



SOCIO ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

The job of an unskilled worker is more strenuous in the construction industry than in other manufacturing industries. As casual workers, women not only face insecurity of work but are also paid lower wages compared to their male counterparts. Minimum wage and other legislation are violated for women. Women face instability in work, they get poor remuneration discrimination in the payment of wages and virtual absence of enforcement of protective labour legislation. Their work is regarded as unskilled, but they are given no opportunity to acquire skills on the job. Usually, women workers in construction industry have to assume multiple burdens of household work, looking after children and work in the sites to earn a living. More than 35 percent of the construction workers are women. Unlike other industries where women are employed in semi-skilled or sometimes even in skilled jobs, in the construction industry they are employed only as unskilled labourers. The present study aims at — identifying the major issues related to socio economic profile of women construction labourers, by analyzing the job satisfaction levels, wages, their economic status by finding out their savings, loans and also examining the status of these women in social ladder and recommending measures for mitigation of the problems.

Keywords: Economic Empowerment, Women Construction

1. Introduction

In India women workers constitute a major portion in the work force of the construction industry. Sad to say they remain not only unorganized but also unskilled as compared to

male construction workers, who by virtue of their gender preference have progressed ahead in their career from an unskilled worker to a skilled one, specifically as a mason, carpenter, welder and electrician. While on the other hand women construction workers start as unskilled helpers and remain unskilled throughout their life and as a result are victims of gender discrimination. Traditions, culture and customs along with the attitude of society towards women have placed women workers at a great disadvantage. In addition to this, they are also unorganized and dependent on their husbands without any empowerment socially and economically. Unfortunately, in this system, women workers do not have an opportunity to receive any type of skills training which has left them stagnant without any chance of promotion or upgrade of any sort in their job. Most of the time, based on the mistaken notion that women are incapable of doing heavy or rough work, women workers lose out miserably. This type of attitude has left the women workers at the bottom of the rung of skills in the industry with no avenues of promotion or higher wages for them. Construction workers in general have no access to formal training in the construction industry and they upgrade their skills through practice or by observing and working under skilled masons or carpenters etc. As a result of women being only engaged in soft skills, the gap between the skilled male workers and unskilled women workers has placed them in a position of less empowerment economically and socially. This has worked against the advancement and empowerment of women workers. Only 11% of the construction workers in India are formally skilled with a huge mass of unskilled workers.

The BWI foresaw a threat to their existence and livelihood as a result of

globalization and felt an urgent need to provide women workers the necessary skills to enable them to sustain their jobs and face competition workers and found it necessary to address this issue. A series of skills training programmers' were initiated for the women construction workers in Tamil Nadu. It is a 10 day programme where the last two days are dedicated to gender awareness and concepts of gender mainstreaming. The BWI established a working arrangement with the Builders Association of India (BAI) through TCWF (TamilNadu Construction Workers Federation) a merger of 7 affiliates of Tamil Nadu) who came forward and agreed to provide skills training to construction women workers in Ta-mil Nadu. Accordingly BWI initiated a skill training package exclusively for women. This training started with training on painting houses. The training is on mixing of colours, brush strokes and proper techniques of painting.

“The Indian women has established, equality with me n in all walks of life, and will never return to her former status of a painted doll, a child bearing, machine or a mere hanger-on”
Mahatma Gandhi.

An extremely high percentage of India's workforce is estimated to be employed in the unorganized sector. According to the NSS survey round, (2009-10) out of the total estimated workforce of 457.5 million workers, 148 million are women (roughly 38 percent). Out of the total female workforce of 148 million, 142 million or nearly 96 percent of all female workers are in the unorganized sector; making an overwhelming proportion of women workers in low paid, unskilled jobs.

Workers in the unorganized sector, unlike their counterparts in the organized sector, have little or no social security, little negotiating power in terms of choice of work, are often 'unskilled' and work in poor conditions. However the unorganized sector is extremely complex and there are wide differences in nature of work, employer employee relation, wage levels, degree of informality, size of enterprise and skill. While men can move up the ladder of career in construction, women have no promotion or aspiration. Interests of patriarchy and entrenched gender inequities, rather than any inherent differences in physical capability, have drawn these divisions and made acquiring of any

construction skills taboo for women in India. While men start work as helpers or coolies on construction sites, and gradually acquire and upgrade their skills on the job, it is unthinkable for a woman to do any other task than the ones she performed on her first day on the job. They join as unskilled workers and retire as unskilled workers. They earn very much less when compared to men. Men move up to be masons and then become supervisor and many even become contractors. But women are denied promotional opportunities. The male dominated construction sector does not encourage women to become masons.

Most women construction workers were hired in the rural areas by subcontractors. They were generally hired and paid through their husbands, which meant that their names were not listed in the payroll record of the subcontractors. The traditional, male-dominated social system in India, the nature of women's work as casual laborers and the subcontractors' unwillingness to disclose the number of women workers to avoid the obligation to pay social costs, contributed to their invisibility. The present study aims at — identifying the major issues related to socio economic profile of women construction laborers, My analyzing the job satisfaction levels, wages, their economic status by finding out their savings, loans and also examining the status of these women in social ladder and recommending measures for mitigation of the problems.

- (1) To understand the personal background of women construction workers in the study area.
- (2) To estimate the job profile of women construction workers in the study area.
- (3) To study the economic status of women construction workers in the study area.
- (4) To assess the support given by family members in household works
- (5) To give suggestions for improving the conditions of women construction workers.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure.

The research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. The research design adapted in the present study is a Descriptive Research Design.

Sample

The researcher selected 50 respondents on the basis of simple random sampling from the universe.

Tools of the Study

The study involves primary data collection. A pre-designed questionnaire is employed to gather the data required for the study.

Analysis of Data

The relevant frequencies and tables for the major variables will be studied and interpreted in terms of the objectives of the study. Descriptive statistics will be used to interpret the data gathered by the researcher. The study on, **Economic Empowerment of Women Construction Workers in Tamil Nadu** has revealed the following findings.

- ✓ All the 50 respondents in the study were found to be Hindus and they all belonged to Scheduled Caste (SC).
- ✓ 46% of the respondents were in the age group between 30 – 40 years. 30% of them were in the age group between 20 – 30 years. 24% of them ranged between 40 – 50 years of age.
- ✓ 76% of the respondents were found to be married. 6% of the women were found to be unmarried and 6% of them were single. 12% of the respondents were widows
- ✓ 66% of the respondents were found to have attended school till the primary level. 22% of them were illiterates and 12% of the respondents had education up to secondary level. None of the respondents were found to be graduates.
- ✓ 44% of the respondents were found to be carrying bricks, cement and stones. 22% of them filter sand at the work sites. 20% of them carry water for construction purpose. 14% of the respondents assisted

the masons in the work site. The nature of job was in no way related to age.

- ✓ Out of a sample of 50 respondents, 22% of the respondents were highly satisfied with the job. Nearly 36% of them were found to be either unsatisfied or highly unsatisfied with their job. These women are forced to work due to poor economic conditions, in order to maintain sustenance of their family. 20% of them were neutral in their opinions.
- ✓ 80% of the respondents earned an income between Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 10,000. 18% of them were found to be earning an income between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 15,000 and only one respondent was earning income above Rs. 15,000.
- ✓ All the respondents were unsatisfied or highly unsatisfied with the working conditions and facilities provided in the work place. No basic facilities are being provided to them in spite of their hard work.
- ✓ 94% of the respondents were found to reside in their own houses. The rest 6% lived in rented houses.
- ✓ 16% of the respondents earned additional income from leasing vehicles and another 16% were found to earn extra income from raising domestic animals like cow, goat etc. 10% had an additional income from renting out shops, land etc. 58% of the respondents had no other sources of income.
- ✓ 4% of the respondents had taken an amount of Rs. 30,000 as loan. 8% of them had taken up to Rs. 25,000 as loan. 14% of the respondents had taken an amount of Rs. 15,000 as loan.
- ✓ 6% respondents contributed 100% of their income to their family. This is because they were single and had to contribute fully to take care of their family. 36% of the respondents contribution to the family income was nearly 40%. Respondents those who contributed 30% to the family income was 34%.

✓ 18% of the respondents had all the work done by their family. It was because they had the support of their daughters or mothers in their homes. 24% of them were assisted in various household works such as cooking, washing, taking care of children, cleaning house etc.

The construction industry in India is facing a huge shortage of man-power, especially those with skill-sets to sustain the burgeoning growth in infrastructure and housing sectors. Although the construction industry employs about 31 million people, second only to the agriculture sector, the workforce requirement is about 5 million people per year over the next seven years to sustain the current eight per cent growth rate (Manpower shortage hits construction industry, 2007 November 16). With only two million workers available in the country every year, the construction industry will face a heavy manpower challenge, as it requires employing 5 million people per annum. There is also dearth of contractors due to the fact that while the existing contracting agencies are overloaded attempts are not being made to form new ones. Construction workers are one of the most numerous and vulnerable segments of the unorganized sector in India. The building and other construction workers are characterized by their inherent risk to the life and limb of the workers. The work is also characterized by its casual nature, temporary relationship between employer and employee, uncertain working hours lack of basic amenities and inadequate welfare facilities. There is no discernible and permanent employer employee relationship in the construction sector due to the migratory nature of the labour, short duration of projects, and the numerous sub contractors, (Suchitra and Rajasekar, 2006). Usually, the Principal employer never knows who is actually working for him and nor does the workers know for whom he is working. These characteristics also influence the practice of gender discrimination, working conditions, social security, health and safety of the workers specially the women in this industry. Even though construction is considered to be one of the principal industries in the country, the workers in the industry still remain un-skilled, exploited and discriminated against (Mathew, 2005).

3. SUGGESTIONS

Create awareness of construction labourers' rights and set up mechanisms of redressal. Ensuring decent working conditions and proper contract systems and providing basic health care for construction labourers. Adequate intervention from the government authorities required ensuring the health, safety and welfare of the construction labourers. Effective implementation of the labour laws that makes provision of better health, safety and welfare of the construction labourers. NGO's working should extend open education to the labourers. Encourage saving habit among the construction labourers and also adequate insurance facilities

4. CONCLUSIONS

The job of an unskilled worker is more strenuous in the construction industry than in other manufacturing industries. As casual workers, women not only face insecurity of work but are also paid lower wages compared to their male counterparts. Minimum wage and other legislation are violated for women. Women face instability in work, they get poor remuneration discrimination in the payment of wages and virtual absence of enforcement of protective labour legislation. Their work is regarded as unskilled, but they are given no opportunity to acquire skills on the job. Usually, women workers in construction industry have to assume multiple burdens of household work, looking after children and work in the sites to earn a living. More than 35 percent of the construction workers are women. Unlike other industries where women are employed in semi-skilled or sometimes even in skilled jobs, in the construction industry they are employed only as unskilled labourers.

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after children and work in the sites to earn a living. More than 35 percent of the construction workers are women (ILO, 200/a). Unlike other industries where women are employed in semi-skilled or sometimes even in skilled jobs in the construction industry they are employed only as unskilled labourers.

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