

Women Workers in Unorganised Sector – Victims of Challenges and Disabilities

Madhu Dhawan

Department of Sociology, GNKCW, Ludhiana, Punjab, India.

Email:madhubalab6jan@yahoo.com

Abstract

The paper presents an overview of the situation of women workers in unorganised sector of India. Today, unorganised sector constitutes a pivotal part of our economy and covers about half of GDP. Also it has lead to preponderance of unorganised workers which occupies more than 90 per cent of the workforce in it. Undoubtedly, this sector generates employment opportunities for marginalised and vulnerable section for their subsistence but at the same time, it is plagued by several problems such as no service rules, no wage rules, and no possibilities of career advancement. A large proportion of socially and economically underprivileged section of our society i.e. women who constitutes lion's share but their work often goes unaccounted. The plight of women in this sector is miserable as they mostly do arduous work as wage earners, piece rate workers, casual labourer with extremely low wages, no fixed working hours and hardly drive any benefits.

Key words: *unorganised sector, women workers, plight of women, etc.*

Introduction: Today, women constitute a significant part of labour force in India. Traditionally well entrenched and prevailing socio cultural milieu emphasised that women are meant only for household chores, their role outside the world has never socially accepted. Despite cult and conventional values confine Indian women folk into four walls of the family yet women have never been exclusively confined to domesticity, sitting idle on platter served by others. However, over the years population pressure, economic hardship, and changing social cultural attitude towards women has necessitated their participation in labour market. Even though numerable structural changes in our economy forced out women from organised sector to join unorganised sector. Consequently there are an increasing number of women workers in the unorganised sector. The term informal sector and unorganised sector are often used interchangeably. Unorganised sector constitutes a pivotal part of our economy and covers about half of GDP. There is preponderance of unorganised workers in it occupies more than 90 per cent of the workforce and 50 per cent of the national products are accounted by this sector only.

Unorganised sector workers are those who do not have any job security, income security and therefore extremely vulnerable to exogenous shocks. Moreover unorganised workers are not able to legally organise themselves in pursuit of their common interests like casual nature of employment, ignorance, illiteracy and scattered size of employments. The second labour commission (2002) specifies characteristics of unorganised labour follows-apprentices, casual and contract workers, home based artisans, section of self-employed

persons involved in jobs like vending, rag picking, rickshaw pulling, agricultural labour, migrant labour and those who perform manual and helper jobs. According to the ministry of labour: 90 per cent of women workforce comprises women in unorganised sector, but paradoxically, all the laws made so far have been with an eye on the women in the organised sector which forms a mere 10 per cent of the workforce.(Arfat,2013). As per report of international labour organisation, women represent 50% of the population 30% of labour force performs 60% of all working hours, receive 10% of the world's income, and owing less than 1% of world's property. Despite high sounding legal equality, provisions and other declarations, women have remained oblivious and denigrated in almost every walk of life. It is grave matter of concern that being sole supporters of our economy, women do not get recognition of their work; their work is completely invisible and undermined.

Objectives of the study:

1. To study the socio economic profile of women workers of sports goods industry.
2. To examine the challenges and social disabilities of women workers.

Methodology:

Sports goods industry of Jalandhar district of Punjab is one such widespread and unorganised industry which is absorbing a large number of women as home based workers in it. Home based worker is one of the categories of unorganised sector that carry out their activities in their household units, not to be seen on factory floor of employers. These workers are relatively free to work as piece rate workers under the control of contractors or employers who supplies the raw material to them. Sports goods industry is highly labour intensive industry has shown unprecedented growth and provides employment to many people from weaker section including women. This industry is so wide and no. of products are manufactured in it such as cricket balls, inflatable balls, shuttle cock, badminton racquets, sports cap and soccer balls etc. The present study is primarily focused on production of soccer balls. Three hundred home based workers were selected and interviewed with structured interview schedule. An observation method was also applied during the course of study.

Findings of the study:

The main findings are summarised here under the following headings:

Socio economic profile: As per the sample for the study, the age of sample women was between 20 and 46 above. The study shows that a large proportion of women falls in the age category of 31-45 years (60%) followed by 32% of women who falls between the age group of 20-30 years. Lack of skills and literacy are the main causes to enter into sports goods industry. A majority of women workers were illiterate and amongst all of the respondents 85.33 per cent were from schedule caste who had taken up this work because of caste traditions because in caste system occupations and crafts have been handed down from one generation to next. 95.67% respondents were married who taken up such tasks for shouldering the family responsibilities because of inadequate income of male members or absence of bread winner.

Challenges and social disabilities:

On one side, labour intensive industry feeds most of the population of Jalandhar city but on the other side it poses numerous challenges and social disabilities to those home based women workers who are actually the bedrock of it.

High level of insecurity

It is found that more number of home based women workers were having constraints such as insecurity of their work as they had no contract with the owner of the factory for whom they were working. Due to lack of direct relationship, they were easily exploited by contractor and usually had a risk of the termination of employment due to delaying of the product or even because of wrong stitching of soccer ball.

Deplorable wages

Home based women workers as part of the unorganised labour are today victims of unmitigated hardship and indignities. The plight of these workers is particularly bad.

As home based women workers are not registered in any account and their work is totally invisible. It is found that respondents were getting extremely low wages for their work if anybody tries to raise their voice for increasing it they are easily terminated. Also contractors are able to find easily new entrant who will do the work for them at very cheaper rates.

Disparity in wages

Gender based discrimination at work is the most enduring and universal phenomenon. Despite of enactment of Equal remuneration act in 1976 and subsequent amendment in 1987, women workers in the sports goods industry are still discriminated for wages as compared to men. The study shows that 65% of the respondents claim that they are not getting fair and equal wages with their male counterparts and rest of the workers did not report any wage disparity for their experiences, efficiency and regularity of work.

Gender based division of labour

It is observed that preferably women are recruited to perform monotonous and time consuming task along with their domestic chores on the pretext of women innate characteristics for stitching. The findings of the present study are in conformity with those of Singh and Iyer (1991) who also found that women are employed in those processes where they are indispensable and cheaper to engage.

Lack of recognition of women's work

It is found that a considerable segment of the workers of sports goods industry are home based workers but their work is not acknowledged. They worked throughout the day and seldom got time for rest, leisure and recreation. Moreover not any authentic register of workers is maintained by employers to avoid claim any benefit under the law.

Offences against woman's personhood

With regards to dignity of womanhood, women faced numerous challenges. In the present study, sexuality and violence together constitute one of greatest hurdle in determining honourable position in the society. A majority (66%) the respondents had not received the

full payment of wages where as 29% of the respondents faced the problem of disrespect during their work i.e. insulting and filthy language by the contractor and 5% of workers reported about sexual assault in the study.

Dual dilemma of working women

Due to present inflationary pressure and tremendous changes in the lifestyle, the economic exigencies all necessitated women participation in the labour force. Also survival of poor families is entirely based on women wages. Under the present study, it has been found that home based workers has joined this work to overcome financial crisis but with that confronted with role conflict.

The study shows that 50% of the respondents were facing role conflict due to husband's drinking habits and one fourth of them claimed that the role conflict they have due to non-cooperation from family members. They also reported that conflicting family environment has a profound impact on the family members. With the entering of women into labour market for sustenance needs leads to distortion of personality of their children. About 50 per cent of the respondent claimed that due to familial conflict their children lacked interest in studies. A few respondents reported that their children have become delinquent due to uncongenial family atmosphere.

The other dejecting dimension of the present study is problem of child labour. It is observed that out of 300 respondents about one third reporting for their children became as labour of this industry to meet the family expenses.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals that lives of home based women workers are hard and tough. They bear the double burden but deprived of all statutory benefits and amenities under the legislation. Both centre and state government have formulated certain specific schemes for safeguarding the unorganised workers but fail in meeting the real needs and requirements of the labour force. Hence it is imperative that government should make the efforts to ameliorate the working conditions in terms of occupational safety, limits of working hours, payment of adequate wages so that productive capacity of these workers not to be undermined ,may have mandatory, decent and dignified work.

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