

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN KINATHUKKADAVU TALUK OF COIMBATORE DISTRICT IN TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

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. 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.

KEYWORDS: Economic Empowerment, Women Construction

INTRODUCTION

“The Indian women has established, equality with men 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

The construction industry is a major source of employment worldwide, arguably the second largest after agriculture, and generally the primary one in urban areas. Building construction (both new build and maintenance) are labour-intensive activities, generating many jobs per unit of investment both on and off the building site.

The construction industry makes a major positive contribution to the economy of all countries. The output of the industry worldwide is estimated at around \$3,000 billion per annum. The industry creates employment for more than 110 million people worldwide. The provision of large numbers of jobs at relatively low investment cost per job invested is particularly important in the developing countries, where the construction industry plays a major role in combating the high levels of unemployment and in absorbing surplus labour from the rural areas.

Construction provides much needed work opportunities for some of the poorest and most marginalized sections of society in developing countries. Construction output, by value, is heavily concentrated in the developed world. The high income countries of Europe are responsible for 30 per cent of global output, the United States for 21 per cent and Japan for 20 per cent. The figure for India is only 1.7 per cent; for China, despite its huge size and rapid economic growth in recent years, is only 6 per cent. While three-quarters of output is in the developed countries, three-quarters of employment is in the developing world. Many construction workers in these countries are informally employed and not counted in official data, so the real number is likely much higher.

Construction workers are the backbone of the economy as they create the infrastructure necessary for industrial growth. In a globalizing economy, it is they who are constructing the new economy. India's three crore construction workers are literally the builders of modern India. They contribute in infrastructural development of India by building the roads and highways, the railway tracks and airports and ports, the IT cities, the call centre's and mega malls that are creating new forms of wealth today. It is they who are laying the cables for a rapidly expanding country-wide telecommunications network that connect the vast sub-continent and make India one country, to shorting the distance and supporting the business activitely in order to upgrade the economic development.

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 labourers and the subcontractors' unwillingness to disclose the number of women workers to avoid the obligation to pay social costs, contributed to their invisibility.

The invisibility of women workers hindered them from improving their working and living conditions. Women workers were forced to work in unsafe and unsanitary environments for long hours. They suffered from many kinds of

injuries and accidents at work which often harmed their reproduction capacity. Women workers' wages were lower than male workers' wages. Needless to say, the industry took advantage of this situation. Contractors sometimes threatened that they would not hire women workers if they insisted on receiving equal pay. The inequality was rooted in the lack of skill, as well as the failure to recognise skills, among women workers. The traditional system whereby skills were transferred from father to son prevented women workers from receiving skill training, which was given only to male workers. But even when women workers did possess skills, they did not receive a fair evaluation and contractors would never hire them as skilled workers.

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.

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

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The issue of empowerment of Indian women is one of the neglected areas of development. The concept of women empowerment is the major concern among the developing countries because of her responsive and forfeiting role in the families. Most of the evidences in India point out that the empowerment of women is still in the budding stage and needs more and more motivation for a woman to participate in the developmental activities of families.

The researcher keeping all these in mind and also to gain more knowledge on the occupational empowerment of women living in Kinathukkadavu taluk, of Coimbatore dist. of Tamilnadu and the factors influencing the concept of empowerment of women, the present topic — **Economic Empowerment of Women Construction Workers in Kinathukkadavu taluk of Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu** has been formulated.

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.

Universe

The study is planned to be conducted in Kinathukkadavu taluk of Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu. Women construction workers residing in Kinathukkadavu taluk of Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu constitute the universe for the study.

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 Kinathukkadavu taluk of Coimbatore district 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 inspite 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.

- 22% of the respondents earned income up to Rs. 5,000 from additional sources. 16% of them earned income between Rs. 5,000 – Rs. 10,000. It was found that 4% of them earned extra income between Rs. 10,000 – Rs. 15,000. 58% of the respondents had no other sources of income.
- 20% of the respondents had savings in banks. Another 20% saved with post offices and 12% were found to save with SHGs. 8% of the respondents saved with relatives and even with themselves. 50% of the respondents did not have the habit of saving. Habit of savings has to be cultivated among the respondents.
- 12% of the respondents had taken vehicle loan and another 12% of them had taken loan for functions and festivals. 8% of the respondents had taken loan for hospital expenses and another 8% of the respondents had taken education loan. 8% of them had taken educational loan. Nearly 56% of them had not taken any loan. Loans taken for functions and festivals are highly unproductive loans. There are no sources of returns from these types of loans.
- 14% of the respondents had taken loan from chits in their local area. 12% of them had taken loan from private finances. 8% of them from banks and 10% from SHGs. Loans taken from banks is less because of the formalities put in front of them by the banks. Other sources, apart from banks, are easy because of very less formalities. The reasons why the respondents have not taken loan can be due to job insecurity and low level of wages.
- 4% of the respondents had taken an amount of Rs.30,000 as loan. 8% of them had taken upto 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.

SUGGESTIONS

1. 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

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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