



ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND PROBLEMS OF WOMEN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN TAMILNADU : A MICRO LEVEL STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

Women have been drawn into direct economic role as wage earners in factories, construction sites, homes and even in farms. Women are employed as cheap substitute manual labour where the situation is pitted heavily against women workers and in favour of their employers. Women work in a situation which is sometimes not bearable but they are forced to do their job for the better life style. Unfortunately they are illiterate and unaware about social status and reluctant to protest against the misconduct or prevailing situation at the workplace. The unorganized sector is most vulnerable, ignored and diverse and women workers in unorganized sector constitute a sizable number. Therefore, this paper identifies economic condition and problems faced by women construction workers in the selected study area of Chennai City.

KEYWORDS: *identifies economic condition and problems faced , factories, construction sites,.*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The unorganised sector plays an essential role by providing job opportunities to a large proportion of workforce and contributing to national product significantly. Its contribution to the net domestic product at present rates is above 60 per cent, the share of household sector in the savings with respect to total gross domestic saving, in particular unorganised sector, is about three fourth. Currently, Indian economy is passing through a process of economic reforms and liberalisation during which, to compete in the world market, merger of various industries and technology up gradation and innovation take place to improvise the output in terms of cost and quality. The less efficient units either move out of business or merge with the better performers.

A Majority of women work in unorganized sectors for low wages due to low level of skills, illiteracy, ignorance and surplus labour and thus face high level of exploitation. This hampers their bargaining power for higher wages and/or any opportunities for further development. Women enter the market as wage earners but occupy secondary position in the labour workforce. Their significance is considered marginal. Women enter the labour market only when the economic compulsions force them to supplement the meagre family earnings. The perception of women's work as a supplementing or balancing force in the family and the nation's workforce has made them susceptible to all sorts of discriminatory treatment and exploitation (physically, economically and socially) in the field of employment

The women's contribution to the economy by and large remains unrecognized, yet their services are valuable. The World Bank report observed that 35 per cent of Indian households below the poverty line were headed by women and in most cases, were dependent absolutely on female income. Further,

the report revealed that women's contribution is significant in families with low economic status and poorest families thus depend on women's economic productivity.

Women workers in unorganised sector are distinguished by regular salaried jobs with distinct terms and conditions of employment, precise rights and obligations and fairly comprehensive social security protection. On the other hand, a women worker in unorganized sector has no such precise employer-employee relationships and lacks most forms of social protection. Having no fixed employer, the women workers are casual, contractual, migrant, home based, own-account workers who attempt to earn a living from whatever meagre assets and skills they possess.

The nature of women's work ranges from wage employment or self-employment, family labour and part rate work, the occurrence of women workers in urban unorganized sector is important in number. They are engaged in activities like domestic work, construction work, small trades like brick making, coir and basket weaving; household industries etc. women are engaged in agricultural activities, animal husbandry, dairy, fisheries etc in rural areas. Most of the domestic workers and construction workers are primarily women who have migrated from rural areas for economic gain.

The invasion of women workers to the cities for non-farm employment has waterlogged the existing sectors and is one of the main reasons for her severe exploitation. Hardship of city life, absence of basic amenities and exploitation of these women by employers has added to their misery, they suffer vital disadvantages compared to men in their search for employment opportunities, lower real wages, increased uncertainties and irregularities of employment. There are legal provisions to protect their rights.

1.2 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The study was conducted in Chennai city of Tamilnadu. The primary data relating to economic condition and problem faced by women construction workers were collected from sample women construction workers in the unorganized sector through a well-structured questionnaire. The study was randomly selected three Zones of Chennai city viz., South Chennai, North Chennai and Central Chennai of Tamilnadu. A sample of 150 women construction workers was selected randomly according to the availability of workers in unorganized sector. The collected data were analysed by using frequency and percentages.

1.3 ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF WOMEN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

Total Salary Structure per month: Table 1.1, indicates salaries and perquisites are the main factors that determine the economic position and life standard of garment workers. Our survey reveals that 71.52 percent of the female workers get Rs. 6000 or less as total pay per month, which is really insufficient to lead their life with 3-4 dependent members in the family. Only 17.33 percent of the female workers get more than Rs.7000 as total monthly salary.

Women construction workers are very cheap in Chennai City of Tamilnadu but they are employed in this industry to exploit the comparative advantages of their disadvantages like the low price of their labour, their low bargaining power, and their docility. Women construction workers are getting low salaries as they are employed in lower level and unskilled jobs. A study indicates that the women construction workers earn only about 60 percent of the earnings of the male workers.

Table 1.1 Total Salary Structure per month of women construction workers

Amount of salary (inRs.)	3000-4000	4001-5000	5001-6000	6001-7000	Above 7000	Total
No. of Respondents	08	37	63	16	26	150
Percentage	(05.30)	(24.50)	(41.72)	(10.60)	(17.33)	(100)

Modes of Salary payment: table 1.2, reveals that the workers are not only deprived of appropriate amount of salary but also deprived of getting the salary in time. Our survey result shows that only 24.00 per cent of the women construction workers get their salary of the last month before 10th day of the next month, 48.35 per cent get their salaries of the last month before 15th day of the next month and 23.84 per cent of the workers need to wait more than 15 days to get their salaries of the last month.

Table 1.2 Modes of Salary payment of women construction workers

Payment Dates	25 th -last day	1 st -10 th day	10 th -15 th day	After 15 th day	Total
No. of Respondents	12	36	66	36	150
Percentage	(03.31)	(24.00)	(48.35)	(23.84)	(100)

Bonus Structure: table 1.3 explains basically, different types of bonuses are given to the women construction workers for encouraging them for better performance and sincerity in the work. But more than 84 percent of the female workers get only festival bonus from their employers, 6.62 percent get bonus for production efficiency and 4.64 percent of the women construction workers get bonus for regular attendance in the work. The authority of the selected unorganised industries in the study area may distribute a part of their profit to the workers to give them a sense of ownership and make them more responsible in the work.

Table 1.3 Bonus Structure of women construction workers

Bonus structure	On time attendance	Regular Attendance	Festival	Production Efficiency	Others	Total
No. of Respondents	00	07	126	10	07	150
Percentage		(04.64%)	(84.00%)	(06.62%)	(04.64%)	(100%)

Medical Allowance System: table 1.4 shows one of the basic needs of the human being is medical allowances from the employer but it is very unfortunate that 26.00 percent of the surveyed women construction workers get nothing from their employers for medications if they make any accident or become sick. According to the law, in every establishment wherein three hundred or more women construction workers are ordinarily employed, there shall be provided and maintained a sick room with dispensary of the prescribed size, containing the prescribed equipment or similar facilities, in the charge of such medical nursing staff as may be prescribed.

Table 1.4 Medical Allowance System of women construction workers

Medical Allowances	No payment	Paid as per Medical Documents	One time payment	Others	Total
No. of Respondents	39	106	04	01	150
Percentage	(26.00%)	(70.20%)	(02.65%)	(00.66%)	(100%)

Duration and Payment Structure of Maternity leaves: table 1.5 and 1.6 explains that the Maternity leave is a basic and humanitarian right of the women construction workers but construction industries are not giving maternity leave to their workers with pay. Our survey revealed that 7 percent of the women construction workers are granted 8 weeks or less maternity leave, 32.66 percent get 12 weeks, 54.30 percent granted 16 weeks and only 6.62 percent granted no leave. While 3.25 percent of the women construction workers are paid nothing during their maternity leave, remaining 86.75 percent of the women construction workers get either regular salaries or an amount based on the medical documents.

Table 1.5 Duration of Maternity leave of women construction workers

Leave structure	No leave	1- Month	2- Months	3- Months	4- Months	More than 4 Months	Total
No. of Respondents	10	02	07	49	82	00	150
Percentage	(06.62%)	(01.32%)	(04.64%)	(32.66%)	(54.30%)		(100%)

Table 1.6 Payment Structure of Maternity leaves of women construction workers

Payment Structure	No Payment	Regular Salary	Paid as per medical document	Others	Total
No. of Respondents	20	103	28 (18.54%)	00	151
Percentage	(13.25%)	(68.21%)			(100%)

Amount of Savings: table 1.7 indicates saving is an important factor that affects the socio-economic condition of the women construction workers. The survey result indicates that about 66.66 percent of the women construction workers can save Rs. 500 or less per month and more than 90 percent of the workers can save Rs. 1,000 or less per month. Earlier there was no income and savings of these women construction workers. The tendency of savings has increased over the years.

Table 1.7 Amount of Savings (in Rs.) per Month of women construction workers

Savings per month (Tk.)	0-500	501-1000	1001-1500	1501-2000	Above 2000	Total
No. of Respondents	100	37	09	01	03	150
Percentage	(66.66%)	(24.50%)	(05.96%)	(00.65%)	(02.00%)	(100%)

Satisfaction towards earnings and job: table 1.8 and 1.9 reveals that the degree of satisfaction of a women construction worker is a subjective judgment. So the level of satisfaction has been measured by scaling into five categories such as very bad, bad, neutral, good and very good. It is observed that the satisfaction level of the women construction workers in construction industries in the study area towards earnings and overall jobs is in, rated average, as good. As per the survey, 58.27 percent of the women construction workers are satisfied with their earnings and 17.25 percent are dissatisfied. More satisfaction of the women construction workers may be derived from their realization that they could be unemployed and what they are getting is good for them, or from their awareness of their education, job experience, and socio-economic conditions of the country. It is motivating factor for the survival and stability of women construction workers in the construction industries in Chennai city of Tamilnadu.

Table 1.9 Satisfaction towards Earnings of women construction workers

Level of Satisfaction	Very bad	Bad	Neutral	Good	Very good	Total
No. of Respondents	06	20	36	67	21	151
Percentage	(04.00%)	(13.25%)	(23.84%)	(44.37%)	(13.90%)	(100%)

Table 1.10 Satisfaction towards job of women construction workers

Level of Satisfaction	Very Bad	Bad	Neutral	Good	Very good	Total
No. of Respondents	10	16	46	59	20	151
Percentage	(06.62%)	(10.59%)	(30.46%)	(39.07%)	(13.25%)	(100%)

1.4 Problem faced by women construction workers

This is clear from the study that the women engaged in construction is more hard work and also need for particular skill. But compare to men women also face some sort of inequality in wages. This revealed that most of the women construction workers were satisfied with the facilities at work place given by the employer like special refreshment room for the women construction workers and staying but there is no time for refreshment because of continuous working hours without shifting the job. Respondents also said that they had more work load at season time, festival etc and less breaking time at that time. The main points of the study were noted the below table 5.33.

Table 1.10 Problems of Sales Women & their responses

Opinion	HS		S		NO		D		HD	
	No:	%	No:	%	No:	%	No:	%	No:	%
About Wages	0	0	25	29	5	6	43	51	12	14
Facilities at workplace	8	10	19	22	0	0	52	61	6	7
Working Hours	4	5	24	28	2	2	39	46	16	19
Basic needs	13	15	35	41	4	5	25	29	8	10
Working conditions at season	0	0	4	5	0	0	17	20	64	75
Break time including lunch & prayer	7	8	19	22	0	0	41	49	18	21

Note: HS-Highly Satisfied, S-Satisfied, NO-No Opinion, D-Dissatisfied, HD-HighlyDissatisfied

Table 1.10 it is clear from the study that the 75 per cent of the women construction workers were highly dissatisfied on the seasonal workload. Some of the employers ensure the fulfillment of basic needs of their employees like staying facility, sanitation etc. for their wellbeing and security, more employees also show positive responses towards it i.e. 41 per cent. So the poor women consider it has their livelihood and still continue with the job just like an addition to the family income for better life.

1.5 CONCLUSION

In India, women play an important role in each and every family, but in the ancient period women are dependent on men. Historically women have been discriminated against men in the male dominated society. Most of the girls were married when they were in their teens. Widow Remarriages were considered to be a social taboo, education beyond the primary or at the most school level was rare. Girls, especially in rural areas and small towns were deliberately undernourished and denied access to the outside world and women were considered to be fit to food but not work in business establishments. As we go into the future, discrimination against women will go and they will occupy equal status along with their male counterparts. Today's girls are better educated, more assertive and bolder. Added to this is the women deliberation movement to protect and improve the life of women. Employment is considered to be an important indicator of women's achievement in the economic condition. In the services of professional and industrial sector employment of women has increased rapidly. Work participation rate for females has shown as increasing trend in the unrecognized sector such as agriculture, construction, domestic, garments, and petty trader both in the rural and urban areas the labour force mainly of women.

It is observed that women construction workers have to perform dual role of both outside employment with or without violent working conditions and also manage their home. They are also having same productivity and efficiency like men even then they faced discrimination in wages and poor working conditions and insecurity. Both the central and state governments have formulated certain specific schemes to support women construction workers but which fail in meeting the real needs and requirements of the unorganized labour force. Further, it reveals that the problems, satisfaction level of women construction workers, working conditions and wage patterns were comparatively higher than other unorganised work. Engagement of women in this field was high because of less hard work, no skill and easy accessibility even some sort of inequality is there when compared to men. Moreover, most of the women were satisfied with the facilities at work place and showed dissatisfaction in continuous working hours and work load at seasons. The following suggestions and recommendations are made by this study are as follows:

- In order to provide the maternity benefits to the women workers necessary amendments are required in the Maternity Benefit Act.
- Adult education programme for the women workers should be implemented for making them literate.
- Exhaustive and comprehensive legislation is urgently needed for regulating working conditions, wage structure, welfare measures of the women workers.
- The Labour Department should come forward to prevent physical-mental torture, sexual

harassment and molestation of the workingwomen. For this, the Department should introduce special wing that can supervise the matter and take necessary action against the wrongdoers.

- The government should fix the minimum wage system in order to cater the needs of the women workers.
- Every informal industry may be provides medical facilities to safeguard the women workers health.
- The government should arrange education of Women workers so that, the workers get necessary information from these education.

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