

Problems Faced by Women Construction Workers in Theni District

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Abstract— Women are the weaker section in rural Tamil Nadu due to social stigma. Most of the women population in rural area engaged manual work only. Theni district is a one of the economically backward southern district of Tamil Nadu. Construction sector is the one of the major contributor to provide employment next to agriculture and textile industries. This current study aimed to focus the major problems faced by the women construction labourers at both workplace and their home. It found that unskilled women labourers were helps the male workers and they popularly known as “Chithaals” in the construction field. They were paid very less compared (half) to the male workers and they enjoyed poor basic amenities in the worksites and there is no practice of welfare schemes and maternity benefits. It suggest that the sector should monitor by the both government and non government bodies to working condition to implement the welfare schemes to provide fulfil the basic needs at worksites and equal pay for their work. Further it open up the new avenues to conduct the research in the construction sector to enhance the working condition of the women workers in future.

Keywords— Women; Construction Workers; Sexual Harassments; Inequality; Working Condition.

1. Introduction

Construction industry is one of the central pillars of growing Indian economy by developing infrastructure and generating more employment. The construction sector has the largest number of unorganized labourers in India next to agriculture sector. Women constitute a significant part of the workforce in India and a big pool of unskilled labour force in the construction segment. The worker participation rate of women is increasing in construction sector. Women workers in the unorganized sector face many problems especially in construction sector. Their basic rights and duties were violated in many forms like sexual harassment at work place, occupational hazards, poor safety measures are the important factor which affects the mental health of the women workers and their right to work with dignity is greatly affected. Maternity benefits were absences and the

pregnant workers remain jobless on account of become pregnant in the construction sector. Most of the women construction workers are casual labourers. They do work that is physically hard and work under close supervision without proper safety equipments, which results in industrial accidents and employment injuries.

Domestic violence is another severe problem faced by women construction workers. Female workers are discriminated in wage payment in the construction operations, which are better performed by them. Many of the national and international enactments had not altered the socio economic conditions of women construction workers. Sexual harassment and occupational hazards are the serious problems for women construction workers. Many of the sexual harassment against women worker at construction sites is unnoticed as the affected persons conceal the fact. The present study analyzes the working condition and problems of the women workers engaged in construction sector in Theni district.

2. Statement of the Problem

Most of problems surrounding the women construction workers draw the attention of work hazards, sexual harassments and occupational health in recent times. The Government of India recognizing the importance of construction labour force had enacted a separate legislation. An object to regulate the employment and conditions of building and other construction workers and to provide the safety, health and welfare measures the “The Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions Service) Act, 1996 was enacted. The Government of Tamil Nadu even before the enactment of above stated central Act had passed a separate Act for the regulate the employment and working conditions of the manual workers. In addition to the above said legislations specifically applicable to the construction workers, a number of other national and international laws are also applicable to construction workers including women workers. To study the above issues will certainly leads to a meaningful assessment of the existing conditions of women workers in Construction sector and the effective

implementation of the suitable policies and programmes and its lapses if any so as to formulate a policy decision at national level.

3. Overview of Literature

Many of the practicioners, researchers, authors, voluntary organizations, and Government agencies have undertaken several studies on women's employment and their problems. Women construction workers are exploited because they are illiterate, socially backward, unskilled, unorganized, uninformed and poor (Johri and Pandey). Vinita Shah (1998) found that non-implementation of labour laws. Anand (1998) observes that the wages of the women workers in the unorganized sector, particularly in the construction industries, have been significantly below the minimum wage payable under the Minimum Wages Act 1948. Gender discrimination was well entrenched and women workers were paid less than men workers for similar work (Vettriselvan, R., & Balakrishnan, A., 2013). Over three fourth of the women workers in the construction sector are working for more than 10 to 12 hours every day (Ram Lakhani 2004). Sexual harassment at workplace affected the workers and many seek to opt for other contractors. Vaughn (1999) reported tainted image and reputation of the construction industry and claims that sexual harassment is inherent in the construction sector. Most of the research studies reveal the fact that the conditions of women construction workers were found to be pathetic and their legal rights violated to great extent. The problems pointed out in the previous researchers were taken as a main theme to conduct this present study.

4. Conceptual Framework

Women Construction workers were encountered by plenty of difficulties, because of their distressing and pitiable working conditions in the field. Basic rights of the women workers at construction sector were violated in various forms such as sexual harassments, work hazards and poor health and safety measures. There is an imperative need to take up more studies at this level to understand the problems of women construction workers more widely. Such an understanding is absolutely necessary to evolve appropriate strategy to deal with their problems and to bring out overall development of women construction workers to create awareness about the importance of better working condition and welfare and safety measures in their working field. This study was helpful to frame the programmes and policies to improve the working condition of the women construction workers. Construction sector in Tamil Nadu shows the steady growth in recent period due to high growth of the industrial sector. This study tries to cover the women workers in construction sector in Theni District, which is more

industrially growing district of Tamil Nadu. Hence the study was absolutely needed at this point of time to picture out the real life situation of women construction workers in Theni District.

5. Objectives of the Study

- To study the socio economic profile of Women Construction workers.
- To examine the working conditions of women construction workers.
- To suggest suitable measures to improve the standard of living and occupational health of women construction workers.

6. Methodology of the Study

The present study on the problems faced by the women construction workers is a descriptive cum analytical in nature. In order to accomplish the study objectives both primary and secondary data has collect and analyse for the study purpose. The present study has been conducted among selected women construction workers in Theni District. The population is unknown due to the situational changing trend in the construction sector so study employs convenient sampling method to select 150 samples from the population and collect necessary primary data by structured interview schedule which has consist of socio economic, working conditions of the women construction workers to understand their condition. Averages and chi-square methods were used as statistical tools to analyze the collected data. Therefore the present study is an attempt to investigate various forms of violations take part of the women construction workers in Theni District. To draw the suitable measures to improve their working and living conditions of women construction workers.

7. Results and Discussion

In this section results and discussion of the study was presented on the basis of collected primary data from the field. Table 1 discusses about the distribution of the women construction workers by nature of job.

Table 1: Nature of Job

S.No	Nature	Frequency	Percent
1	Building works	99	66
2	Roads & Canals	51	34
Total		150	100

Source: Computed from Primary data

In general construction workers are engaged in the two kinds of works in the study area namely building works and roads & canal works. Majority (66 percent) of the

respondents were selected from building works and remaining (34 percent) from roads and canal works. It clears that building construction sector plays a vital role in provide the employment opportunities to the women. Table 2 deals about the reason for continuing construction jobs by women workers in the study area and opinion about the reasons.

Table 2: Reason for Continuing Construction Job

S.No	Reason	Good	Average	Poor	Total
1	Wage	66	57	27	150
2	Working Environment	24	30	96	150
3	Job Security	57	42	51	150
4	Maternity Benefits	9	54	87	150
5	Rest rooms & Toilet	6	51	93	150
Total		162	234	354	750

Source: Computed from Primary data

Nearly half (47.5 percent) of the women construction workers opinion that working condition was poor and nearly (31.5 percent) are graded as average and remaining (22 percent) only reported that working condition was good. Among the given variables wage (44 percent) and job security (38 percent) only got the good as opinion from the women construction workers in the study area. Poor working environment, absence of restroom and toilet facilities and non availability of maternity benefits are the major problems in the field. Table 3 presents comparative values of the respondents experience and wage. This table also employed the chi-square distribution and results of the variables.

Table 3: Experience Vs Wage

Wage Experience	Upto Rs.150	Rs.151 to Rs.200	Rs.201 to Rs.250	Rs.251 and above	Total
Upto 1 year	24	9	0	0	33
1.1 to 3 years	6	27	9	0	42
3.1 to 5 years	0	3	9	6	18
5.1 years and above	0	0	27	30	57
Total	30	39	45	36	150

Source: Computed from Primary data

9 degrees of freedom at 5% table value is 23.5893 calculated Chi-square value is 157.81. Calculated chi-square value is more than the table value clears that the experience is not only the determinant for the wages to the women construction workers. Table 4 presents the distribution of respondents by problems faced by the women construction workers in the study area. Sexual

abusements, wage discrimination, work hazards, poor working condition and occupational ill health as a components to study the problems of the women construction workers.

Table 4: Problems Faced in the Worksite

S.No	Problems	Yes	No	Total
1	Sexual Abusements	123	27	150
2	Wage Discrimination	150	0	150
3	Work Hazards	84	66	150
4	Poor Working Condition	104	46	150
5	Occupational Ill health	78	72	150
Total		539	241	750

Source: Computed from Primary data

From the result of the table 4 majority (71 percent) of the respondents facing the above mentioned problems at their worksite. Among that cent percent of the women workers are facing wage discrimination, more than four fifth (82 percent) of them suffered by sexual abusements, more than two third (69 percent) of them enjoys poor working environment following more than half (56 percent) of them struggled work hazards and 52 percent meet the occupational ill health at their worksites. Wage discrimination highlights the gender inequality in the sector and the sexual abusements show the pathetic situation of the women construction workers in the society.

Focus group discussions were conducted to understand the real scenario of the women construction workers. They reveal that many of them were forced to work in the field due to their poor economic condition and non availability of any other works. They are facing the major problems such as poor security in the working environment and the supervisors (mesthris) and the co-workers force them and abuse sexually in the name of job and payment of wages. If the women denied their sexual abusements they may be terminated. Government and the nongovernmental organizations were failed to protect women workers from these critical issues. These abusements may lead to the loss of their lives and hidden in the name of workplace accidents. They were sexually harassed by the external people due the absence of restrooms in the workplace and using of open surface for the latrines and urinals.

8. Suggestions

- Proper restroom and sanitary facilities should be created and maintained;
- Proper awareness should be provided to the women for their rights and duties;
- Promote gender equality and equal pay;
- The punishments against the sexual harassments should be revised and increased; and

- Safety in the workplace should be promised and provided in the name of law.

9. Conclusion

The present modernized society with the improved culture of one is responsible for the things happen to them. Every one of us has the responsibility to do something to reduce their problems to save them from the harassments. Here all the three parties Government, Nongovernmental organizations and the ordinary citizens to think together to protect from their problem by providing equal opportunity and pay, health and hygiene working environment, proper awareness for their basic rights and duties, education for gender equality in order to promote them. It concludes that civilization should give the proper education and equality for all the humans, power is meant to guide them in the right path not to abuse and harass. The change should be start from the individual's heart to the empowerment of the women. This kind of equal practices should be followed and implemented for all the women in the world especially in the construction sector.

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