

Home-based Worker's Oral History



Read the story of a sequins embellisher and her family from Dharavi,
Home-based worker Khushboo from Mumbai

Written by Jyoti Bayballi from LEARN, India.

Translated by Shreeya Joshi.

Khushboo, 22 years, is a home-based sequins-embellisher, and a mother of two infants. Her husband makes Rs. 1000 a month working as a tailor in a nearby factory.

Khushboo started embellishing sequins on garments six years ago. She produces 8 pieces per day, which take about an hour each, and earns Rs. 10 per piece. She works four days per week and around 16 to 18 days per month, depending on the availability of work from the contractors and middlemen. She receives the materials for the sequin embellishment work via a

local contractor because she lacks access to the factory owners directly. Her husband's tailoring work has been resumed.

Khushboo's monthly house rent is Rs. 4,000 and the electricity bill is around Rs. 600 per month. Around Rs. 3,000 per month is spent on food, milk and other provisions for the household. Khushboo and her husband were both out of work when the COVID-19 lockdown was announced. Their landlord evicted them from their home after they were unable to pay the rent. Khushboo relocated and urged the landlord to take her situation into account and let them pay the rent later. After three months, he began to demand the rent as well, so she borrowed Rs. 20,000 from her sister at a 10% interest rate. Khushboo continues, *"Even our relatives did not come out for our assistance during those hard times. I received some help in the shape of rations from the union. My husband found employment as a sweeper once the lockdown was lifted..."*

Khushboo still doesn't have the same amount of work as before, even as the world returned to the 'old normal.' Khushboo has no choice except to work on the pieces that are currently in stock and hope that the number of orders increases. She discusses the dangers and difficulties involved in the task of sequins-embellishing, "I have to do this work to bring in some income for the household because my husband's salary alone is insufficient. The sequins and beads are so small that it strains my eyes. There is also a chance that these small sequins and beads will get into my children's eyes, ears, and mouth."

Khushboo's story highlights the numerous occupational health and safety concerns related to home-based work. While she pastes the sequins on garments doing much value-add to it, her kids play in the background with the sequins lying around. It highlights the realities of home-based workers who take various risks to create a beautiful dress and support the global apparel industry. Also, not owning a home directly affects their livelihood, as they are unable to work if they do not have a roof over their heads. They do not have the choice to work and keep their kids at home in secure conditions since they do not have access to factory owners or factory floors.