

## A STUDY OF ECONOMIC STATUS OF UNORGANISED WOMEN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SIVAGANGAI DISTRICT IN TAMIL NADU

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### **Abstract**

*The present study was carried out with women construction workers, working in the unorganized sector. An attempt has been made in the paper to understand the socio economic condition of women laborers, nature of their work, their working conditions, wage pattern, wage discrimination and other difficulties faced by them at their work place. In order to assess the economic status of women construction worker in Sivagangai district, 420 women construction workers (60 sampling from each taluk, Sivagangai, Tiruppattur, Devakottai, Karaikudi, Manamadurai, Tiruppuvanam and Illayankudi,) of Sivagangai district were randomly selected with the help of construction engineers. To analyze wage discrimination and factors influencing the wage of women construction workers in Sivagangai district, the proportionate probability sampling technique was adopted in order to select 140 engineers. Findings show that majority of the migrant women were engaged in the construction industry and were only employed in unskilled and low paying jobs as coolies, laborers and helpers. Women were exploited to a greater degree as they were paid less compared to men for similar nature of work hours spent on work. The conditions of work in the unorganized sector were unsatisfactory and the problems confronted by them were acute. And that their illiteracy, poverty and indebtedness forced them to work for lower wages and under unjust conditions.*

**Keywords:** *women construction workers, working conditions, wage pattern, migrant women, Construction sector, industrial employees*

### **Introduction**

A great majority of people in the developing nations are under the line of poverty. They are deprived of adequate access to the basic needs of life such health, education, housing, food, security, employment, justice and equality. Issues of sustainable livelihood, lack of social and political participation of the vulnerable groups are the major problems in the developing nations. Governments have failed to guarantee people's right in the implementation level itself. People who belong to the vulnerable groups are unable to acquire and use their rights. Construction sector is the world's largest industrial employees with seven per cent of total world employment out of 28 per cent of industrial employment. Construction activity is an integral part of a country's infrastructure and industrial development

### **Employment in the Informal Sector**

While there are numerous definitions of the informal sector, those who work in small scale enterprises are often invisible workers who create their own niche of employment. Informal sector enterprises are characterized by their smallness (less than 10 workers), frequently relying on family labour. The lives of informal sector workers are struggling to meet their basic needs, in very poor working conditions where people endure

long working hours for minimal and fluctuating income. They have neither income nor social security, many are self-employed, but the sector also includes persons who are in waged employment, apprenticeships, work as industrial outworkers and unpaid family members. Their struggle is also a longer-term one to gain control of assets and to make provision against contingencies.

An important aspect of quality of employment in India is the predominance of the informal sector. The Indian Economy is characterized by the existence of a vast majority of informal or unorganized labour employment. The contribution of the construction industry to the economic and social life of the country is noteworthy. Besides, the construction industry generates substantial employment and provides a growth impetus to other sectors through backward and forward linkages. It is essential therefore, that this vital activity is nurtured for the healthy growth of the economy. As per the Economic Survey 2010, 93 percent of India's workforce includes the self employed and employed in unorganized sector. Unfortunately, the International Monetary Fund's latest study on "Women, Work, and the Economy", shows that, despite some improvements, progress toward leveling the playing field for women has stalled, may be written amounting to as much as 27 per cent of per capita GDP in some countries.

The size of the organised sector characterized by higher earnings and job security is small, it accounted for less than 6 percent of the total employment in 2004-05. Around two-thirds of the total organized sector employment is in the public sector. Over the years, organised sector employment has grown more slowly than the total employment, reflecting the faster growth of employment in the unorganised sector. As a result, there has been increasing informalisation of employment over the years. This informalisation has been more pronounced in the case of female workers. As a whole, about 96 percent of female employment is in the unorganized sector as against about 91 percent of males. In urban areas, the percentage of unorganised sector workers is close to 65-70 percent. Not all of them are poor but crude estimates suggest that close to half of this number is in dire need of occupational up-scaling.

A large proportion of the workers engaged in the urban unorganised sector is migrants from rural areas with poor educational, training and skill background and are employed in low-paying, semi-skilled or unskilled jobs. The productivity and earning levels in most of the enterprises are low and do not often provide full time work to those engaged. For the employees, the working environment is not conducive; working hours are long and most of the conditions of decent employment (e.g. paid leave, pension, bonus, medical support and health insurance, maternity leave benefits, compensation against accident, etc.) are nearly non-existent. The past trends and all the available evidence suggest that the bulk of the growth in employment in future will come from the unorganised sector. It will be an important challenge to ensure that employment in this sector consists of jobs with safe conditions of work, decent and growing earnings and a measure of income and social security. Moreover, increasing the proportion of organised

sector employment will be an important task to accomplish in the near future. Around the world, the number of women in the workforce remains far below that of men only about half of working-age women are employed. Women account for most unpaid work and when they are paid, they are overrepresented in the informal sector and among the poor. They continue to be paid less than men for the same jobs, even in OECD countries, where the average gender wage gap is about 16 per cent. And in many countries, distortions and discrimination in the labour market restrict women's chances of equal pay and rising to senior positions.

The potential gains from a larger female workforce are striking. In Egypt, if the number of female workers were raised to the same level as that of men, the country's GDP could grow by 34 per cent. In the UAE, GDP would expand by 12 per cent, in Japan by 9 per cent, and in the US by 5 per cent. According to a recent study based on data from the International Labour Organization, of the 865 million women worldwide who could contribute more fully to their economies, 812 million live in emerging and developing countries.

#### **Empowerment of Women Construction Workers**

Empowerment aims at creating both equality and equity between individuals or social groups. In women's empowerment, the gender and social relations are transformed in favour of women to create greater equality and equity between men and women within social groups and between different social groups. In the empowerment process, the powerless people begin to have control over their lives. Empowerment results in a change in the balance of power in the living condition.

Financial independence is very important for women construction workers as many of them are found to be single or abandoned women. Within families too, the husbands are found to have other sexual partners and the income is split. Some are drunkards and most of them are indebted. The earnings of the women are often forcibly taken away by their husbands and total dependence on such irresponsible men too wreaks havoc on their personal lives. Economic empowerment alone can save them from the clutch of poverty and disease. Many direct and indirect benefits can accrue from economic independence the chief among them are nutritious diet, access to health care, education for children, proper dwelling, and even social security

#### **Women Construction Workers: Global Scenario**

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.

There is strong evidence that the number of informal workers as a proportion of all construction workers is growing. Studies in India, for example, show that while construction employment in the organized (formal) sector rose by 0.37 per cent between 1973 and 1987,

the numbers of informal workers rose by 9.73 percent over the same period). The proportion of temporary construction workers in China rose from 28 per cent in 2000 to 65 per cent in 2005 and in Brazil the proportion of informal construction workers raised from 57 per cent in 2000 to 75 per cent in 2005.

**Table 1: Estimated Number of Informal Sector Workers, Per Thousand Population, in India states between 2000-2005 and 2005-10**

S/No	State	Estimated no. of informal sector workers (Per thousand)		Share of Informal workers to total (in Percent)	Growth rate (in Percent)	
		2004-05	2005-10	2004-05	2004-05	2005-10
1	Andhra Pradesh	380	443	88.45	88.28	1.01
2	Assam	3263	267	76.70	84.41	7.17
3	Bihar*	313	315	93.71	93.59	1.53
4	Gujarat	380	386	386	82.83	2.32
5	Haryana	279	334	82.44	83.45	6.82
6	Himachal Pradesh	437	438	88.47	83.66	2.85
7	J&K	368	322	87.69	81.65	-
8	Kerala	258	250	67.56	63.40	1.98
9	Madhya Pradesh	362	393	86.62	90.08	3.25
10	Maharashtra	344	380	81.51	82.00	3.05
11	Odessa	362	393	89.62	90.08	3.25
12	Punjab	331	355	85.60	85.23	3.68
13	West Bengal	312	327	86.79	85.42	3.65
14	Rajasthan	373	393	91.04	91.16	5.51
15	<b>Tamil Nadu</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>81.85</b>	<b>80.76</b>	<b>0.39</b>
16	Uttar Pradesh	338	90.95	92.20	85.67	3.91
17	North Eastern States	314	346	85.13	83.72	5.83
18	Other states & UTs	197.20	60.39	60.85		1.46
	<b>Total</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>86.36</b>	<b>86.32</b>	<b>2.83</b>

Source: Central Pollution Control Board 2010-11

The proportion of casual informal workers in the total construction workforce is growing overall. In India however, virtually all women construction workers are based in the informal economy. In India, the share of casual labour in the construction workforce increased by 10 per cent between 1983 and 1993. In 1993, 64 per cent of men and 96 per cent of women in urban construction were working on a casual basis.

**Table 2: Number of Persons in Informal Sector, 2010**

Sector	Male	Female	Total
Rural	196.72	104.02	300.76
Urban	77.65	18.96	96.01
Total	273.79	122.98	396.77

Source: Redefining of unorganized sector in India: report of the Expert Group for Informal sector 2010

### **Women Construction Workers in Tamil Nadu**

The Work Participation Rate (WPR) for the female had increased from 33.55 per cent in 1991 to 38.50 per cent in 2001 against 59.24 per cent and 58.28 per cent for male during the above given period in the same period rural areas. In urban area, it rose from 11.97 per cent to 13.10 per cent for female and from 51.25 per cent to 52.78 per cent for male in urban areas.

Construction workers in general have no access to formal training in the construction industry and they upgrade their skills through practice or by observing and working under skilled masons or carpenters etc. As a result of women being only engaged in soft skills, the gap between the skilled male workers and unskilled women workers has placed them in a position of less empowerment economically and socially. This has worked against the advancement and empowerment of women workers. Only 11Percent of the construction workers in Tamil Nadu are formally skilled with a huge mass of unskilled workers

### **Significance of the Study**

Women constitute nearly half of the population of India but form only 32 per cent of the labour force. The potential in women is still unexploited. In construction sector about 35 percent are women and their potential is not used to the maximum. They clean the building site and serve the male skilled workers by carrying the materials to them. They perform very heavy work and exert more physical strength than masons. Women are not assigned masonry work purely on the ground of socially assigned roles. The rural women work in fear of physical harm, economic deprivation or social oppression. These women are pushed to construction jobs for the sake of merge earning.

Women are identified as a mother, a wife, a daughter in law or a daughter but ever as an independent person. The International Labour Organization says that women represent 50 percent of the population, 30 percent of the labour force, Perform 60 percent of all working hours and of receive only 10 percent of the world's income and own less than 1 percent of the world's property

Much of the discrimination in woman's life stems from this fact. As a matter of fact, the problem of female worker is the index of the status of Indian labour in both organized and unorganized sectors. Almost 400 million people work in unorganized sector and of these about 120 million are women. According to an estimate by the National Commission on Self -Employed Women (2001), of the total number of women workers in India, about 94 percent are in the informal or unorganized sector whereas just 6 percent are in the organized or formal sector.

Majority of construction workers, up to 95 per cent of them are estimated to be temporary workers and most of them are seasonal. Statistics over the period have shown that compared to other sectors, this sector of economic activity generally creates 4.7 times increase in incomes and 7.76 times increase in employment generation potentiality.

This research “**A Study of Economic Status of Unorganized Women Construction Workers with Special Reference to Sivagangai District in Tamil Nadu**” is an effort to study all these issues including the problem of gender discrimination in the construction sector in wages, and to find out the reasons for the gender discrimination with the view to eradicate this problem in Sivagangai District. This research is an attempt to make the women construction workers awareness of the opportunities, and studies the means to empower women on par with men in the construction sector by training them as masons.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The construction industry is the single largest employees of migrant laborers, the poorest of the poor, in Indian cities.” Millions of women construction workers have left their native villages to escape from extreme rural poverty and find a job in big cities.

Construction industry is an integral part of a country’s infrastructure and industrial development. But, it is typically a male dominated industry and presents a major challenge for equal opportunities for women. Construction industry is the key for the success of the globalization of Indian economy. Construction sector is providing employment to 7 percent of total world employment.

The contribution of construction sector in India to the GDP at factor cost in 2006 - 07 was Rs. 1,965,550 million, registering an increase of 10.7 percent from the previous year and the share of construction in GDP has increased from 6.1 percent in 2002-03 to 6.9 percent in 2006-07. But it should be noted that the women construction workers are facing poverty, lack of access to education and inadequate healthcare facilities. Most workers in the unorganized sector barely manage a with subsistence existence.

Several factors responsible for their plight are indifferent attitude of the employers towards women workers, their weak bargaining power and in many cases the women workers themselves being unaware of their rights. Women constitute half of the construction workers in India as semi-skilled / skilled jobs in other industries but in the construction industry, women are employed mostly as unskilled labourers. In the construction sector most of the women are unskilled. Though there are skilled women workers are employed in other sectors, but it is very difficult to find skilled women workers in the construction sector.

They perform various unskilled jobs in the industry like cleaning the building sites, carrying bricks, gravel, mortar and water up to the skilled masons and carpenters, irrespective of the number of years they worked, they are not upgraded from unskilled to skilled as males. Women face discrimination on the job because even if they have the same skills like men they are not given the same work. Sexual harassment is a serious problem for female construction workers. The women workers at certain points were going through a number of job stresses like sexual harassment, being jobless, gender-based discrimination, proneness to different health hazards, physical problems, insomnia, nausea, headache, and other adverse outcomes. It is seen that at the work place they do not have any privacy or

toilet facilities. Both male and female workers work together. Due to free mixing with the male co-workers they might get Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

Hence, an attempt is made to bring out the hidden facts in the real life of the women construction workers.

### **Scope of the Study**

It is hoped that the outcome of the research work definitely would bring many policy implications relating to handloom Industry. The findings of the study would be much more useful for the Government and Policy makers to formulate strategies for the development of women construction workers.

### **Objectives**

The following are the objectives of the study

1. To study the socio-economic conditions of women construction workers in the study area.
2. To find out the age wise discrimination of women construction workers in the study area.
3. To make a study on the working conditions of women construction workers.
4. To determine the factors that influence the wages of men and women construction workers
5. To identify the obstacles and problems faced by women construction workers mainly the exploitation of women workers and gender discrimination.
6. To offer concrete suggestions for the betterment of women workers and conclusion based on the outcome of the study

### **Methodology**

#### **a) Reasons for Choosing the Topic**

1. It is a well-known fact that Sivagangai district is one of the most backward districts in Tamilnadu.
2. In Sivagangai district, women constitute half of the construction work.
3. There are as much as 90, 277 families in Sivagangai District living below the Poverty Line (BPL), they are resource poor in terms of assets, skills and credit availability.
4. Among the working population of the district, 16.33 per cent were cultivators while 30.13 per cent were agricultural labourers. In case of female working population, 56.02 per cent were engaged in informal sector activities.
5. In total workers in Sivagangai district 32 per cent were engaged in agriculture as agricultural labourers.

Hence, this study has been purposively selected.

**b) Method of Data Collection**

This study fully depends upon both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from the sample respondents through well structured interview schedule and Questionnaire. Secondary data have been collected from text books, journals, magazines, News papers, Government Gazettes, internet etc

**c) Sampling Technique**

In order to assess the economic status of women construction worker in Sivagangai district, 420 women construction workers (60 sampling from each Taluk, Sivagangai, Tiruppattur, Devakottai, Karaikudi, Manamadurai, Tiruppuvanam and Illayankudi,) of Sivagangai district) were randomly selected with the help of construction engineers,

To analyze wage discrimination and factors influencing the wage of women construction workers in Sivagangai district, the proportionate probability sampling technique was adopted in order to select 140 engineers.

Civil Engineers were asked to fill questionnaire to find out their views, ideas and suggestions on women workers in construction work. The construction workers were selected from the place where they are assembled and recruited for work, work places and wage disbursement spot.

Data were collected through personal visit to the home or work site of the respondent. For collection of primary data, interview schedule was used. The interview schedule was prepared keep in view of the objectives of the study. Buildings Contractors and Engineers were also interviewed for further information. In addition to this, informal discussion was also held with head of the family or other members of the family so as to cross check the information. A Preliminary interview schedule was constructed and administered to 35 women construction workers pilot study out of the selected sample. Then, the interview schedule was pre-tested by administering them to ten respondents, selected for the study to judge the arrangement of questions, wording, format sequence, and the like. They were redrafted in the light of their comments.

A pilot study was also conducted and the interview schedule was revised in the light of the pilot study also for the purpose of bringing it to the present shape so as to make the study a comprehensive one. Pre structured interview schedule was used to collect the primary data.

Relevant secondary data and useful information had also been downloaded from the appropriate website in the internet.

**Statistical Tools Applied**

1. In order to analyze the determinants of employment in the construction sector, two set of multiple regression model have been constructed.
2. In order to examine the association, chi-square test was used.



3. In order to assess the contribution of the respondents to family income, multiple regression analysis is used
4. paired t -test is used to compare the equality of means before and after entering into construction sector
5. To analyze the reasons for joining the construction work has been estimated by using Garrett's Rank correlation method.

#### **Limitations**

1. The study has covered only one district also the findings of the study can not be applied to other districts
2. Some of the women construction workers are hesitant to provide correct information of their salary. In such a case, it is necessary to resort indirect method for gathering information.
3. The population of construction workers is scattered hence the coverage was a major problem

#### **Major Findings of the Study**

1. The number of women construction workers consists of 4-6 members and majority of the family are of nuclear type.
2. It is seen that majority of the women construction workers are interested in giving their children higher education. They send their children to Tamil Medium schools. But their children do not show much progress in their studies
3. The study reveals that are all women construction workers possessed land of their own and a house. Majority live in huts. Housing conditions are very poor.
4. Majority of the respondents are indebted to money lenders.
5. Women construction workers are prone to various health problems.
6. It is found that 74 per cent of the respondents reported to sexual harassment at work place.
7. It is evident that the overwhelming majority of women in the industry are young, being between the ages of 16-40 years.
8. It is observed that the most of the workers are married. Women of this age group have the capacity to do hard work and easily exploited and harassed by the contractors.
9. The findings revealed that about 46 per cent of respondents reported that they do not have any other option, as they are widows or abandoned by their husband, or if husband is there, he is either drunkard or unemployed, therefore to meet the basic needs of family and to support children they have to take job at site.
10. Another group (4 percent) is forced by poverty while 10per cent are working to improve their economic status or helping other existing members of family in construction industry.

11. It was found that 65 per cent of the women's families had been doing construction work from one generation to the next, while the remaining 35 percent of women joined this sector to support their families mainly due to the non-availability of other work
12. The average daily wages of the female workers were found to be substantially lower than the male workers. The average daily income of the female worker was Rs. 200 as against Rs. 500 for the male worker, who earned more than double that of the women.
13. During the study, the majority of the women workers (68.8 per cent) said that they work as head loaders on construction sites; 90 per cent of women workers surveyed were unskilled labourers, while a nominal 10 per cent work as semi-skilled labourers, mostly assisting the male masons.
14. It is absorbed that 15 per cent of women respondents were widows
15. It is found that the average monthly income of the female worker was found to be Rs. 4,500 whereas the monthly average income of the male worker was around Rs. 8,000. Annually, the male worker earned more than double than the female workers.
16. Out of 350 women workers surveyed, 40 per cent women are engaged in construction work for the last 8 years while 18 per cent of them have been doing this work for the last 20 years. The remaining joined the construction sector during the previous 3-5 years.
17. It is found that 90 per cent of women workers confirmed that the contractors do not give them any additional benefits such as a bonus.

### **Suggestions**

1. Literacy is one of the social indicators of development. There is a high correlation between literacy and development. Implementation of literacy programmes and general awareness programmes must be conducted to reduce the dropout rates from school among the children of women construction workers.
2. Awareness Programme on savings, education, and income generating activity must be given to those people for improving their standard of living.
3. The establishment of micro credit institutions and banks has made no real changes in the borrowing pattern of the respondents. They are still exploited by the middlemen and money lenders. Consequently easy accessible loan with low rate of interest should be given to these poor
4. Each and every woman has a potential in them. Motivation should be given to bring out their potentialities in other occupation. This will improve their status.
5. The critical areas of the concerns are lack of education, health care, decision making, planning process and poverty of women. To implement policies on these

concerns more vigorously and strongly women's political participation should be enhanced.

6. The employment, conditions of work and service may be regulated.
7. In order to develop the living conditions of women construction workers social security and labour welfare measures may be provided.
8. Safeguard of women construction workers in health and also safety measures are very essential and much attention is needed in this regard.
9. Gender discrimination in terms of conditions of employment, wages etc may be Prohibited in order to rescue the women construction workers.
10. Minimum and equal wages should be fixed by State Government for women construction workers and wage rates should be reviewed periodically.
11. There is need to make available credit facilities with less interest to needy women construction workers to start self-employment and as a result of that women construction workers may get additional opportunity for gainful employment.
12. Conscious efforts are needed for training of female construction workers in the rural areas in alternative skills.
13. There is need to bring about some attitudinal and institutional change to remove prejudice against women construction workers and to remove the general feeling that women are suitable and fit for doing only unskilled and semi-skilled works.
14. Addition to above, some alternative employment programmes and opportunities should be provided to women construction workers.
15. Accident insurance scheme may be introduced for the benefits of women construction workers.
16. A detailed study of all aspects of social and economic conditions of women construction workers must be conducted and report must be submitted to the government so that necessary and effective welfare measures may be taken.
17. It is suggested that training on morale and ethics may be provided to the women workers.

### **Conclusion**

Women in the construction sector is not easy, within the industry they have to face several adverse situations such as sexual harassment, wage discriminations, injuries and deceases are the major factors due to which women's even though works hard, but lack behind the men and remains unskilled even after hardship a lot of years. The scenario only can be changed with the government intervention, through implementing the policies strictly. Stem action has to be taken against all those who harass the employees. The status of the women only can be improved when major transition in the society occurs and that can be achieved by mind set transition of every individual in the society.

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