

WOMEN IN UNORGANIZED SECTOR

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ABSTRACT: *Almost 400 million people (more than 85 percent of the working population in India) work in unorganized sector and of these at least 120 million are women. Women working in the informal sector are not included in the official statistics and their work is undocumented and considered as disguised wage work, unskilled, low paying and does not provide benefits to the worker. Despite the advances women have made in many societies, women's concerns are still given second priority almost everywhere. They continue to face discrimination and marginalization both subtle and blatant and do not share equally in the fruits of development. Their contribution is not given due credit. Women workers in unorganised sector lag behind the males in terms of level and quality of employment. We find that women usually go in for temporary and standby jobs because of the prevalent hesitancy to employ women in regular jobs and providing them with good working conditions. The main workers are those who "work" for the major part of the year. Female main workers constitute 14.65% of the population and men- 50.54%. Female marginal workers constitute 6.25% of the population, whereas males being only 0.98%. Most of the women are found to be employed in agricultural activities and in the unorganized sector. The employment of women is high in the unorganized sector such as part time helpers in households, construction centre, tanneries (setting, parting and drying), match and beedi industries etc. the workers in unorganized sector, are so scattered that the implementation of legislation is very inadequate and ineffective. There are a lot of problems faced by women workers in unorganised sector in India. Women in unorganized sector require social security addressing issues of leave, wages, working conditions, pension, housing, child care, health benefits, maternity benefits, safety and occupational health. This can only be ensured by extending labour protection to those sectors in a manner that pays special attention to needs of women workers.*

Objectives of the study are to know the problems faced by the women workers in unorganised sector in India, to know what measures can be taken to improve their occupational health, safety and welfare in unorganized sector, and role of different agencies to improve the position of women workers in unorganized sector in India.

As a research methodology descriptive research has been made. Secondary data is collected from various journals, articles, and economic reports.

In conclusion about this research study it is found that the unorganised sector occupied a significant position in Indian economy. It is clear that a large number of unorganised workers are home based and are engaged in occupations like beedi rolling, handloom weaving etc. the central government enacted several social security laws to protect the interests of workers both in organized and unorganized sectors. Apart from this, statutory welfare funds such as Beedi Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1976; Lime Stone and the Dolomite Mines Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1976; Social Security Act, 2008 etc. have been enacted to make apply to the special categories of workers in the unorganized sector with a view to provide housing, medical, recreational, educational, family welfare and other welfare facilities.

Keywords: *Unorganized, Women workers, Welfare, Social Security*

INTRODUCTION

Various studies have shown that economic dependence of women is predominant cause of their subordination. Thus, a change in the structure of the economy whereby women are assigned a major productive role would be a way to improve their status. Economic independence is a foundation on which any structure of equality for women can be built. Hence the employment of women have opened up new vistas for women; shifting interest from household duties to work outside. In the modern world women have to perform dual responsibilities in being a house wife, a mother as well as an employee and a producer of income for her family. Society being male dominated, women workers receive still poor recognition and value especially for women workers in the informal sector, the double burden of combining the tasks of production and reproduction is even more arduous despite the statutory provisions to ensure fair working conditions for women in India and also the specific provisions for the protection and welfare of women workers. According to the information provided by the office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India as per census 2011, the total number of female workers in India is 149.8 million comprising of 121.8 and 28.0 million in rural and urban areas respectively. Out of total 149.8 million female workers, 35.9 million females are working as cultivators and another 61.5 million are agricultural labourers. Of the remaining 8.5 million are in household industry and 43.7 million are classified as other workers. As per census 2011, the work participation rate for women is 25.51% as compared to 25.63% in 2001. The work participation rate of women was however 22.27% in 1991. Merely 6% of the women workers are in formal sector and the remaining that is majority of the women workers are employed in rural area, in that, 87% amongst them are labourers and cultivators. Thus women constituted a significant part of the workforce of India. Majority of these women are engaged in the occupations of unorganised sector such as agriculture, cotton and tea plucking, pottery, handloom, construction and domestic services (<http://deshkalindia.com/publisher:Deskhkal>). Women workers in domestic services in 1999-2000 constituted 3.2% of the workforce and this comprised 39, 25,000 workers. The services provided include cooking, cleaning utensils, washing, and babysitting amongst other responsibilities. In the 'global economy' there has been an emergence of a new professional class of workers that include well educated women. With this there has been a need for domestic servants to help the professionals in their daily chores (Padma 2002).

Unorganized sector always play a vital role in terms of providing employment opportunities to a large segment of the workforce in India. Near about 92% of the total employment in the Indian economy during the period 1999-2000 was accounted for by the unorganized/informal sector (NSSO 55th Round 1999-2000). In most states the share of informal workers is approximately the same as the national average. In West Bengal, 89% male workers and 94% female workers were unorganized workers. According to Unni & Rani (1999) due to steady decline in the growth of the formal sector a larger section of the growing labour force is being absorbed in informal sector,

resulting in a progressive increase in employment in that sector. Generally, major section of the informal workers are either absorbed in the agricultural sector or in traditional crafts, village and cottage industries or they migrate to cities to do different types of informal jobs like rickshaw puller, weight carrier, waiters in different restaurants, vendors etc. The proportion of women in the country's workforce has increased during the last three decades. The great majority of women in India do home-based work, are self employed, employed in household enterprises, small units, on land as agricultural workers, as labourers on construction sites, as domestic workers, and in many other forms of temporary employment, in rural as well as urban areas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research has been made. Secondary data is collected from various journals, articles, and economic reports. Observation method has been used to know the problems faced by women workers in unorganised sector. Information has been collected by using interview method also.

LEGISLATIONS RELATING TO OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH IN INDIA

1. The Factories Act, 1948 and the State Rules notified thereunder
2. The Dock Workers (Safety, Health & Welfare) Act, 1986 and the Regulations framed thereunder
3. The Mines Act, 1952 and the Rules framed thereunder
4. The Plantation Labour Act, 1951
5. The Shop & Establishments Act
6. The Explosives Act, 1884 and the Rules framed thereunder
7. The Petroleum Act, 1934 and the Rules framed thereunder
8. The Insecticides Act, 1968 and the Rules framed thereunder
9. The Indian Electricity Act, 1910 and the Indian Electricity Rules, 1956
10. The Indian Boilers Act, 1923 and the Indian Boilers Regulations
11. The Dangerous Machines (Regulation) Act, 1983
12. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and the Manufacture, Storage & Import of Hazardous Chemicals Rules, 1989 and other Rules framed thereunder
13. The Indian Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Factories Rules framed thereunder.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

UNORGANIZED SECTOR

Unorganized labour which contributes about 90% of the total workforce in the country remained a neglected lot especially for the lack of protection on safety and health. The largest segment of the workforce in the country belongs to the unorganized sector, 185.3 million workers in the agriculture sector, 14.6 million in the construction sector, 9.51 lakhs in the plantation sector and about 41.35 lakhs in the beedi industry.

Sector	Informal sector		Formal sector		Total	
	1999-00	2004-05	1999-00	2004-05	1999-00	2004-05
Rural	98.63	117.21	5.39	6.82	104.02	124.03
Urban	13.89	17.88	5.07	6.12	18.96	24
Total (women)	112.51	135.09	10.46	12.94	122.98	148.03
Total (male+female)	342.64	394.9	54.12	62.57	396.76	457.46

Table 1: Women workers in an informal sector and formal sector between 1999-2000 and 2004-2005 (in million).

To begin with the following 6 sectors have been identified for strengthening OSH (Occupational Safety and Health). These are Agriculture, Construction, Shops & Establishments, Beedi & Cigar Manufacturing, Home Work, Eating Places and Waste Management.

The **Agriculture sector** is one of the most hazardous occupations and it includes hazards which primarily are caused by:

- i. Agriculture hand-tools and implements such as pick-axe, spade, sickle etc.
- ii. Farm machinery – tractors, threshers, fodder chopping machines, etc.
- iii. Chemical agents – pesticides, fertilizers, strong weed killers, etc.
- iv. Climatic agents – high temperature, heavy rain, humidity, high velocity wind/storm, lightening, etc.
- v. Electricity
- vi. Animal/snake bites,
- vii. Other agents-dust, solar radiation, etc.,

The Insecticides Act, 1968 and the Dangerous Machines (Regulation) Act, 1983 and their rules are the two legislations presently applicable to specific aspects of the agricultural operations. The enforcement of these act lies with the State Agriculture Departments. No major studies/survey in the area of hazards involved in these occupations have been undertaken at the national level so far.

India has also recently supported a Convention for the safety of Agricultural workers. A national policy on OSH matters for the Agricultural labour would also need to be drawn up.

Construction Sector

This is one of the most vulnerable segments of the unorganized labour in our country. A large number of workers in this sector are vulnerable to the vagaries of workplace accidents and occupational health problems. They are exposed to a wide variety of serious OSH hazards and the rate of fatal accidents in this industry is 4 to 5 times that of manufacturing sector. The workers are also exposed to a host of

hazardous substances, which have a potential to cause serious occupational diseases such as asbestosis, silicosis, lead poisoning etc. There is also a serious potential for fires due to storage and use of flammable substances and a potential for disasters due to collapse of the structures and subsidence of the soil on which the construction activity is being carried. The Building and other Construction Workers (Regulation for Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996 was promulgated in 1996 and Central Rules under this Act were notified in 1998. Except for Kerala and Karnataka no other state has notified these rules.

Shops & Establishments

Shops & Establishments are covered under the Shops and Establishment Act enacted by the various State Governments in 1948. The enforcement of these Statutes has been entrusted to either the State Labour Commissioner or the local authorities. There is a separate chapter on Health and Safety providing for cleanliness, ventilation, lighting, precautions against fire and first aid facilities at the workplace as prescribed under Statute.

Beedi & Cigar Manufacturing

About 90% of the workforce is home workers and majority of them are women. The remaining 10% are employed as factory workers for whom the provisions of the Factories Act are applicable. The Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966 is applicable to this sector which includes home workers as well and the legislation is enforced by the State Commissioners of Labour.

Some sectoral-specific recommendations for improving OSH standard in the selected seven segments of the unorganized sector are summarized below:

Agriculture Sector

Amendments to the Dangerous Machines (Regulation) Act, 1983 in the form of a notification in the Gazette, the scope suitably to cover more machinery being used in the agricultural sector. Suitable amendments on the matters relating to safety and health aspect may be considered. Amendment to section 36 of the Insecticides Act, 1968, which would include the use and provision suitable Personal Protective Equipment while applying the substance by spray, etc. is suggested.

Notifications to the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 and Rules framed there under, for enlarging its scope to cover lesser land holdings and fewer numbers of persons employed may be considered. Also occupational safety and health aspects may be included.

Construction Sector

The scope of the Building & Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act be enlarged by suitably reducing the existing eligibility criteria to 5 workers and making appointment of safety officers by the employers of establishments employing 100 workers and above as a statutory obligation.

The Act applicable to the construction sector is presently overseen by nontechnical department. In order to supplement their efforts in inspection, the existing professional bodies/organizations, may be associated to oversee technical inspections and investigation of accidents. DGFASLI (Directorate General Factory Advice Service & Labour Institutes) and professional independent bodies/organizations should organize trainers' training programme for education officers Central Board of Workers Education and Supervisory and Management personnel from industry.

The Central Board of Workers Education under the Ministry of Labour may be given the task of training of construction workers in collaboration with professional independent institutes involved in construction safety.

Beedi & Cigar Manufacturing Sector

Amendment may be carried out to the Beedi and Cigar Workers Act, 1966 (Conditions of Employment and Health) incorporating safety, in case of any mechanized work activity that is carried on. A provision on ventilation, lighting and fire safety can be also made to ensure better and safe working conditions. Furthermore, in addition to the existing provisions, suitable provision may be incorporated in the Act and Rules making it mandatory to carry out periodical health check-up of the workers (as provided under Sec.44).

Shops & Establishment Sector

To protect the workers from electrical/mechanical hazards, an amendment may be made to the Shops and Establishment Acts of the State Governments. Similarly, for operation and maintenance of lifts, as well as maintenance of building for carrying out additional construction, whitewashing etc. adequate safety provisions should be incorporated in the Rules. In short, there is a need to amend the existing provisions under the Act and Rules to be amended suitably to cover the safety, health and welfare of large number of workers employed in this sector.

The shops and establishments carrying out electrical and mechanical repair work, small garages, air conditioner/refrigerator repair shops, small jobbing workshops, etc., may be brought under the purview of the Factories Act.

The enforcement officials from the enforcement agencies of Agriculture Departments may be trained on OHS aspects and inspection strategy and guidelines on OHS may be developed.

Home Work Sector

After assessing the problem through studies and surveys simple booklets and training material may be prepared. For disseminating information on occupational safety, health and environmental awareness campaigns conducted for the benefit of those who are engaged.

Eating Places Sector

All the eating places, which are beyond the Notified Areas and not covered by any statute, may be brought under the Shops and Establishments Acts of the State Governments or the Factories Act through an amendment/notification.

Waste Management Sector

Citizen's active participation and effective coordination with all agencies concerned and NGOs is suggested. Safety Awareness Programmes may be organized for NGOs and waste collectors.

CONCLUSION

Women workforce is playing an important role in the development of Indian economy. Women workers in the unorganized sector are facing many problems related to their safety and health. From the above discussion, it is concluded that the constitutional guarantees have not made women really equal to men. Women workers in the unorganized sector in different occupations such as agriculture, beedi rolling, construction etc. in substantially large numbers, but paid less than men for the same or similar work. Legislations which are providing health and welfare measures, maternity benefits etc. are not implemented effectively because women employees do not get the stipulated benefits and facilities to their desired extent. This is a sign of vulnerability and exploitation. Despite all these labour laws, a majority of women employees lack proper education and ignorance of statutory provisions, which is the thrust area affecting the development and welfare of women employees. Hence, appropriate efforts should be taken to make women employees conscious about their rights for improvement in socio economic conditions.

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