

## Why do Women Work? Assessment of Socio-Economic Profile of Women Worker in Unorganized Sector

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### ABSTRACT

*Unorganised or informal sector constitutes a pivotal part of the Indian economy. Almost 457 million people are working in the unorganised sector. Out of this 92 percent of the total workforce constitutes an unorganised worker. The National Commission for Women estimates that 94 percent of the total female workforce is to be found in the unorganised sector. The changing patterns of economic development in the liberalisation era have put a heavy burden on women which is reflected in their health and status. The objective of this paper is to identify the socio-economic status of women workers in the unorganised sector. This paper attempts to examine government programmes and protective legal provisions for women workers in unorganised sector.*

**Keywords:** government programmes, unorganised sector, women workers, workforce participation rate, social security laws.

### INTRODUCTION:

The term 'unorganised sector' has been defined by the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) Government of India as "the sector which "consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers" (Report on Conditions of work and Promotion of livelihoods in the unorganised sector). Women constitute the largest segment of India's unorganised workforce. As per Census report, 2011 the total number of female workers in India is 149.8 million and female workers in rural and urban areas are 121.8 and 28.0 million respectively. Out of total 149.8 million female workers, 35.9 million females are working as cultivator and another 61.5 are agricultural labourers. Of the remaining female workers, 8.5 million are in household industry and 43.7 are classified as other workers. 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 conditions of work for all. Despite the concerted efforts of the state, the economic status of women is lagging behind their male counterparts. An estimate by the World Bank shows that 90% of the women working in the informal sector are not included in the official statistics and their work is undocumented and considered as disguised wage work, unskilled, low paid and do not provide benefits to the workers. The changing patterns of economic development in the liberalisation era have put a heavy burden on women which is reflected in their health and status. Women work in industries like tanning, tobacco, cashew, coir textiles, garment, fish processing and canning, construction and domestic work etc. toil long hours at low paid, skilled or unskilled workers. In the unorganised sector, women are overworked, their work remains invisible, unrecognised and unremunerated, women are displaced by men due to the impact of technology, high incidence of physical and sexual exploitation of women.

### LITERATURE REVIEW:

Dave (2012) attempted to explain the socio-economic condition of women workers, nature of work, working conditions, their wages, prejudices on ground of gender and other problems faced in working unorganised sector.

She conducted this study on 350 women worker who were involved in construction work, agriculture area and domestic paid workers. She founded that most of the migrated women were working in construction industry. They were exploited to greater degree. They were not paid fairly for doing same work in comparison of men and for same hours of work. Lack of organisation in terms of forming trade unions among female workers, adverse impact of technological growth on women labour, absence of purposeful human resource development policy on improving women's employability through training, inadequate legislation and ineffective enforcement of safeguards to protect female workers, particularly in terms of their working conditions etc were the major causes leading to pitiable condition of women workers.

Sansiya (2013) in her research "Women in informal sector" evaluated the role and status of women in informal sector and unorganised sector. Women workers in unorganised sector are deprived of maternity benefit, equal remuneration and child care facilities in spite of existing legislation. Women worker posed with serious problems and constraints related to work such as lack of continuity, insecurity, wage discrimination, unhealthy job relationship, absence of medical and accident care. The woman workers were exploited both horizontally and vertically. They suggested to introduce policy reforms and institutional changes for the emancipation and empowerment of rural female labour force.

Mohapatra(2015) in her research work "Female Workers in the Unorganised sector in India" revealed in 21st century women still struggles with harsh realities of discrimination, exploitation, violence in organisations, societal and family pressures and suffers from bitter effects of the balancing act which she is expected to perform for handling workplace and household chores. The research was based on secondary data. Exploratory research was carried out to explore the hardships of women workers in India. She concluded that with the introduction of technology particularly in those areas where women worked, they were replaced by men, economic necessity compels them to work outside for meagre wages without social security, women worked mainly for economic dependence and were sexually exploited due to their nature of work. Hence, she made suggestions to provide basic education, protect them against exploitation, introduction of comprehensive law to protect the rights of women workers, introduction of grievance cell in organised sector and in case of unorganised sector women to form self-help groups for their protection.

Swamikanna and Jeyalakhshami(2015) conducted a study on "Women labour in Agriculture in India: Some facets". They found that female work participation rate has declined drastically during last few decades which depict that female workers are moved from agricultural to non-agricultural activities because wage differences between male and female workers for the same type of work demoralise female workers.

Rajendran and Hema(2015) in "A Study on the Social Security of Unorganised Workers in Nagapattinam District with Special Reference to Unorganised Workers Social Security Act,2008" evaluated the impact of social security measures on unorganised workers. The research was based on primary and secondary data. The sample size was taken 1870 which included 1648 workers and 222 employers based on proportionate stratified random sampling method. They were the most vulnerable and deprived section of the society in the need of protection, security, benefits and assistance. The main problems were poor implementation of social security measures, inadequate benefits, long procedures of assigning benefits and the like. The female workers were more than the male workers in unorganised sector. They concluded that organised efforts are necessary for the welfare of unorganised working class.

Nandal and kumar(2016) carried out research on "Women Workers in Formal economy: A Study of Brick kiln in Haryana" examined the role of women worker in economic system. The research was based on primary and secondary data. The sample was taken 89 women workers based on probability sampling method. The socio-economic conditions of women workers were miserable. Rebuking, abusing, beating, threatening and physical torture were common feature reported by women working in Brick Kilns. Women workers were used as private property by the Sardarin, Munshi and other associates of employers. They concluded that majority of women were illiterate, married, belonged to lower caste and resided inkachacha houses. They were put to work for 8 to 10 hours in a day. They were deprived of social security measures and their wages were collected by their husbands. Most of the women workers were dissatisfied with work. Further, they suggested to provide elementary education, good housing facilities, electricity facilities and bank account facilities.

Dadheech(2016) carried out research work on "Women workers in unorganised manufacturing sector of Punjab". The research was based on secondary data. She concluded that women workers were low paid, discriminated and exploited to greater degree. They put in 12-15 hours of work every day but their economic activities were not fully recognised. They were required to carry out the dual responsibility of work and home. They were deprived of medical benefits, crèche facilities and overtime wages. She suggested that women workers should be empowered; loopholes of labour laws should be removed; awareness programmes and

vocational programmes should be launched.

Singh and Gupta (2016) in their research work "Work Conditions of Women Workers in Unorganised Sector: A Review of Literature" concluded women in the unorganised sector are oppressed sections of the society as they live under subdued conditions with family and children devoid of proper working and living conditions, gender discrimination, poor working conditions, double work burden, lack of training, educational skills, job security, health problems were the common features reported by women worker in unorganised sector. They do not possess much of skill, training and education for the type of work they perform. Therefore, they suggested to improve the working and living conditions of the unorganised sector women workers, introduction of labour inspectorates, enforcement of payment for overtime and establishment of industrial training institutes.

### **OBJECTIVE OF STUDY:**

1. To study the socio-economic condition of women worker in unorganised sector.
2. To identify the government programmes for women worker in unorganised sector.
3. To identify protective legal provisions for women workers in unorganised sector.

### **Why do Women Work?**

Women work mainly for economic independence, for economic necessity, as some are qualified enough to work, for a sense of achievement, recognition and to support their family. Most women work under economic compulsion to serve the needs of their family, to earn living. The Ministry of Labour, Government of India has pointed out that whatsoever the stage of socio or economic development of a country that prevail which lead women to join working force. They are: (a) the inadequate earning of the principal earner which forces a women to work and supplement the income; (b) mishaps, such as incapacity of the bread winner; (c) death of the bread winner, and (d) a women's desire for economic independence or for securing higher standard of living. The main reasons for employment reported by women workers included both financial and non-financial needs. The financial reasons consist of three sub-categories: (a) economic pressures which pertain to the fulfilment of basic minimum needs of life, (b) other economic needs- money required to help relatives, (c) higher standard of living. The non-financial reasons also consist of three sub- categories: (a) personality traits, (b) to occupy time-become monotonous with household work and felt lonely, they want an escape to work outside home and utilise their time meaningfully, (c) traditional occupation- women reported that they worked because of the tradition of the family in a specific occupation. It also helped them to earn their living and freedom. Some women have also started working to enjoy their social life and utilise their talent and skills.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY:**

The present study is descriptive in nature. The data has been collected from secondary sources such as government reports, journals, articles, books and official websites. The table is used to represent female labour force participation rate in India.

### **Female Labour Force Participation Rate:**

Female labour has been an important segment of the workforce of India. With the changing socio-economic scenario women's productive roles have assumed new dimension. Frankly speaking, it was in recognition of crucial importance and need that women's participation has always been necessary for the success of social and economic development (Female labour in India, 1975). Women's economic participation is hindered by low skills, capacities as well as lack of ownership and control over assets. The labour force participation rate (LFPR) is defined as the number of persons in the labour force per 1000 persons. Female labour force participation rate can be determined through usual principal status approach (UPS). Under this approach, the major time spent by a person (183 days or more) is used to determine whether the person is in labour force or out of labour force. The low female labour force participation rate (LFPR) is a cause of concern for the economy as females constitute a significant proportion of the total working age population. In the World Economic Forum 'Global Gender Report 2015' India is ranked 139 among 145 countries on the Economic Participation and Opportunity sub index and in the rankings by indicator, India's rank in Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) is 136 among 145 countries.

Table 1 reveals that female labour participation rate of rural women has decreased from 33.1 in 1993 to 26.7 in 2016 and of urban women from 16.4 in 1993 to 16.2 in 2016. The rate of rural women and urban women at work are depicting decreasing trend over the years. The female labour force participation rate is mere 16.2 as compared 69.1 for men in urban areas where as it is 26.7 for women as compared to men 77.3 in rural areas

respectively. Female labour force participation rate was significantly lower as compared to labour force participation rate among males. At the All India Level i.e. rural and urban both, female labour force participation rate was estimated to be 23.7 percent as compared to 75 percent for males respectively. Several factors are affecting either positively or negatively female labour force participation rate. Patriarchal tradition, family norms, religious conservatism, economic condition, education, caste system etc. are some factors which affect female labour force participation rate.

### **Government Programmes for Women Worker in Unorganised Sector:**

The Government of India is implementing a number of programmes for improving access to employment, education, health, infrastructure development and urban development etc for women worker in unorganised sector as follows:

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme(MNREGS) : This nationwide employment programme guarantees 100 days of unskilled work for every household in the rural area in every year. While providing employment, it seeks to ensure that at least one-third of the beneficiaries are women. The act is sensitive to working conditions of women workers as it advocates providing accessible worksite (within 5km of workers residence), crèches for women with children below six and above all, gender parity of wages.
2. RashtriyaMahilaKosh (National Credit Fund For Women) : The RashtriyaMahilaKosh was set up in 1993 with a corpus of 31 crore, against the backdrop of socio-economic constraints faced by poor women to access micro-credit from the formal financial system in the country, especially those in the rural and in unorganised sectors. The main objective of setting up of RashtriyaMahilaKosh(RMK) under the Department of Women and Child Development was to provide micro-credit to poor women for various livelihood support and income generating activities at concessional terms in a client-friendly procedure to bring about their socio-economic development.
3. SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA): The education for all campaign(SarvaShikshaAbhiyan) with special focus on girls education aiming to target the hardest to reach girls through residential schools, mid-day meals and other incentives is set to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education. The interventions include gender sensitive pedagogy, separate toilet for girls, bridge course for older girls, recruitment of 50 percent women teachers and an innovation fund per district for need based interventions for ensuring girls attendance and retention.
4. Saakshar Bharat: The National Literacy Mission was recast with its new variant Saakshar Bharat launched in 2009. It aims to accelerate adult education especially for women in the age group of 15 years and above. The mission primarily focuses on women, SC, ST, minorities, other disadvantaged groups and adolescents in rural areas in low literacy states.

### **Protective Legal Provisions for Women Workers in Unorganised Sector:**

The protective legal provisions for women workers in unorganised sector as follows:

1. The Beedi & Cigar Workers(Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966 : Provision of Crèches, in every industrial premises wherein more than thirty female employees are ordinarily employed, they shall be provided and maintained a suitable room or rooms for the use of children under the age of six years of such female employees.
2. The Plantation Labour Act,1951: Provision of crèches in every plantation wherein fifty or more women workers are employed or where the number of children of women workers is twenty or more. The definition of family has been broadened to include women and to cover all aspects of safety and occupational health of workers specifically women and adolescents, a new chapter pertaining to the use of handling, storing or transporting chemicals, insecticides and toxic substances used in the plantations has been added.
3. The Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970: Provision of crèches where twenty or more women are ordinarily employed as contract labour. Female contract labour to be employed by any contractor between 6.00 am to 7.00 pm with the exception of mid-wives and nurses in hospitals and dispensaries.
4. The Inter State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment & Conditions of Service) Act, 1979: Provision of crèches for the benefit of women workers in establishments wherein twenty or more women are ordinarily employed as migrant workers is likely to continue for three months or more.
5. The Factories Act, 1948: Provision of crèches in every factory wherein more than thirty women workers are ordinarily employed. Employment of women in factory is prohibited except between the hours of 6.00am to 7.00 pm. However, in exceptional circumstances employment of women is permitted up to 10.00pm. The employment of women is also prohibited in certain factories involving dangerous

- operations; no women shall be allowed to clean, lubricate or adjust any part of prime mover while it is in motion, for pressing cotton in which a cotton opener is at work.
6. The Mines Act, 1952: Employment in mines below ground prohibited and in any mine above ground women workers are permitted between the hours of 6.00am and 7.00pm. The Central government may, by notification, vary the hours of employment above ground of women. However, no employment of women between 10 pm and 5 am is permitted. Further, women employed above ground shall be allowed an interval of not less than eleven hours between the termination of employment on any one day and the commencement of next period of employment. Provision of separate toilets and washing facilities for women workers is also part of the act.
  7. The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 : Maternity benefit (paid leave) for pregnancy/Child birth up to 26 weeks, two nursing breaks for women with child, six week leave in case of abortion/medical termination of pregnancy, two week leave for tubectomy operation, maximum leave of one month in case of pregnancy/child birth related illness, medical bonus to women who does not get medical facility from employer for childbirth, prohibition on dismissal on account of absence due to pregnancy, no reduction of wage during pregnancy/maternity leave.
  8. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976: Payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers for same or similar nature of work protected under the act, no discrimination is permissible in recruitment and service conditions except where employment of women is prohibited or restricted by or under any law.
  9. Employee's State Insurance Act, 1948: Maternity benefit(paid leave) of 26 weeks of which not more than eight weeks to precede the expected date of confinement, extended benefits of one month on account of sickness after maternity benefits, six weeks leave in case of abortion/medical termination of pregnancy.
  10. The Building and Other Construction Workers(Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service)Act, 1996: Representation of a women member on Building and other Construction Worker Welfare Boards, provision for maternity benefit to female beneficiaries of the welfare fund, provision for crèches where more than fifty female construction workers are ordinarily employed, for the use of children under the age of six years of such female workers.
  11. The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946: Provision regarding safeguards against sexual harassment of women workers at their work places.
  12. The Beedi Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1976: Appointment of women member in the Advisory and Central Advisory Committee is mandatory under the act.
  13. The Iron Ore Mines, Mangnese Ore Mines and Chrome or Mines Labour Welfare Fund Act, 1976: Appointment of women member in the Advisory and Central Advisory Committee is mandatory under the act.
  14. The Lime Stone and Dolomite Mines Labour Welfare Fund Act, 1972: Appointment of women member in the Advisory and Central Advisory Committee is mandatory under the act.
  15. The Mica Mines Labour Welfare Fund Act, 1946: Appointment of women member in the Advisory and Central Advisory Committee is mandatory under the act.

## **FINDINGS:**

1. Women mainly work to earn living for her family.
2. There is no sustainability of employment of women workers in unorganised sector.
3. Exploitation and harassment at workplace is the main problem of women workers.
4. Women workers frequently face discrimination due to gender inequality.
5. Women workers do not get benefit under maternity benefit act.
6. They were required to work for more than stipulated hours thus underpaid.
7. They were forced to live in miserable conditions.

## **Way Forward for Upliftment of Women Workers in Unorganised Sector:**

1. Women workers should be provided with basic education facilities.
2. Women workers should be acquainted with necessary skills to perform their work.
3. A supervisory body should be established to monitor the social security legal provisions for women workers.
4. Women workers should be made aware about their rights.
5. There should be proper guidelines for recruitment process, working hours and for health hazards.
6. Any kind of exploitation including sexual harassment of women workers is to be prevented and stringent action needs to be taken against the wrong doer.
7. Cooperative should be promoted because they have important role in improving the socio-economic conditions of women workers.

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**TABLES**

**Table 1: Labour Force Participation Rate (%) based on UBS.**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Rural</b>		<b>Urban</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
1993-1994	56.1	33.1	54.2	16.4
1999-2000	54.0	30.2	54.2	14.7
2004-2005	55.5	33.3	57.0	17.8
2009-2010	55.6	26.5	55.9	14.6
2011-2012	55.3	25.3	56.3	15.5
2015-2016	77.3	26.7	69.1	16.2

**Source:** Compiled from various NSSO and EUS reports.

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