
Plight of Women Workers in Unorganized Sector of Bastar District of Chhattisgarh

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ABSTRACT

India has all along followed a proactive policy in the matter of labour Policy. India has evolved in response to specific needs of situation to suit requirements of planned economic development and social justice and a two-fold objective namely maintaining industrial peace and promoting the welfare of labour. The unorganized sector of the economy is primarily labour intensive but less rewarding to the workers in compensation to their efforts put in production. The characteristics of the unorganized labour are specified by the Second Commission on Labour (2002) as self employed persons involved in jobs, agriculture workers, migrant labours, casual and contract workers and home-based artisans. The nature of the employment relationship is the key determinant factor of unorganized labour.

The unorganized labour accounted for more than percent of the total workforce according to census 2001. The majority of women workers come under this category and is employed in the rural areas. Among the rural women workers, 87 percent are employed in agriculture as labourers and cultivators. In urban areas, 80 percent are employed in household industries, petty traders, domestic servants and workers in the cottage industries. Though women constitute a significant part of workforce, they lag behind men and they are neglected section of the society. Moreover, it is an established fact that women bear a disproportionately heavy burden of work than men as they have to contribute more time in the care economy that is the domestic work. The unorganized is most vulnerable, ignored and diverse. Women in unorganized sector constitute a sizable number so it is important to study their problems and prospects. The present study is based on the primary data conducted in Baster district of Chhattisgarh which examine the socio-economic conditions and various problems of unorganized women workers.

INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of India guarantees equality of opportunity in employment and directs the state to secure equal rights for livelihood, equal pay for equal work as well as just and human conditions of work for all. Despite the concerned efforts of the state, the economic status of women is lagging far behind their male counterparts. Women work the most; paradoxically they earn the least in life. The additional social responsibility shouldered by them, their subordinate status in society, patriarchal family set up, socio- economic backwardness, proneness for occupation in the unorganized sector with low productivity and marginalization in employment opportunities account for their poor or low earning capacity. A majority of women work in unorganized sectors for low wages due to low level skills, illiteracy, ignorance and surplus labour and thus face high level of exploitation. This hampers their bargaining power for higher wages and any opportunities for further development.

The term unorganized sector was first used by Hart in 1971 who described the unorganized sector as that part of urban labour force, which falls outside the organized labour market. In the unorganized sector, work situations are not in official record and working conditions are not protected by law. So the problems of female workers in unorganized sector are not properly known. It has been pointed out by Hart that one of the major problems is that working conditions are worst.

That optimistic vision of economic transition did not match what was actually happening in the world. In the late 1960s and 1970s, a large section of the population in the developing countries was suffering from poverty and working outside the organized sector in activities that were later broadly termed as “unorganized”. Due to population growth and urban migration, the active labour force was growing at a much faster rate than availability of jobs in the organized sector. The focus of development policies was gradually shifting from pure economic to growth with equity and the eradication of poverty. Interest was, thus generated in sectors outside the organized economy that was providing a livelihood to a large section of the poor. Hence, the concept of the unorganized sector was born. In defining the unorganized sector, self- employed with or without family labour and microenterprises with less than five workers, is also included.

In analyzing the contribution of the unorganized sector, emphasis is placed on the pervasive importance of the link between organized and unorganized activities that are not confined to particular occupations or even economic activities.

PROBLEMS OF WOMEN WORKERS IN UNORGANIZED SECTORS

A large number of women from rural areas migrate to cities and towns all over India. Most of these women and girls are illiterate and unskilled. They work in inhuman conditions in cities as their living standard is extremely poor. A large number of these women are being exploited by middlemen, contractors, construction companies and other type of employers. Many of these women and girls work as housemaids, construction area and brick kiln, where their working hours extend up to 14 hour a day. A large number of migrant women become victims of financial and sexual exploitation. Gradually, many women and girls lose contact with kith and kins back home and become alienated from their culture and roots.

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 women unorganized sector are facing so many problems. According to the 2001 census about 96 percent of women workers in India are in unorganized sector. The rise of female participating in unorganized sector is due to the compulsion and employer's preferences for female employee. Their ignorance, illiteracy and poverty have added fuel to their woes all the more. Women are considered the human resource of choice for the unorganized sector because they lack education and training and are amenable to accept lower wages for equal work due to gender casting.

The unorganized sector is characterized by the several factors such as wage discrimination, no limit for minimum wages, long hours of work, lack of job security, lack of legislative cover, lack of minimum facilities at work place, heavy physical work and ill treatment, physical exploitation by the employers. A proper study shall bring out the problems of women workers in unorganized sector and their attitude towards employment. The present study is an attempt in this direction.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study is an attempt to understand the women workers attitude towards their employment conditions in unorganized sector.

OBJECTIVES

The study has been undertaken with the following main objectives:

1. To study the socio economic conditions of women workers in unorganized sector.
2. To analyze the problem faced by women workers of the study area.
3. To suggest measures for overcoming the problems of women workers in unorganized sector.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is empirical one. Survey method was employed to collect the data from women workers. A well conceived and structural interview schedule was prepared for collecting the primary data. To study the plight of women workers of unorganized sectors, 120 samples were selected through the convenient sampling method. Fieldwork for the present study was carried out personally by the research. Secondary data has been collected from the articles, journals and the books.

Socio-economic Background of the Women Workers

Table 1.1 Age-wise Classification of the Women Workers

| S. No. | Age in years | No. of women workers | Percentage |
|--------|--------------|----------------------|------------|
| 1 | Below 20 | 18 | 15 |
| 2 | 20-30 | 48 | 40 |
| 3 | 30-40 | 34 | 28.3 |
| 4 | Above 40 | 20 | 16.7 |
| | Total | 120 | 100 |

The Table 1.1 reveals the age group of the women respondents. It is clear from the table that the majority of women workers (40%) belong to the age group of 20 to 30 years, 28.3 percent workers belong to the age group of 30 to 40 years, 16.7 percent workers are above the 40 years and the remaining 15 percentage women workers are below 20 years.

Table 1.2 Education –wise Classification of Women Workers

| S. No. | Educational level | No. of women workers | Percentage |
|--------|-------------------|----------------------|------------|
| 1. | Illiterate | 76 | 63.3 |
| 2. | Primary school | 32 | 26.7 |
| 3. | Middle school | 10 | 8.3 |
| 4. | High school | 02 | 1.7 |
| | Total | 120 | 100 |

It is evident from Table 1.2 that the majority of the respondents (63.3%) are illiterate while 32 have primary school education, 10 respondents (8.3%) have middle school education and 2 respondents have high school education only. Thus, it is clear that the educational status of the most of the respondents is very poor.

1.3 Marital Status of Women Workers

| <i>S. No.</i> | <i>Marital status</i> | <i>No. of women workers</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Married | 97 | 80.8 |
| 2. | Unmarried | 23 | 19.2 |
| | Total | 120 | 100 |

Table 1.3 reveals that 80.8 percent of women worker are married while only 10.2 percent respondents are unmarried.

1.4 No. of Children of Women Workers

| <i>S. No.</i> | <i>No. of children</i> | <i>No. of women workers</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|---------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | 1 to 2 | 13 | 13.4 |
| 2. | 3 to 4 | 53 | 54.6 |
| 3. | More than 4 | 26 | 26.8 |
| 4. | No children | 05 | 5.2 |
| | Total | 97 | 100 |

*Only 97 women workers (97/120) are married.

Majority of the women workers (54.6%) have 3 to 4 children, 26.8 percent have more than 4 children, 13.4 percent respondents have 1 to 2 children and 5.2 women worker have no children.

Table 1.5 No. of Earning Members in the Family of Women Workers

| <i>S. No.</i> | <i>Earning members (including the respondent)</i> | <i>No. of women workers</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|---------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | One | 06 | 5 |
| 2. | Two | 25 | 20.8 |
| 3. | Three | 57 | 47.5 |
| 4. | More than three | 32 | 26.7 |
| | | 120 | 100 |

It is found that (47.5 %) of the women worker have three earning members in their family, 26.7 percent workers have more than three earning members in their family, 20.8 percent of respondents have two earning members while only 5 percent women workers have 1 earning member in their family. The male members of their families were mostly drivers, carpenters, construction workers and scavengers.

Table 1.6 Family Income of Women Workers (per month)

| S. No. | Income (in rupees) | No. of women workers | Percentage |
|--------|--------------------|----------------------|------------|
| 1 | Below 2500 | 13 | 10.8 |
| 2 | 2500-4000 | 33 | 27.5 |
| 3 | 4000-5500 | 62 | 51.7 |
| 4 | Above 5500 | 12 | 10 |
| | Total | | 100 |

It is clearly evident from Table (1.6) that 51.7 percent women workers have a family income of Rs 4000 to Rs 5500, 27.5 percent workers have a family income of Rs 2500 to 4000, 10.8 percent workers have a family income below Rupees 2500 and only 10 percent women workers have family income above 5500 Rupees. The women workers in unorganized sectors felt that they find it highly difficult to run their family with such a meager income. Some of them are single earners in their family who entirely depend on the income from unorganized sector.

1.7 Caste-wise Classification of Women Workers

| S. No. | Age in years | No. of women workers | Percentage |
|--------|----------------------|----------------------|------------|
| 1. | Schedule Tribe | 99 | 82.5 |
| 2. | Schedule Caste | 13 | 10.8 |
| 3. | Other Backward Class | 08 | 6.7 |
| | Total | 120 | 100 |

Baster, the land of tribes and about 70% of the total population of Bastar comprises tribals, which is 26.76% of the total tribal population of Chhattisgarh. It is clear from the table 1.7 that majority (82.5 %) of women workers belong to schedule tribe, only 10.8 percent of women workers belong to schedule caste while 6.7 percent respondents are from other backward class.

PROBLEMS OF WOMEN WORKERS

2.1 Duration of the Employment of Women Workers (in months)

| S. No. | Duration of employment | No. of women workers | Percentage |
|--------|------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| 1. | Less than 3 months | 15 | 12.5 |
| 2. | 3 to 6 months | 36 | 30 |
| 3. | 6 to 9 months | 42 | 35 |
| 4 | More than 9 months | 27 | 22.5 |
| | Total | | 100 |

It is clearly evident from the Table 2.1 that 35 percent women workers get employment from 6 to 9 months, 30 percent workers can get the work from 3 to 6 months, 22.5 percent women workers can get employment more than 9 months and 12. 5 percent women workers can get the employment less than 3 months.

2.2 Type of Residence of the Women Workers

| <i>S. No.</i> | <i>Type of residence</i> | <i>No. of women workers</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Own house | 11 | 9.2 |
| 2. | Rented House | 109 | 90.8 |
| | Total | 120 | 100 |

Table 2.2 shows that 90. 8 percent women workers reside in rented house and only 9.2 percent women workers reside in their own house. The house rent takes away a considerable portion of their income and leaves a little residual income to meet other necessities.

2.3 Numbers of Hours Worked by the Women Workers

| <i>S. No</i> | <i>Working Hours</i> | <i>No. of women workers</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | 9 hours | 36 | 30 |
| 2. | 9-10 hours | 58 | 48.3 |
| 3. | More than 10 hours | 26 | 21.7 |
| | Total | 120 | 100 |

Table 2.3 highlights the working hours of women workers. 48.3 percent women workers have to work 9 to 10 hours, 30 percents workers have to work up to 9 hours while 21.7 workers have to work more than 10 hours. According to unorganized sector worker's Bill, 2002, the working hours are defined as 9 hours a day. It further says that every worker shall be entitled a weekly holiday, casual or sick leave and 15 days earned leave in a year. However in most of the workers in unorganized sector are to work for more hours.

2.4 Monthly Income of Women Workers

| <i>S. No</i> | <i>Monthly Income</i> | <i>No. of women workers</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Below 2500 | 24 | 20 |
| 2. | 2500-3000 | 81 | 67.5 |
| 3. | 3500-4000 | 11 | 9.2 |
| | Above 4000 | 04 | 3.3 |
| | Total | 120 | 100 |

Table 2.4 shows that 67.5 percent of the women workers earn Rupees 2500-3000 per month, 20 percent of women workers earn below Rupees 2500, 9.2 percent workers earn between 3500 to 4000 Rupees per month while only 3.3 percent women workers earn above Rupees 4000 per month. In fact, most of the workers stated that they seldom get their wages timely. One of the severe problems that is being faced by the workers of unorganized sector is that they are not given wages what they deserve.

2.5 Expenditure Pattern of the Women Workers (Per Month)

| <i>S. No</i> | <i>Expenditure</i> | <i>Percentage of monthly income</i> |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. | House rent | 28.6 |
| 2. | Grocery | 41.9 |
| 3. | Clothing | 2 |
| 4. | Loan repayment | 10 |
| 5. | Education | 9.5 |
| 6. | Health | 2 |
| 7. | Savings | 0.8 |
| 8. | Repair of house | 1 |
| 9. | Festival | 2 |
| 10. | Miscellaneous | 2.2 |
| | Total | 100 |

*The expenditure of each women worker is converted into percentages and averages are taken for each expenditure.

Table 2.5 shows that women workers spend 41.9 percent of their monthly income on grocery items, 28.6 percent of their income for paying the house rent, 10 percent on loan repayment, 9.5 percent on education, 2 percent on their income spend on health and clothing and festival, 1 percent on the repair of their house and save only 0.8 percent (average) of their income.

2.6 Occupational Diseases of Domestic Workers

| <i>S. No</i> | <i>Disease</i> | <i>No. of women workers</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Back pain/body pain | 21 | 17.5 |
| 2. | Skin Diseases | 5 | 4.1 |
| 3. | Anemia | 37 | 30.8 |
| 4. | Bronchitis | 18 | 15 |
| 5. | Indigestion | 14 | 11.7 |
| 6. | Other diseases | 11 | 9.2 |
| 7. | No Disease | 14 | 11.7 |
| | Total | 120 | 100 |

Occupational diseases pose a serious problem to the women workers. The polluted environment and unhygienic work place affecting not just the flora and fauna but also workers of unorganized sectors. Majority of women workers suffer from anemia, back pain, body pain and various diseases. The women workers in unorganized sector generally do not eat rich food. Though they work hard, they eat only one or two times a day. This affects their health to a great extent (Table 2.6)

2.7 Working Condition of Women Workers

| <i>S. No</i> | <i>Working condition</i> | <i>No. of women workers</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Less Hygiene Prevails | 35 | 29.2 |
| 2. | Old machines | 37 | 30.8 |
| 3. | Insecurity | 48 | 40 |
| | Total | 120 | 100 |

Table 2.7 shows the various factors that affecting the working conditions. 40 percent women believe that insecurity is the reason, (30.8 %) women workers believe that old machines are affecting the working condition while 29.3 percent women said that less hygiene prevails.

2.8 Harassment of Women Workers

| <i>S. No</i> | <i>Harassment of women workers</i> | <i>No. of women workers</i> | <i>No. of women workers</i> |
|--------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. | Sexual Harassment | 42 | 41.7 |
| 2. | Financial Harassment | 28 | 23.3 |
| 3. | Caste harassment | 50 | 35 |
| | Total | 120 | 100 |

Table 2.8 reveals the various kinds of harassment and exploitation faced by women workers in unorganized sector. 41.7 percent women workers are sexually harassed while 23. 3 percent women workers feel that they face the financial harassment and 35 percent respondents said that they are exploited on the basis of their caste.

2.9 Problem of Women Workers (Level of Satisfaction)

| <i>S. No</i> | <i>Problems</i> | <i>Satisfied</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>Not Satisfied</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>Total</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|----------|----------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Job security | 32 | 26.7 | 88 | 73.3 | 120 | 100 |
| 2. | Work duration | 36 | 30 | 84 | 70 | 120 | 100 |
| 3. | Wages | 23 | 19.2 | 97 | 80.8 | 120 | 100 |
| 4. | Leave facility | 26 | 21.7 | 94 | 78.3 | 120 | 100 |
| 5. | Medical facility | 28 | 23.3 | 92 | 76.7 | 120 | 100 |

It is clearly evident from Table 2.9 that majority (73.3%) of women workers are not as far as job security is concerned. The worker could not entirely rely on their monthly income. They fear that they would be terminated at any time without notice.

Long duration of work is a crucial problem for 70 percent of women workers as shown in Table 2.9. Majority of women workers said that they have no stipulated working hours. Irrespective of day or night, they have to discharge any type of work assigned to them. In fact long duration of work spoils the health of the workers.

The unorganized women workers are paid very low wages. According to the study 97 percent of women workers are not satisfied with their income. Furthermore there is no leave facility if they are on leave their employers deduct the wages of that day.

As shown in Table 2.9 that 78.3 percent women workers don't get leave facility. Sometimes the workers are either terminated or get deduction of their wages even if they take leave for genuine reasons. Besides whenever the workers return after taking casual leave, the employer assigns lot of work to them. Hence, lack of leave facility is the biggest problem before them. The women workers in unorganized sector pay the medical expenses (if any) from their own pockets. Only few employers reimburse such expenses. Though some of them get treatment in Government hospital but they are not satisfied. In case of life threatening diseases the workers borrow money from the employers, relatives to get treated in private hospitals. Hence huge debt accumulates before they recovered from the disease. As such lack of medical facility seems to be a great problem for 76.7 percent workers (Table 2.9).

SUGGESTIONS

The empowerment of women is the major concern of the present day. The efforts of the government to improve the condition of women workers are praiseworthy but due to corrupt practices of the functionaries, the beneficiaries are not capable to utilize the programmes meant for their betterment. In order to improve the condition of unorganized women workers some of the suggestions are recommended.

1. Women workers should be educated and make them aware about their rights and legislative provisions.
2. Effective steps should be taken to reflect the duty of the government and society to protect the rights of women workers in unorganized sectors.
3. The legislations, which prevent all forms of discriminations and guarantee equal job opportunities, should be strictly enacted and implemented.
4. Women workers must be motivated to utilize the existing programmes of their welfare.
5. Necessary amendments are required to be made in labour laws.
6. Women workers leaders must be included in the policy formulation and other decision making processes relating to their welfare.
7. To ensure full employment to the women workers the government must come forward with certain job oriented training and skill programmes to generate local self employment.
8. The workers have to work for very long hours. This need to be regulated and not to exceed 8 hours per day. The government must take some sincere attempts to regulate working hours of the women in unorganized sectors.
9. To fight against harassment and exploitation the women workers must be encouraged to form groups.
10. There should be proper regulation of unorganized sector industries, which ensure job security, healthy work environment and at least minimum wages, maternity and child care benefits.

CONCLUSION

Even though, the unorganized sector has been the most vulnerable and ignored sector in India, it holds an inevitable place in Indian economy. Thus, there is no exaggeration in saying that the backbone of Indian workforce is the unorganized sector. The unorganized women workers development should be viewed as an issue in social development to be seen as an essential component in every dimension of development. In order to get empowerment the government and the social workers may contribute significant role in making women workers capable, self reliant and well organized. It is worthwhile to create the awakening among unorganized women so that they can come up by taking care themselves. There is urgent need to give top priority to the issues and problems of the workers of unorganized sector.

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