawana again after one and a half months. Then, when my kids started walking he would call me back again. He has done that every time.

6. What is your educational qualification?

I studied till 8th class in a government school.

7. Where did you study, government or private?

Government school. R.A Kanya Intercollege, Mawana.

8. Are you involved in any kind of work? Is it home-based or do you step outside? Is the work in a formal setting or an informal one?

Yes. I work in a pharmaceutical company in Potasaab, Himachal Pradesh.

It is in a formal setting. My salary is credited to the bank account.

The work involves packing the medicine.

9. If you are working, how long has it been since you are working? What made you decide to work?

I have been working there for 2.5 years now. I decided to work because I left my husband's house due to increasing domestic violence day by day.

I came back to Mawana and I had to feed my children since my brother and his wife were hesitant to keep me and my children. I rented a place in Mawana and left my 3 children under the care of my mother and left for Himachal for work.

10. What does your husband do? His educational qualification?

He is a painter. He is illiterate.

11. How many members are there in the family?

My husband's family is a joint family and is quite big. In the family, I have a mother-in-law, two unmarried sisters-in-law, two brothers-in-law, and their wives and children. I have six children. We are a total of 27 members in the family.

12. How many earning members are there in the family?

The three brothers including my husband are the earning members.

13. Do you live in a rented place or a house of your own? How big is it? Do you have a separate room for your family?

It is our own house. It is made in 70 square yards. Yes, I have one room for my family. However, my mother-in-law and sisters-in-law live in a common area.

14. Do you have children?

Yes.

15. If yes, how many children do you have?

I have six children. Two sons and four daughters. The sons live with their father back in Meerut. Daughters are with me.

I am pregnant with the seventh one.

16. If there is more than one child, what is the birth gap between children?

My eldest daughter was born within a year of my marriage. The second daughter was born after 2.5 years. Then, three children were born in a gap of every two years. Later, a girl was born after five years. Now, I am pregnant after 2.5 years.

17. Do they go to school? Private or government?

No, none of them goes to school. Earlier, my eldest daughter used to go to a private school in Meerut. I was adamant about private schooling and then the government as they are better but his father had withdrawn her from school because according to him there is no need for getting the children educated as we have financial issues. My son who lives with his father goes to an Islamic school called Madarsa.

Now that I am singularly taking care of them, I want to educate them but I am helpless because my earnings are not enough to enrol them in schools. My eldest daughter takes care of her younger siblings when I am in Himachal.

I am planning to get their admission sooner.

18. Where did you deliver each of your children?

I get my deliveries done in private hospitals. (non-caesarian)

19. What kind of health problem have you suffered in the past or are suffering in the present?

I don't face any health problems as such but I have migraine. I don't pay attention to it though. I also sometimes have body pain. Apart from that, I have had a pregnancy and abortion-related health concerns in the past.

20. How and when did you express it to the husband or any other family member of the house? Did you feel at ease while sharing symptoms? Why/why not?

There is no benefit of sharing with my husband or any other family member for that matter. When I was living with my husband, I was very ill and I shared with him about the same. On hearing, he said, “either I can arrange medicines or food. I don’t have money for your treatment.” Once he beat me up so badly on requesting him for seeing the doctor I decided to come back to my mother’s house.

During the initial years of my marriage, he used to take me to the doctor but after coming back he used to beat me up for the medical expenses.

21. What do they suggest upon the treatment, some home remedies or professional medical care?

They don’t suggest anything. It feels like it does not matter if I am sick. I have tried sharing it with them, and the answer is usually like that, “either I can provide food or medicines, you decide?”

There are no home remedies for migraine, so I just simply take a painkiller (Crocin) or go to sleep. When I work in Himachal, I go to the government hospital and the medicine that they give me makes me feel better.

22. Were you able to tell their gynaecological complaints to the husband or the mother-in-law? What was the response?

As I said, no matter what is the health issue it is not taken seriously. On sharing something with my mother-in-law, the reply is to go see the doctor but in a government hospital.

23. Where did they take you as the first line of treatment? How was the experience there? What were you told?

When I was pregnant for the first time, I was taken seriously and they took me to a private hospital. The delivery process was smoother compared to my further deliveries.

I want to share this with you, during the delivery of my second daughter, the gynaecologist was a male and I felt uneasy during the process. When I was pregnant for the third time, I was in Mawana and my mother took me to the female doctor, Dr Sadiqa Hussain. I had complications at that time. I suffered from Kala Pilia (Hepatitis) and due to that puss was formed in private areas. I had a prolonged treatment at that time. My daughter also passed away after two days after her birth.

24. Who bought the medicines for you? Any reactions about the expenses incurred? Did you feel better? Did anyone ask you if you felt better?

My brothers have taken care of me most of the time during the pregnancy. Even when I was in Meerut my husband was reluctant to spend on deliveries and post-pregnancy treatments. My brother has spent on my children's deliveries. He has also given blood when my son required it.

When my brothers and mother spent, they felt I need it and it is important so they somehow managed. Whenever my husband had to give money, he used to mention that so many times.

Yes, my family keeps asking me if I am doing better. My husband does not care, he or his family never asks.

25. Did you feel better with the treatment or you were suggested to consult the advanced healthcare treatment?

I was not recommended further consultation but the doctor has asked me to visit again. If my husband took me to the doctor once and bought medicines, that is it. I was never taken to the doctor to check my progress or even the medicines are also not bought again for prescribed doses. Medicines are never brought until I start feeling something irresistible.

26. Did your husband support you for further treatment? If not, why? Did you convince him? Was he convinced?

As I told you earlier, the doctor had told me that the treatment is for a month or so but my husband assumes one-time medicine is enough. I tried to ask him for visiting the doctor but he did not pay attention. When I am with him, I struggle with even the food arrangements for me and my children. He is not convinced ever to follow the entire treatment.

27. Did you face the financial crunch for the treatment? How was that covered?

The larger expenses of my medical requirements are covered by my mother and brothers. Whenever my husband had paid, he brought that during our fights and especially when he is beating me up.

28. Do you bring anyone along with you to the health centre or hospital? who do you usually bring and why?

My husband used to accompany me till I lived with him. He used to do that very often when we were newly married. Later, it also depended on his mood. When he is not in the mood or not at home and working, I was accompanied by my mother-in-law. As I am pregnant now, my husband came to the clinic to hand over my registration card and left.

I do not go alone to the doctor because my usual visits are during my pregnancies and there is a risk in going alone.

29. Do they come along with you? What if no one accompanies you? Has it happened ever? How did you manage without them?

Yes, they come with me if I ask them to come. Asking my husband becomes a little risky as I told you he hardly cares now but rests others including my mother-in-law, sister-in-law, mother or brother go to the doctor with me.

However, if it is a seasonal health issue like the common cold, fever et cetera, I consult a non-degree doctor sitting in the neighbourhood by-lane. For that, I don't bring anyone with me, I go alone.

I don't consult any doctor for my back pain as I don't have money.

As far as I remember, it has not happened never that I had to go alone to the doctor if it is related to my reproductive health concerns. Avoiding the risk of fainting or not being able to handle me during my pregnancy has stopped me to go alone to the doctor.

30. Do you directly communicate with the doctor or does the person (your husband, children or family member) accompanying you has to talk on your behalf?

I prefer communicating with myself. I believe I will be able to talk about my problem better than the person I am accompanied by.

If I don't understand anything then I ask it again but I always prefer communicating by myself.

31. Do you find that helpful?

It feels like a relief that someone is there coming with me. At least, I would not have to go back home all by myself.

32. Do you think you can better talk about your health condition?

Of course, I mean I am the sufferer and I know what I am feeling better than anybody else. So, I can express it properly.

33. What stops you to do so?

NA.

34. What is the general gaze at the health centres? Do you find it discomfoting in any sense?

There are a few differences in how people look at a Burqa-clad woman. The differences like in how people at health centres look at us and in the way doctors talk to non-Muslim women, especially Hindus. Like, for they give better treatment to Hindu women than Muslims.

I want to share this with you, in the past before I was pregnant with a boy, I had some complications in my pregnancy and I underwent a surgical abortion in a government hospital. After the surgery, the nurse did not even cover me properly. I was unconscious and my mother was singlehandedly taking care of me. They took me out of the operation theatre uncovered in the general ward. I have seen quite a lot of times during my visits for abortion-related concerns, they would treat non-Muslim women with more ease and comfort. They would cover them properly. This has been quite an old incident, some 5-6 years ago. You know what? This is quite prevalent on the Meerut side otherwise, in Himachal, there is nothing like that. In Himachal Pradesh, be it a woman or a young girl, they carry out surgical abortions without any discrimination. I have gone to a gynaecologist sitting in a private clinic in Himachal as well, I felt good with how she treated me but the expenses are more there. The services are good there. Government hospitals are better in Meerut but the private are excellent in Himachal.

35. What are the conversations like at the health centre?

- a. I have faced more discrimination in government hospitals in Meerut and Mawana. Once, I went to the CHC in Mawana when I was pregnant with a girl child who died in two days and I had Hepatitis at that time (as mentioned earlier). The doctor said this baby will not be born here, so take her to Meerut. I was in so much pain but they did not do anything. Then my mother took me to a government hospital in Meerut named Pyare Lal. They said, her delivery is still undue. Take her back. We said it is 12 at the midnight where will we go? Please admit me here. They said “Jao tum yahanse” go from here. I mean they did not even consider that we are just two women at the midnight. I was in so much pain almost about to deliver and how could they be so insensitive? We did not even come from the local.

We were outsiders but they did not admit me. We somehow came back and were admitted to a private hospital Angoori Devi nursing centre and in the morning, I delivered the baby girl. These incidents have made me so scared of the government health services.

- b. I feel really scared of the government hospitals. If the services in the government hospitals are good then why would a poor person go to a private hospital? They scold Muslim women. I will tell you so many incidents happened in front of me with Muslims in government hospitals. The government hospital facilitators usually ask for C-sections for Muslim women even when they could be operated on normal delivery. I don't understand why they do that.
- c. Sometimes, they scare the woman and her family so much by saying she is so weak, she needs better treatment and refers her to a city hospital. These come across as excuses because reports are normal and a woman is healthy.
- d. When I was giving birth to my third daughter in Pyarelal Hospital (govt hospital in Meerut), they kept saying that I am overreacting there is no pain and that I am still due. The doctor on duty and the nurse left me with incomplete delivery preparations after saying that I have time. Right after five minutes they left, I delivered my girl child and since they kept a bucket to collect the waste and impurities during the delivery and my baby fell in that bucket. Then they came running.

36. How are you supported there? Did anyone help you?

Nobody helps in a government hospital. It's relatively better in private. I have been getting my deliveries from Dr Savita, a gynaecologist in Meerut. She has her private hospital. Services in her hospital are very good. Dr Savita talks to the patient nicely and also give some concessions to me seeing the financial situation. She only charges 3-4k compared to

Angoori Devi (a private nursing home in Mawana) who charged 17k. I intend to go to Savita Sharma for this delivery as well.

The nurse helps me throughout the process. But there is one thing with nurses, they don't clean you or take care of you when you are getting the surgical abortions done because they are not gifted with any money.

When it is for the deliveries then they pay good attention because people offer something to them. I have noticed one thing though they don't do the same with everyone during the abortion. If you belong to low economic background, then they do this that they won't cover you properly and things of those nature.

37. Do you feel any sort of physical distancing or stigma while waiting after the appointment? Are you assigned a different place to sit while waiting?

It happens rarely. Like I might have experienced physical distancing in a private clinic but it has been normalised so much because it is more or less similar in every set not only at the doctors.

In government hospitals, people are more or less from the same economic background, so it hardly matters.

38. How many times have you had to go through surgical abortions?

Twice. Once my in-laws had paid for it and the next time my mother did.

39. Do you feel any kind of difference in the doctor's behaviour between you and other patients? What is the language used? Do they listen to you patiently?

I told you before whatever I have experienced and noticed. Muslim patients in government hospitals are not seen and treated equally. They trouble Muslims. I have seen it mostly in Pyare Lal (govt hospital in Meerut) they trouble Muslim patients for no reason. They made derogatory remarks like, "Musalmano ki baccho ki fauj itni hoti hai" I visited that hospital so many times for check-ups but I did not dare to deliver other babies after my girl fell off in the bucket during the delivery.

When I was in my husband's house, my mother-in-law had responsibly made a health card for Pyare Lal hospital thinking that it will be a boon during any kind of health emergency. So, once I went when I was pregnant with my fourth child and I was admitted. There was still time for the birth of my baby. A Muslim woman who was admitted to the adjacent bed was in labour during the night. She told to the doctor who was on night duty that she is in pain. On hearing this, the doctor scolded her, switched off the ward's light and asked her to sleep without making any noise. After the doctor left, she delivered the baby boy whose head was touched by the iron rod of the bed and the baby died.

I only know one thing, if a patient is suffering just listen to him/her. Give her attention and give the required treatment. Why do they say something like, "Tumhe Kuch Nahi ho Raha hai" and then leave us in that situation? It could happen to anyone what happened to that woman. Fortunately, my daughter was saved even after falling into the bucket. What if it would be someone's first child and she lost her because of the doctor's irresponsibility? Thankfully, I have so many children including boys and girls but what about a mother who had nurtured a child inside her womb for 9 months for the first time? We can't imagine what she would have to go through but what will a poor woman do? That doctor had said something in her medical term for the incident and came off clean. (she is referring to the death case of the just born baby she talked above) If this would have happened to a rich and educated family they would have taken some action against the doctor.

This happened in front of my eyes and I could not forget this. I felt so scared of this that I called my mother, discharged myself and left the hospital and was admitted to Savita Sharma hospital.

40. Do you feel any kind of difference in the doctor's behaviour between you and other patients? If yes, what were those?

As I told you earlier, these incidents count for the different behaviour in the entire healthcare system. I just want to ask one thing of you. Aren't government hospitals made for people like me? Then why are treated unequally? They prescribe medicines which are not even available in their dispensaries so ultimately, we go to the private pharmacy store. Non-muslims, if they visit private or government hospitals, they are prioritised. Especially in a government hospital, they do not call out their names shouting while making their health cards but if you are Muslim they shout. The behaviour also changes if you are coming to the hospital via bike or a scooter. They don't make them wait in lines. I have spent so much time in long queues waiting for my number. If you are lucky, you get the appointment otherwise come back again the next day. The doctor usually says, there is a risk in your pregnancy. You can't be delivered here and referred to the other hospital. The CBC reports are normal they would still say that you have high blood deficiency in your body et cetera. This is called troubling people because doctors have the same knowledge everywhere.

41. What, according to you, could be the reasons for a different behaviour by the doctor or the medical assistant?

They do this because a decent number of groups of people hate Muslims. They make derogatory remarks like, "Ye bacche zaada paida karte hain" they give birth to so many children. Modi (referring to Narendra Modi) said whosoever will have more children than two can not avail of the government hospital services. These things make us feel helpless. I did not want to get pregnant for the ninth time (6 kids, aborted twice) but I found this late and my husband did not give me money for an abortion. What do I do? I am carrying the child.

With that being said, whether more kids or fewer, the parents only have to take care of them. We have it in our Hadiths (Islamic literature) that abortion is prohibited so we end up having more children than other religious groups. As citizens of this country, the government's responsibility is to better the services, end discrimination and provide us with friendly space in the health systems.

They are not good with Muslims anyway but if a Muslim is literate or graduated, then he/she can still cross-question the doctor or the medical facilitators.