

Discrimination against Women Labourers in the Unorganised Sector: A Study in Dindigul District of Tamil Nadu

Sonkhogin Haokip^{*} and S. Gandhimathi^{}**

Abstract

Women constitute a significant part of the workforce of India but they lag behind men in terms of level and quality of employment. Over 96 per cent of women work in the informal/unorganized sector. The informal sector constitutes 93 per cent of the workforce of the population of India. These workers contribute 62 per cent to the gross domestic product (GDP), and 50 per cent to the national income. This sector includes workers employed in a wide range of economic activities, from street vendors and casual workers to permanent workers and temporary workers in factories. However, unlike workers in the formal sectors, they do not have access to regular incomes or welfare benefits, making them extremely vulnerable to change and insecurity. The informal sector includes jobs such as domestic servant, small trader, artisan, or field labourer on a family farm. Most of these jobs are unskilled and low paying and do not provide benefits to the worker. The women workers in the informal sector constituted about 91.38 per cent. Similarly, among rural workers, about 92 per cent were in the informal sector. The National commission for women estimates that 94 Per cent of the total female workforce is to be found in the unorganized sector. The growth of small and cottage industries has depended heavily on female labour. This paper attempts to examine some of the pressing issues faced by spinning mills women workers such as discrimination in service conditions, wages, position, the security provided to women workers, violence against them, and their access to health and other basic facilities at the work place.

Keywords: Women labourers, Unorganised Sector, Tamil Nadu, India

Introduction

Labour policy in India has been evolving in response to specific needs of the situation to suit requirements of planned economic development and social justice and has two-fold objectives, viz., maintaining industrial peace and promoting the welfare of labour. Women constitute a significant part of the work force of India but they lag behind men in terms of level and quality of employment. Over 96 per cent of women work in the informal unorganized sector. The informal sector constitutes 93 per cent of the workforce of the population of India. These workers contribute 62 per cent to the gross domestic product (GDP), and 50 per cent to the national income. This sector includes workers employed in a wide

^{*} Assistant Professor Department of Political Science and Development Administration. The Gandhigram Rural Institute – Deemed University, Gandhigram, India

^{**} Full Time Research Scholar Department of Political Science and Development Administration. The Gandhigram Rural Institute – Deemed University, Gandhigram, India **E-mail:** sgmmathi@gmail.com

range of economic activities, from street vendors and casual workers in a mill workers permanent workers and temporary workers.

However, unlike workers in the formal sectors, they do not have access to regular incomes or welfare benefits, making them extremely vulnerable to change and insecurity. The informal sector includes jobs such as domestic servant, small trader, artisan, or field labourer on a family farm. Most of these jobs are unskilled and low paying and do not provide benefits to the worker. The women workers in the informal sector constituted about 91.38 per cent. Similarly, among rural workers, about 92 per cent were in the informal sector. The National commission for women estimates that 94 Per cent of the total female workforce is to be found in the unorganized sector. The growth of small and cottage industries has depended heavily on female labour.

The main focus of the policies of the Government with regard to women labour has been to remove the handicaps under which they work, to strengthen their bargaining capacity, to improve their wages and working conditions, to enhance their skills and to open up better employment opportunities for them. A separate cell, namely Women Labour Cell is functioning in the Ministry of Labour to address these problems. The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 and equal Remuneration Act, 1976 are the protective and anti-exploitative legislations which have been enacted to protect and safeguard the interests of women workers at the workplaces. The Equal Remuneration Act stipulates payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers for same and similar nature of work. The Act also prohibits any gender discrimination in recruitment and service conditions. Under the Act, a Committee has been set up at the Centre to advise the Government in providing increasing employment opportunities for women and generally reviewing the steps taken for effective implementation of the Act. Similar committees have also been set up at the state level along with competent authorities to oversee the process of implementation of the Equal Remuneration Act.

The Supreme Court of India in its landmark judgment dated 13 August 1997 in the matter of Visakha and others versus the State of Rajasthan and others laid down detailed guidelines/norms for prevention of sexual harassment of women workers at work-places. These guidelines have the force of law under Article 141 of the Constitution of India.

The government has taken a number of initiatives to give effect to the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court, these include circulation of the guidelines for action as indicated therein to all Secretaries to the Government of India/Chief Secretaries of the State Governments/Union Territories, Heads of Central Public Sector Undertakings and employees/employees organisations. Conduct Rules applicable to Government employees and officers of All India Services have been amended to incorporate Supreme Court guidelines. To make the guidelines applicable to employees in private and unorganized sectors, the industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 has also been amended accordingly.

Article 47 of the Indian Constitution require that the state should regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of public health, as among its primary duties.

- The elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour.
- The effective abolition of child labour.
- With a view to stimulating economic growth and development raising levels of living.

Review of Literature

According to Singh (2002), women workers suffer vital disadvantages comparative to men in their search for employment opportunities and irregularities employment. They do not possess much of skill training and education for the type of work they perform. Society as they live under subdued conditions with family children, devoid of proper living and working conditions even they receive humiliating treatment from the contractors.

Objectives

- To study the Socio – economic and demographic characteristics of women workers.
- To examine the nature of gender discrimination in terms of wages, position and violence at the work place.
- To understand the nature of security provided to women workers and their access to health and other basic facilities at the work place.

Measurement Procedure

Data pertaining to development in terms of spinning mill workers problems Socio- demographic, economical aspects, occupational, health aspects, Awareness Programme were collected from the respondents through different area scale consisting of different indicators. It is however, recalled here that awareness were measured through the degree of frequency and individual Percentage in this context was measured in terms of awareness Programme.

To assess the relationship between unorganized sector and development a composite score was calculated based on different as mentioned above “one” is given for unorganized sector.

Different Variables and Measuring Indicators

Variable: Socio- demographic, economical aspects, Health aspects, Awareness Programme.

Socio – Demographic: It helps to understand the respondents and their living conditions more clearly.

Economic Aspects: The earnings income, savings of individuals and their family have the greater impact on the health, education and other aspects of their life.

Awareness Programme: Legal awareness is a very essential thing now days because people those who are not aware about law they are more exploited now. So, awareness about laborer laws have significant role in protection from exploitation of unorganized spinning mill workers by middle women and employers.

Problems of Women Labourers in the Unorganized Sector

Unorganized sector work is characterized by low wages that are often insufficient to meet minimum living standards including nutrition, long working hours, hazardous working conditions, lack of basic services such as first aid, drinking water and sanitation as the work side, and the like. Education of women leads to occupational diversification. Education helps women to move away from spinning mill workers.

Data Analysis

The present chapter deals with the analysis and interpretation of the data. It has been divided in to eight sub sections. Each section explains different aspects of the study.

First section begins with the socio – demographic details of the unorganized spinning mills women workers who participated in the research study. Second sections explains the economical aspect of the respondents, it includes income savings and other related aspects, third section deals with the occupational related aspects of the respondents. The fourth section is about the health aspects of the respondents.

The fifth section explains the social aspects of the respondents. Sixth section deals with the health aspects of the respondents. The seventh section deals with the awareness level of the respondents regarding their rights, welfare programme, for explaining all these aspects, the data has been presented with the help of different tables.

Socio-demographic details include basic on about the respondents Age, Marital Status, Educational status, religion, Community etc. It helps to understand the respondents and their living conditions more clearly.

Table 1: Age of the Respondents

S. No.	Categories	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	18 – 28	34	34.0 %
2	29 – 38	35	35.0 %
3	39 – 48	20	20.0 %
4	49 - >	11	11.0 %
	Total	100	100

Table 1 shows the age-wise distribution of the respondents. The minimum age of the respondents was 18 years and 58 years was the highest age of the respondents. 35 per cent of the respondents belongs to the age group of 29 – 38 and only 11 per cent of the respondents are above 49 years.

Table 2: Marital Status

S. No.	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1	Married	74	74.0
2	Unmarried	21	21.0
3	Widow	5	5.0
4	Separate	0	0
	Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data

The table 2 results shows that majority (74 per cent) of the unorganized labour twenty one (21 per cent) of the respondents are unmarried and remaining few of them are widow from their family there were no separated respondents in the sample.

Education is on important indicators to analyze the social status. Here the level of respondents helps to understand the relationship between the education and unorganised labour.

Table 3: Educational Status

S. No	Educational	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Illiterate	10	10.0
2.	Primary	12	12.0
3.	Middle	23	23.0
4.	Secondary	28	28.0
5.	Higher Secondary	27	27.0
	Total	100	100

Source: Primary data

Education status of the respondents is most important determinant for the measure the awareness level about unorganized sector. Table 4.3 result shows that nearly (10 per cent) of the respondents are illiterate, 12 per cent of the respondents are studied up to primary level 23 per cent of the respondent are studied up to middle and 28 per cent of the respondents are studied up to secondary level. Only 27 per cent of the respondents studied higher secondary level. This show that (22 per cent) of the unorganized laborers are studied below the primary school education. It shows the existence of lack of awareness about education. It shows existence of lack of awareness about education and accessibility.

Family Details

Family is the one of the primary social institution of the society, where an individual start her life and the learning, begin from the socialization takes place here. It has its vital role in the development of women. The each and every aspect related to family such as the family type and size has its influence on the personality development and designing of their future.

Table 4: Family Details of the Respondents

Particulars	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Family type	Joint family	12	12.0
	Nuclear family	88	88.0
Number of Family members	1-3	46	46.0
	4-7	43	43.0
	8->	11	11.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 above shows that 88 per cent of the respondents were living in nuclear family and only 12 per cent of them were living in joint family. This table revealed that the joint family system was gradually breaking down and nuclear family system is increasing in the Indian society. 43 per cent of the respondents were having 4- 7 members in their family consisted of 1- 3 members. Only 11 per cent of them were having 8-7 member in family.

Economic Condition

Economic aspects plays important role in every individuals life. The earnings income, savings of individuals and their family have the greater impact on the health, education and other aspects of their life. The details of the economic aspects of the respondents are given below in table.

Table 5: Income details of the Respondents

S. No	Monthly Income	Frequency	Percentage
1.	1000 – 5000	11	11.0
2.	5100 – 10,000	57	57.0
3.	10100 - >	32	32.0
	Total	100	

Source: Primary data

The head of the Family's income plays important role in the family. The head of the family's earnings and savings of the family has a greater impact on the family expenditure, health, education and other aspects of their life. The detail of the economic aspects of the head of the family is given below in the table.

The table shows the income status of the respondents in unorganized spinning mill women workers 11.0 per cent of the respondents earn 1000 – 5000 as monthly income. The income level of 5100 – 6500 is for 57.0 per cent of the respondents monthly income of 10100 - >. It is observed that the earning level of women is affordable in unorganized spinning mill women workers.

Table 6: Source and Purpose of Borrowed

S. No	Source	Purpose						
		House construction	Education	Marriage	Medical Expenses	Festival	Purpose of durable items	Agriculture
1	Bank	4 (4.0)	5 (5.0)	1 (1.0)	1(1.0)	-	-	1 (1.0)
2	Co-operative	1 (1.0)	-	1 (1.0)	-	-	-	11 (11.0)
3	SHG	1 (1.0)	20 (20.0)	1 (1.0)	6 (6.0)	4 (4.0)	8 (8.0)	-
4	Finance	1 (1.0)	5 (5.0)	1 (1.0)	13 (13.0)	14 (14.0)	6 (6.0)	-
5	Chit fund / LND	-	-	-	4 (4.0)	2 (2.0)	8 (8.0)	3 (3.0)
6	Surya trade	-	2 (2.0)	1 (1.0)	4 (4.0)	-	13 (13.0)	1 (1.0)

The table explains sources and purpose of the borrowed money by the respondents. The money is borrowed from the bank, cooperative, SHG, Finance, chit fond/LND and surya trade. The purpose of borrowing the money is for house construction, Education, marriage, medical expenses, festival, purpose of durable items and Agriculture. The source and purpose of the borrowed money is given below.

Bank: 4 Per cent of the respondents borrows money from the bank for construction of the house, 5 per cent of the respondents have borrowed for the educational purpose of the children and 1 per cent for the purpose of marriage, 1 per cent of the respondents for medical expenses and 1 per cent agriculture related purpose.

Cooperative: The majority (11 per cent) of the respondents borrowed money from the cooperative for agriculture purpose and 1 per cent for house construction and 1 per cent for marriage purpose.

Self Help Group: 1 Per cent of the respondents borrow money from SHG's. The majority of 20 per cent of the respondents borrowing money from SHG uses the money for educational purpose. 8 per cent of the respondents borrowed to purchase durable items. Remaining 6 per cent borrows money for medical purpose. 4 per cent for festivals and 1 per cent for house construction.

Finance: One per cent of total borrows money from finances and out of it 4 per cent of the respondents borrow money for festival purpose. 13 Per cent for medical expenses, 6 Per cent for the purchase of durable items, 5 Per cent for educational purpose and 1 Per cent for the house construction and remaining 1 Per cent for the purpose of marriage. The finances are the easiest way of getting money for respondents.

Chit Fund/ LND: One Per cent of the respondent borrows money from chit fund/LND. 4 Per cent of the respondents use this money for medical expenses. 2 Per cent for festival, 8 Per cent for purchase of durable items and 3 Per cent of the respondents for agricultural purpose.

Surya Trade: It is a private micro finance institution. 2 Per cent of the respondents borrow money for educational purpose. 1 Per cent for marriage, 4 Per cent for medical expenses, 13 Per cent for the purchase of durable items (house using things and Jewells etc). and 1 Per cent of the respondents agricultural Purpose.

Awareness about minimum wage help the unorganized spinning mill women workers to get reasonable wages for work and it also make them free from exploitation in terms of wages.

Table 7: Distribution of Respondent face Health Problem

S. No	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	33	33.0
2	No	67	67.0
	Total	100	100.0

Source: Primary data

The table 7 shows some health problem faced by the respondents has displayed in the 33 Per cent respondents were suffered blood pressure, sugar and white discharge asthma joint pain 67 Per cent of the respondents it's not affected any health problem.

Insurance is integral part to ensure the social security of the workers, especially for those who are working in hazardous and risky work environments. Majority of the unorganized spinning mill workers working this type of situations, so health insurance is very important to them. Here the table shows the distribution of insurance in unorganized spinning mill women workers.

Table 8: Distribution of Respondents Awareness about Minimum Wage Act

Particulars	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage %
Minimum wage act	Yes	11	11.0
	No	89	89.0

Source: Primary data

Minimum wage is a right of the workers. Awareness about minimum wages among unorganised spinning mill workers is essential to end the exploitation of workers by the employers. The table 7 shows that only 11 Per cent of the respondents know about minimum wages and 89 Per cent of them do not have any idea about minimum wages.

Most of the unorganised Spinning mill workers did not know minimum wages is a right. Ignorance about minimum wages prevents them do demand reasonable wages for work from the employers and they don't get sufficient wages. This indicated that they are exploited by their employers.

Legal awareness is a very essential thing now days because people those who are not aware about law they are more exploited now. Legal awareness is a very essential thing now days because people those who are not aware about law they are more exploited now. So, awareness about labourer laws have significant role in protection from exploitation of unorganized spinning mill workers by middle women and employers.

Table 9: Distribution of Respondents Awareness about Labour Act

Particulars	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Labour Act	Yes	12	12.0
	No	88	88.0

Source: Primary data

The table shows that 88 Per cent of them don't know anything about the labourer laws and only 12 Per cent of them have awareness about workers and rights. Majority 88 Per cent of the respondents there is no awareness about labour Act.

The unorganized workers form a major portion in the general work force and they are the major contributors to the development of the economy too. But the care and privileges enjoyed by them are very low when compared with the organized workers. Their physical as well mental problems draw the attention of the researchers besides their financial problems. In order to tap their fullest potentialities, the unorganized workers are to be taken care of in both aspects.

Economic Problems

Low payment, hard work, Irregular employment, Health problem, Lack of security, and Non – Co – operation are the filtered variables here and they can be community termed as economic problems.

Raw Material Problems

This may interrupt the smooth production as well as the work of the women folk which in term make the women to become unemployed till the shortage is recouped. Hence, it can be concluded that economic problems are the major problems encountered by the women folk in the unorganized sector.

The women in the unorganized sector are able to manage the family by way of mental satisfaction, savings, educating the children, and are able to take decisions. They could able to derive satisfaction by the proper utilization of time and are able to manage the family. Through savings, they could manage the family, educate the children, gain self-confidence and economic independence. Education of children is possible by managing the family, savings and economic independence.

Conclusion

Contrary to common perception, a large number of women in India work. The National Data collection agencies accept the fact that there is a serious under-estimation of women's contribution as workers. However, there are fewer women in the paid workforce than there are men. In urban India, women have impressive number in the workforce. As an example at software industry 30% of the workforce is women. They are at par with their male counterparts in terms of wages, position at the work place. In rural India, agriculture and allied industrial sectors employ as much as 89.5% of the total female labour. In overall farm production, women's average contribution is estimated at 55% to 66% of the total labour. One-third of the almost 92 per cent of the work force in the unorganized sector are women and their dependents. Though the Indian Constitution guarantees equality of opportunity related to work, equal rights for livelihood, equal pay for equal work etc., The condition of women in the unorganized sector is deplorable. The most serious hazard faced by the working class in the ear of globalization is the increasing threat to job security. The informal sector is fast expanding, while the organized sector is shrinking. Contract, casual, temporary, part-time, piece-rated jobs and home based work etc., decreasingly replacing permanent jobs.

Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last few decades. Social stereotyping and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other manifestations. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in parts of the country. The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms and practices.

Consequently, the access of women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Other Backward Classes and minorities, majority of whom are in the rural areas and in the informal, unorganised sector – to education, health and productive resources, among others, is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded.

References

- Gupta. R. (2009). "Perceived Caregiver Burden in India: Implications for Social Services". *Affilia*, 24 (1), 69-79.
- Vinita Shah,(1999) "Women Building Workers – An Area Study in Bombay NICMAR ISBN (81-85448-24-8)."Sexual Health Problems and Treatment seeking Behaviour Among Rural Women in India". International Conference AIDS, July 11-16; 15, Abstract No. C11462. International Institute for Publication Sciences, Mumbai India.
- Purushothaman, Sangeetha. (1998). "The Empowerment of Women in India: Grassroots Women's Networks and the State", New Delhi: Sage Publication.
- Times of India. "Protest against Atrocities in Women", Internet.P.3.
- Dev, Mahendra. S. (2006), "Growth –mediated and support led social security in the Unorganized Sector in India". Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), Hyderabad (mimeo).
- Peter Perman, Rajee Abuja (2008),"The Role of Government in Health", *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 28-July 41, Vol.XIII, No.26.
- The Hindu, 2010,"Labour Conference and Protection of Workers rights", February 16, p11.
- Government of India (2002 a),"Report of the study group on Social security, Commission on Labour", Ministry of Labour, New Delhi.