

Women in Unorganized Sector: Problems & Issues in India

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Abstract

Women make up 32 per cent of the informal economy, comprising 20 per cent of the agricultural and non-farm workforce. In India, 118 million women workers are employed in the unorganized sector, which is 97 per cent of the total female workers in India. Most of the women in the country are less educated than the men, thus working mainly as unskilled labor and thus getting low wages. They are considered physically inferior to men, so they are assumed to work less, thus being paid less. When Amartya Sen spoke about women's welfare, he was accused in India of expressing foreign concerns. Indian women don't see equality that way, he was told. But he argues that if they don't think so, they should be given a chance to think so. Women's economic participation can be referred to in the field of goods and service production in national income statistics. However, the job participation rate for women has been lower at 26 per cent compared to 52 per cent for men. The problem is that women work all the time.

Key Words: Women Workers, Unorganized Sector, Low Wages.

1. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Kalam has rightly said that empowering Women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their value systems lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately good nation. The same lines are narrated by Pandit Nehru to show how the condition of women is related to nations prosperity, "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women." India is a traditional country and has a diverse environment. In India, the role of women is usually recognized to be limited to household and domestic issues. Women are the largest part of India's unorganized labor. The majority of women are exploited with low wages due to a lack of education, skills and ignorance. The sector in which women work greatly affects their social and economical status.

Unorganized labour stands for dispersed and disintegrated workforces working discreetly.

According to the National Commission for Women, 94 percent of the total female workforce is to be found in the unorganized sector. The presence of a large number of women as workers and producers in the informal sector, where income is low, seasonal and insecure employment, and support services are totally or even insufficient nonexistent, growth opportunities few and collective organization weak, has brought into sharp focus the failure of the mainstream to alleviate their predicament. Workers in an unorganized sector, irrespective of sex face exploitation but in the case of women the ratio is higher. There are various factors that effect the overall health status be it physical or emotional such as, The changing patterns of economic development in the liberalization era have put a heavy burden on women, which is reflected in their health status. Small landholders, landlessness, temporary and permanent forced displacement, undoubtedly affects women's health, nutrition and emotional well-being.

The growth of small-scale and domestic industries has been heavily dependent on the female

workforce. Women work in industries such as tanning, tobacco, cashew nuts, coir, textiles, garments, fish processing and canning, construction and household chores. In all these industries, women struggle for long hours with low wages, skilled or unskilled workers. As a result, they face serious health problems associated with the workplace, the danger of pollutants to women working in adolescence, and pregnancy has serious consequences for women. Women work best. Paradoxically, they have the lowest income in their lives. The additional social responsibility they carry, their subordinate position in society, the establishment of patriarchal families, socio-economic backwardness, the tendency to occupy unorganized sectors with low productivity and marginalization The skilled, illiterate, ignorant and surplus labor that accounts for their low- or low-income employment opportunities and are therefore highly exploited. This hinders their bargaining power for higher wages and any chance of further development.

2. DEFINITION OF UNORGANIZED SECTOR

However, it is difficult to define unorganized labor concisely and holistically. Unorganized work refers to a scattered and fragmented workforce in different professions, sometimes loosely associated and working individually. Unorganized labor is formally disorganized in recognized associations and coalitions with defined ideologies, goals, and disciplines. The unorganized sector of India's economy is the largest sector in terms of labor employment. It consists of agriculture and related activities such as forestry, livestock, fishing, and non-agriculture. A bill presented by the Government of India in 2006 when the National Commission for Companies in the Unorganized Sector divides the work of the unorganized sector into self-employed and wage workers.

3. WOMEN IN UNORGANIZED SECTOR

The term unorganized sector was first used by Hart in 1971, who described the unorganized sector as part of the urban labor force and not part of the organized labor market. In the unorganized sector, working conditions are not formally recorded and working conditions are not protected by law.

Therefore, the problem of women workers in the unorganized sector is not well known. Hart has pointed out that one of the main problems is the worst working conditions. Due to population growth and urban migration, the active workforce is growing much faster than employment opportunities in the organized sector. The focus of development policy has gradually shifted from purely economics to equitable growth and poverty eradication. Hence, there is interest in sectors outside the organized economy that provide livelihoods for the majority of the poor. Hence, the concept of the unorganized sector came into being. The definition of the unorganized sector also includes the self-employed with or without family workers and micro-enterprises with fewer than five employees.

4. CONDITION AND CATEGORY OF FEMALE WORKERS

According to the International Labour Organization says that women represent:

- 50 per cent of the population
- 30 per cent of the labour force
- Perform 60 per cent of all working hours
- Receive 10 per cent of the world's income
- Own less than 1 per cent of the world's property.

According to a report by the International Labor Organization published on 8 March 2007 to mark International Women's Day, it depicts that while the status of a working woman does not surprise many, surprisingly there is a significant gender inequality in terms of wages, job security, etc. In all regions, women either work for low wages or are unpaid family members. In South Asia, India and Bhutan ranked 108th and 131st out of 189 countries in terms of the proportion of women in the lower house of parliament in 2006. Categories of women workers in unorganized sector :

a) Scavenger: Scavenger is Someone who scavenges, especially one who searches through rubbish for food or useful things. The count of scavengers are in millions worldwide but they are majorly in developing countries. The global population of urban occupants is expected to double between 1987 and 2015, with 90 per cent of this growth occurring in developing countries. The United Habitat Report has found that nearly 1 billion people all over

the world live in slums, about a third of the world's urban occupants.

b) Homely workers: In 1977-78, there were some 1.68 million female domestic workers, while the number of male workers was only 0.62 million. A study of domestic workers in Delhi (Neetha 2004) [8] shows that although homely work has brought more income to many females and their families it still cannot be considered as decent work because of low compensations, long work hours and hardly any social security. Homely workers are more insecure than other kinds of workers because they are not officially considered as workers at all and are hence not covered by laws that apply to workers.

c) Porters: Women porters basically do the work of loading or unloading of items being acquired at railway stations to warehouses and from warehouses and godowns to further distribution centers.

d) Vendors: This is the most scattered category, which includes females engaged in selling different types of merchandise, like cane baskets, broomsticks, petty cosmetics, utensils, bangles, vegetables and those running roadside food or drink stalls, etc. Nearly 40 per cent of total vendors are females and 30 per cent of these females are the only earning members in their houses.

e) Beauticians: Many females work as beauticians. Many of the beauty parlours/saloons come under the unorganized sector and are identified as informal jobs. According to a study on Human Resource and Skill Requirements in the Unorganized Sector: mapping of human resource skill gaps in India till 2022 carried out by National Skill Development Corporation, Mumbai, the demand for personal care/body care would drive the demand for beauticians.

f) Construction laborers: At least 30 million workers in India are getting employment from the construction industry but recent expansions have resulted in a higher number: trade unions estimate that there were roughly 40 million migrant construction workers in India in 2008. Females work mainly as unskilled workers.

g) Apparel workers: The apparel industry is a subsector of the textile industry and also generates many jobs for migrant workers. India's readymade garment exports increased significantly as a share of

total exports (12 per cent or Rs 254780 million in 2001-02). The women work as helpers to male/female tailors (called as masters). These workers include those involved in knitting woolens/clothes.

5. PROBLEMS FACED BY FEMALE IN UNORGANIZED SECTOR

In India a large number of females migrate to cities and towns from rural areas. Many of these women and girls have insufficient knowledge and skills. They work in inhuman conditions in cities as their living standard is extremely poor. It is a recognized fact that there is still no society in the world in which women workers enjoy the same opportunities as men. The figures for women workers in India are even more gloomy - almost 96 per cent of the women workers are in the unorganized sector. The female work participation rate (FWPR) has increased overall from 19.7 per cent in 1981 to 25.7 per cent in 2001. Some of the problems that females are facing in unorganized sector are:

a) Illiteracy: Because they do not have time to educate themselves, Illiteracy is the biggest problem. They are forced to work from childhood because of which they are also not able to go to school and educate themselves.

b) Lack of skill & knowledge: The skills or training are not provided properly to women. This leads to them getting overworked and still their work is inefficient.

c) More victimization: Female workers are more prone to victimization by employers. It's easier to menace female workers of their job for indecorous favors.

d) Job Insecurity: Since there is still some need for more strong legislation controlling the unorganized sector so the jobs in this sector become more insecure.

e) Non sympathetic attitude of employer: The employer in this sector does not care if the employment is temporary or permanent. They do not care much about conditions of the employees.

f) More work pressure: Females usually get burnt out as they work twice as many hours as male co-workers. In some jobs like agriculture this condition gets worse. As per one study in Himalayas which found

that on a one-hectare farm, a pair of bullocks' works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year, this study was made in relation to tasks performed and hours invested.

g) Irregular Compensation: There is discrimination in compensation too between females and males. Females are usually paid less and this condition gets worse because there is no controlled process in these sectors for compensation.

h) Remuneration differences: It is usually seen that males get paid more than females.

i) Seasonal Jobs: The unorganized sectors have many jobs which are uncertain or seasonal. Some examples are agriculture, construction, handloom workers, fishing etc. During the off season timeline they have to find some other jobs.

j) Problems in the working place: The place of work is not healthy and is not ergonomically designed. Because of these reasons workers face various physical health issues. In agriculture female workers are mostly given tasks in which they are made to stand in one position. This results in various problems such as backache and knee ache.

6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

To conclude, the unorganized sector is more prominent in rural areas compared to urban areas. Also education is less prominent in rural areas. Female participation is more than males. Females face more critical problems. There is compensation differentiation, unhealthy working conditions, insecurity of jobs. This is due to low level employment, seasonal nature of

jobs and absence of guidelines that employees and employers need to follow to maintain healthy relationship. Education and empowerment can thus prove as a boon for upliftment in such a situation. Following suggestions can be put forth:

- i) Women should be given proper education and proper enlightenment so that they can fight for their right to education.
- ii) Women should not be discriminated against in the workplaces and if the work for males and females are the same then they should be paid equally.
- iii) Seminars and workshops should be conducted to enlighten women to empower them and about equality.
- iv) Every working space should have separate department which listens to the problems of female workers and works on to get them resolved
- v) Labor laws should be updated to protect women.
- vi) There should be proper laws and strict actions that should be taken against sexual harassment of women.
- vii) Working conditions should be made proper and guidelines should be made for how a working space should look like and actions should be taken to ensure this.
- viii) Men and women both should be given proper training about the work that they are supposed to do.
- ix) Media should also participate in empowerment of women.

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