

Welfare Measures- A Study on Labourers of Steel Industry, MandiGobindgarh, Punjab

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Abstract

The concept of Labour welfare is basically based on human values, where each citizen has a right to work in a congenial environment with no hazards to his health on reasonable wages and other terms and conditions of employment. Labour welfare means the effort to make the life comfortable for the workers. Provision of welfare amenities enables the workers to live a richer and more satisfactory life and contributes to the productivity of labour, efficiency of the enterprises and helps in maintaining industrial peace. Since, Industrial progress depends on labour force so; in this connection labour welfare measures is very important. Based on the primary and secondary data, this paper is an attempt to study welfare measures in respect of steel workers of Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab.

Keywords: Welfare measures, Social security, Work environment, Steel labourers.

Introduction

At the time of independence, Punjab had only a few hundred industrial units' mainly processing food grains, cotton ginning and brick kilns. During the post-independence period, industrial development in Punjab took place in phases. Diversification of industry started, with the process of liberalization and economic reforms, while many of the established processing units, both in the small and medium and large sectors, came under pressure. With this all major industries used labour as it is the most important and utilization of other factors largely depends on the proper utilization of time and energy on the part of workers. In other words, Labour is the sole source of all production. Infact, labour is the source of all wealth and backbone of the nation.

Since, Industrial progress depends on labour force so; in this connection labour welfare measures is important. The concept of Labour welfare is basically based on human values, where each citizen has a right to work in a congenial environment with no hazards to his health on reasonable wages and other terms and conditions of employment. In other words, Labour welfare means the effort to make the life comfortable for the workers. Provision of welfare amenities enables the workers to live a richer and more satisfactory life and contributes to the productivity of labour, efficiency of the enterprises and helps in maintaining industrial peace. Thus, welfare activities will go a long way to better the mental and moral health of workers by reducing vices of industrialization.

India which launched a boat of welfare measures and social security sometime in the second half of the nineteen century has still been in troubled waters and is far away from the cherished goal of full social security for her citizens. So this study is conducted to know whether the labourers are aware and satisfied with the welfare facilities provided by steel industry in MandiGobindgarh, Punjab as MandiGobindgarh is the largest hub of steel industries in India which had a strong impact on the development of the labour in India. The study is conducted to explore welfare measures and make some suggestions for betterment of workers in future because the successful implementation of labour welfare activities.

Data Base and Methodology

The study has been conducted in Steel town of Punjab that is, Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab for the year 2013. This area has been purposively chosen as it is the largest steel market all over Asia and majority of the steel operations are performed by migrant labourers.

From this area, a simple random sampling technique was used to select five units where a sample of 10 workers from each mill was taken and thus, an aggregate sample of 50 workers- 23 local and 27 migrant- was selected. The primary data for the study have been mainly generated through a comprehensive questionnaire through personal interview method

Main Findings of the study

Working Conditions:

Working conditions refer to the working environment and all existing circumstances affecting labour at the workplace, including job hours, physical aspect, legal rights and responsibilities.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents on the basis of working hours

Variable	Local Workers (n=23)	Migrant Workers (n=27)
No of Man Hours Per Day		
8hours	23(100)	27(100)
Overtime Work Hours		
No overtime	20 (86.96)	15(55.56)
1 hour	02 (08.69)	02 (07.41)
2 hours	01(04.35)	09 (33.33)
3 hours and above	00 (0)	01 (3.70)

Note: Figures within the bracket indicates percentage of the total respondents.

1. Hours of Work, Rest Interval and Working Shifts

The working hours of workers are regulated through the provisions of the Factories Act, 1948. The Factories Act, 1948 provides that normally an adult worker shall not be allowed to work for more than 9 hours in a day and 48 hours in a week. As regards rest interval, the Act stipulates that no worker shall work for more than 5 hours before he has rest interval of at least half an hour.

Table1 shows that 100% (23) of local workers and 100% (27) of migrant workers works for 8 hours per day. This implies that normal work week is 40 hours that is, 8 hours a day and five days a week. The data reveals that all the workers are provided with half to one hour rest interval. Workers often work in rotating shifts like day, afternoon and night but as these units are small scale units and due to lack of facilities available to them, these units work in day only from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. thereby employing workers only for day shift.

2. Overtime

As per the law, no adult worker shall ordinarily be required or allowed to work in an establishment for more than 8 hours a day. Overtime work is an advantageous and an extra earning source for rolling mill workers. In some cases, workers do overtime in the week end. As their salary is very low, they always try to earn some extra amount from overtime.

Table 1 reveals that 86.96% (20) of local workers and 55.56% (15) of migrant workers do not do overtime. On the other hand, 44.44% (12) of migrant workers do overtime for upto 3 hours as against 13.04% (03) of local workers. It implies that majority of the migrant workers do overtime in order to earn extra income because their family size is bigger than local worker's family. Also, majority of migrant workers live alone that is, without families so, in order to utilize spare time they do overtime.

3. Leaves and Holidays

There are different kinds of leaves i.e. casual leave, medical leave, privileged leave and earned leave. It has been observed that there is provision of only medical leave but none of the units were giving casual leave and earned leaves to their workers. Nevertheless, weekly off is there.

Generally there are three types of holidays which are granted to workers in industry. These are statutory holidays, Festival holidays and National holidays. It has been observed that as per the norms, in a year total of 20 holidays including national and festival holidays are being provided to its workers in each unit taken as sample for study.

Welfare facilities

Welfare is a broad concept. It connotes a condition of well being, happiness, satisfaction, conservation and development of human resources.

The Factories Act, 1948 and various other labour legislations enacted from time to time have laid provision of various facilities (intra-mural) at work place; which are supposed to be provided by the employer. It has been observed that basic facilities provided at work place were not of the desired level. Drinking water facilities existed in all the units surveyed while majority of the units had provided latrines, washing facilities and rest shelters to their workers. Transport, canteen (free meal) facilities were non-existent in all the five units.

The standard of cleanliness was not satisfactory in all the units surveyed whereas, the standard of safety provisions was observed to be satisfactory. Every worker was provided with protective clothing made of jute, safety shoes, gloves and goggles while working within the premises. But it has been observed that most of the workers donot prefer to wear safety despite being known that they will be harmed by the hazardous environment. Thus, carelessness of workers in this aspect has been reported during the survey.

Social security

According to ILO, Social Security is the security that furnishes against certain risks to which its members are exposed. Social security is an attack on five giants i.e. wants, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. Social security is an end by itself and it includes: Social insurance and Social assistance.

1. Provident Fund Schemes

The EPF is a scheme intended to help employees from both private and non-pensionable public sectors save a fraction of their salary every month in a saving scheme, to be used in an event that the employee is temporarily or no longer fit to work or at retirement.

During the course of survey it was found that every worker was covered under the Employees Provident Fund scheme. The rate of contribution and eligibility conditions were as per the Act i.e., 12% of their wage should be deposited in EPF and the owner is liable to deposit 12% for him.

2. Pension, Gratuity and Accident Insurance

There is no provision of pension to the workers working in the sampled mills.

The payment of gratuity act is applicable to factories, plantation, shops and establishments, mines, oil fields, ports etc., which employ 10 or more employees. Moreover, a continuous service of five years or more with one employer is also essential to be eligible for gratuity benefit.

It is observed that the labourers if work for one year they should avail services for 15 days in the shape of money at the time of their retrenchment and if they work for more than 5 years they get gratuity for 15 days in every year.

Provision of accident insurance is there in all the 5 units covered but it is not satisfactory. It has been reported that, if some accident occurs within the mill only then compensation is provided to the worker and employer provides medical treatment from the private practitioner.

3. Maternity Benefits

No unit in the sample was employing women therefore, the question of maternity benefits could not be considered.

4. Medical care

ESI Act, 1948 provides medical benefits, sickness benefits, maternity benefits, disablements benefits and dependents benefits in case of sickness and employment injury.

It has been observed that all workers are covered under ESI scheme. Under ESI scheme, 1.75% is deducted from workers pay while employer is liable to deposit 4.75% in worker's account. The workers generally preferred government clinics, district hospitals, ESI hospitals, private practitioners and private hospitals. It has been observed that free medical facilities offered by the government clinics attract workers but in reality, services offered are not satisfactory. So, workers prefer to seek better treatment from private medical practitioners even at higher cost.

5. Housing Accommodation

Housing is the primary need of a worker. It constitutes the most important part of the physical environment which continuously influences the health and well being of a worker. Provision of shelter is therefore, regarded as one of the most important of the social need.

The data shows that all units had a scheme of providing housing accommodation to its workers. But only migrant workers avail these facilities while others live with their relatives or have rented accommodation. This implies that only few migrant workers avail this facility because employers provide the accommodation within the units in the shape of godowns or single-congested rooms with no basic facilities. Also, they are made to share accommodation with 2-3 co-workers (as shown in Table 2). So, the migrant worker prefers to live with relatives or in the rented house. None of the local worker reported avail this facility as they have self-owned houses.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents on the basis of pattern of living

Pattern of Living	Local workers (n=23)	Migrant workers (n=27)
Alone	01(04.35)	08 (29.63)
Family	22 (95.65)	06 (22.22)
Relatives	00 (0)	04 (14.82)
Other workers	00 (0)	09 (33.33)
Sharing Accommodation	Migrant Workers (n=27)	
0	12 (44.45)	
1	03 (11.11)	

2	03 (11.11)
3	05 (18.52)
4	01 (03.70)
5	03 (11.11)

Note: Figures within the bracket indicates percentage of the total respondents.

6. Grievance Redressed Procedure

It has been observed that worker's complaints were initially received and heard by the contractor or site in-charge and appeals were heard by the mill owner in all the units covered.

Work environment

Work environment means your surroundings at your place of occupation. It also refers to a sort of mental state while on the job. It includes other factors relating to the place of employment, such as the quality of the air, noise level, and additional perks and benefits of employment etc.

Working in steel units involves physical accident and blows, muscular and nervous strain, monotony, noise, unhealthy dust and air, which diminish and dampen workers efficiency. Long hours of work and poor working condition render them inefficient and make them physiologically unwilling to work.

The main environmental factors at the workplace are ventilation, temperature, noise and smell. Standard of ventilation is satisfactory as workers work in open area in the mill.

Reasonable Heat / Temperature at work place is an essential working condition. It has been observed that area near the bhatti's is extremely hot in summers and winters. For this, a special provision of fans is provided to every worker working near bhatti's.

Noise has also adverse effect on work efficiency of the workers. In mills, blasting, drilling and breaking the big pieces into small creates noise. Movement of transported vehicle also creates noise. This noise effect is of long run effect with diseases like, hard hearing and dumpness. It is reported that since, workers work regularly in the mill so, the gravity of noise is not felt by them as compared to the person who visits there for the first time.

Effect of Smell is dangerous one. Smell of dust, carbon monoxide through transportation etc affect the respiratory system of the workers in the mills. All workers are working in an unpleasant smelling condition. It implies that the smell in the mills have a disastrous repercussion on the workers health. Generally at the end of the service period workers are affected with diseases in respiratory system i.e. diseases of lungs and heart.

Posture of work in mills hampers the productivity of labour. Instability in workplace, working in continuous standing position for longer hours makes the job strenuous. This also leads to decrease in

Satisfaction towards work environment

Degree of satisfaction of a worker is a subjective judgement. So the level of satisfaction has been measured by scaling it into three categories: Good, Bad and Average. It is observed in all the five units that satisfaction towards work environment is good. None of the worker reported that satisfaction is average or bad.

Workers version on Working Conditions, Welfare Facilities and Social Security

During the course of the survey, information was sought on working conditions, welfare facilities and social security from the sampled workers also. All workers corroborated their employee's version on all these aspects.

Implications and Recommendations

It is suggested that steps have to be taken by the mills to implement various voluntary welfare facilities such as educational facilities to the children of the workers, medical facilities to the family members of the workers, recreational and entertainment facilities etc., In addition to that the mills have to strictly implement the provisions of various Acts and

Laws which have been implemented for the purpose of protecting the interests of the workers at the work place. The benefits derived by the workers because of such voluntary welfare facilities and statutory facilities offered by the mills will increase the satisfaction of the workers on the Working Conditions in the mills.

The mills should take steps for the improvement of these basic facilities at the work place as this will be helpful in improving the work efficiency of the workers. It has been suggested that the mills have to take positive steps for provision of better toilet facilities to the workers in the mills. The toilets in the mills have to be cleaned at regular intervals and adequate quantity of water has to be supplied for the toilets. There should be provision for safe and clean housing facilities with proper sanitation and water for the workers. By providing better lighting, ventilation, cleanliness and proper toilet facilities at the work place, the extent of satisfaction of the workers on the Working Conditions can be improved.

It is suggested that the sites should be inspected in the presence of the employers and workers representatives by the govt authorities to enforce labour laws, other relevant laws and working conditions. At workplace, strict enforcement of labour legislations is a prerequisite.

Conclusion

An industry is the backbone of any country. Industry is the process of growth which organically links to both social and economic development. The industrial workers contribute substantially to nation's economy. Iron and steel Industry forms the base of all Industrial activity. The steel sector in Mandi Gobindgarh contributes to the development of the country in general and to the development of Punjab in particular. Due to participation in this income generating sector, the life and status of steel workers in the society got upgraded. However, largely, the condition of steel workers is very frustrating. They face various crises and the print media had written many reports had aired many pathetic stories on their unfriendly working environment, health issues, nutrition, insurance, etc. but feeble measures have been taken so far to address these problems. Overall, these problems are hampering the production and environment of the steel sector and if these obstacles are not removed, the sector may be affected more and more in the coming days. Last but not the least, steel workers, who are the major workforce behind this sector, must be recognized properly and concrete ideas and their implementation should come to lessen the plight of them. Unless and until the basic rights of the workers are ensured, it may not be expected that this sector will achieve its desired goal. If the recommended measures are implemented then it may improve the present situation and the workers and owners may achieve their goal.

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