

## **Warriors without a Shield: Women Health Workers in India's Villages**

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### **Abstract**

A workforce of 600,000 women is fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in India's 640,000 villages. The Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), originally recruited to ensure safe pregnancy and child vaccination, are now in charge of community surveillance. However, they receive neither health protection (mask, gloves or sanitiser), nor income protection. They face threats and harassment in the course of their work. Prejudices rooted in gender, caste and class place tremendous challenges on their path. Better outcomes in prevention and containment of COVID, and other contagious diseases, will be difficult unless women health workers at the grassroots are empowered.

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