

Executive summary of the Minor Research Project

Title: A study of the Women in Unorganised Sector with Special Reference to the Women Beedi Workers in Udupi District

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Introduction

The unorganized sector in India is largely categorized as units engaged in production of goods and services with the primary objective of generating employment and income to the persons concerned. These units work on a small scale with limited capital, minimum division of labour and minimum employee-employer relation. However it is the largest sector in terms of work force. This sector provides income earning opportunity to large number of workers.

As per the Economic Survey of 2007-08, 93% of India's workforce includes the self employed and those employed in unorganized sector.

A major category of workers in the unorganized sector are home based workers. The home based workers are those who are engaged in production of services or goods for an employer or contractor in an arrangement whereby the work is carried out in a place of the worker's choice, in most cases in his own house. The issues and problems of these workers are complex since they are unorganized and as such they have no bargaining power or ability to organize themselves in pursuit of their common interests. The casual nature of employment, scattered and small establishments, ignorance and illiteracy prevent them from coming together for fulfilling their demands.

These workers are not recognized as independent categories therefore it is difficult to get specific statistics about them. It has been estimated that 3 crore workers in

India are home based workers. Among these 45 lakh are beedi rolling workers, 65 lakhs are handloom weavers and 48 lakhs are rural artisans and craft persons. Others employed in agarbatti making, papad making, zari workers etc.

Beedi rolling is one of the largest unorganized sector works in India. India's 1.5 million beedi workers are among the most exploited workers in India. They are poor, illiterate or less educated, subject to low wages and over all highly exploited by the contractors. More than 50 % of the beedi workers are women.

Beedi rolling is one of the popular amongst the unorganized industry. Women constitute a large portion of this industry because it is home based and an economic security to the women. The industry is spread across the country and found in many states and union territories. Most of the beedi making work is done under contractual, home based, piece rate system. These workers bear the double burden as unorganized workers and as women who enjoy a lower status to that of men.

There are a number of studies pertaining to the beedi rolling industry. Most of these studies cover the socio-economic profile of the workers, health of the women workers, Child labour in beedi industry and so on. The present study is taken in the light of NSSO reports which state the tremendous transformations taking place in the Indian labour market including growth in informal sector, deterioration in the quality of employment with respect to job security, terms and conditions in work, weakening of worker organizations etc. To a greater extent, this transformation could be related to the globalization process and the resultant efforts on the part of employers to minimize the cost of production to the lowest levels. This study will make an attempt to find out the extent of social and economic insecurity and exploitation among the unorganized women workers.

Objectives

- To find out the socio-economic status of the unorganized women workers
- To study the health status of the women beedi rollers
- To find out the extent to which the welfare programmes are availed by the workers and their impact
- To study the status of the women unorganized workers in the household.
- To study the extent of economic progress achieved

Findings of the study

The study was undertaken to understand the women in unorganized sector through an analysis of the home based women beedi rollers in Udupi district of Karnataka. A concentrated effort to understand the women and their problems as workers and their life in society have resulted in understanding many issues related to women in organized and unorganized sectors, safety of women in society, need for gender sensitization, illiteracy and the related problems.

The general findings of the study are given below:

The study was conducted among a group of beedi rolling women who belong largely to the age group 30 to 50 years of age. Majority of them belong to Hindu religion and most of them are married. The educational status of the women ranged from primary to PG level where above 75 percentages have not

studied beyond high school level. Those who are educated are the girls below 25 years who are engaged in the work to find resources for their study. It is encouraging to note that the younger generation is showing interest in education and are trying to come out of the economic conditions through which their parents were struggling.

All the respondents are reported to be coming from poor economic background and belong to below poverty line category. Though engaged in this business for quite a long time, does not altogether brought change in their socio economic background. Many of them reported to have doing the work carried through three generations without any visible change in their economic conditions.

Most of them live in small sized families which are nuclear in nature. The small family norm has been adopted by the respondents as seen in the study where majority are The initiatives of the government in providing land to the landless helped many of them to have ownership of land and most of them have constructed houses by availing loans personally and through Government schemes. However many of them still do not have proper land ownership records even after using the land for more than 20 years. Most of them have constructed houses the land provided by the Panchayat for the economically weaker sections, which comes under the housing scheme initiated by the Panchayats in Karnataka.

Analysis of the economic conditions reveals though the individual workers earn an average of below Rs. 4000/,the average house hold income of the families is above Rs. 6000/. That means overall the family maintains an average level of living, but the unexpected issues like accidents, health

problems, expense of children's education disturb the balance of life.

Those with low income are augmenting the income by way of taking up other works. Mostly temporary works are accepted since they can continue rolling beedis on a regular basis. There is no uniformity in the number of beedis rolled by each worker and it ranges between 500 to 1200 per day which is reflected in the differences in the earnings per worker. It is also noted that the number of beedis rolled by the workers vary in proportion to the number of working hours available, as most of them are not full time workers and are engaged in many other occupations along with it they roll beedis.

Saving habit is to the minimum as the income from work is just enough to manage the day-to-day matters. Majority of them fulfill their economic needs by taking loans but it is said that the income from beedi rolling help them to repay the loans as it is a regular source, though not very high, to depend during emergencies. Loans are availed mainly for children's education, marriage, house construction etc. A large percentage of the workers are members of Self Help Groups which help them to avail loans and they repay the amount by way of the additional income managed through beedi rolling. In the absence of information about banking system and the complex procedures they depend on other sources for loan.

The Minimum wage applicable to beedi workers is fixed at 1000 beedi rolled rate. The respondents reported to be getting 140- 170 for a bundle of 1000 beedis. But they agree that they are not getting this on a daily basis, as they are not able to finish 1000 beedis per day and there will be deduction in the wages on the basis of quality.

Many of these workers put an average of 6-10 hours of work yet could not meet the target. Sometimes, when they could not finish the expected work the leaves used for rolling tobacco many be damaged adding to their loss.

The contractors cheat these helpless women by distributing poor quality tobacco and leaves or without giving tobacco proportionate to the number of leaves provided for rolling it. This will reduce the number of total beedis produced and price for that will be deducted from the workers' wages. As illiterate or less educated they trust the contractors in calculating the actual rolled, rejected and the deductions leaving them susceptible to the cheatings of the contractors. Another form of exploitation is the unnecessarily high rejection rate at collection time. Beedis are rejected for bad leaves, less tobacco, size variation, weight difference, loosely tied etc.

The respondents reported of their inability to control the resources. Most of them pointed out the alcoholic habits of their husbands as a major problem which prevents them from finishing their work on time or the misuse of their hard earned money by the men as they have no hold on such matters.

Majority of these workers are not coming under the social legislations and welfare measures of the government as they work as piece wage workers in the home based production and not directly connected to the any Beedi industry. The workers attached to factories are having the identity cards/ pass book and are eligible for bonus, scholarship for children and pension. Even in the few areas where identity cards or pass books are given, they are generally in the names of male heads of households or husbands, depriving women of benefits. Majority of the respondents reported to be outside the limits of the social and

health security measures. Though they work they have to be satisfied with the wages for the number of beedis they have rolled and do not have any allowances or protection.

Those who are eligible for availing these facilities are reported to have been failing to fulfill the demands or targets of finishing the required number of beedis on time. Few of them reported to have been getting these facilities earlier but had to discontinue due to several factors like inability work for sometime due to illness, distance of the beedi collecting centres from home, closure of the companies where they were working etc. There is no uniformity in the calculation of pension and bonus as everything depends on the wages per 1000 beedis which vary with respect to areas.

Regarding the health hazards it has been pointed out that long hours of work and the way in which they sit, and the raw materials that they use are likely to lead to health hazards. Beedi rolling is a work associated with two raw materials, the leaf and the tobacco, both cause health hazards. The tobacco dust can lead to many problems. Most of these workers work from single room or congested area without proper ventilation and air circulation which lead to the tobacco dust being inhaled leading to breathing problems.

Majority of the workers or their family members are found to be suffering from one or other chronic or periodic diseases which are attributed to the effect of beedi rolling, yet many of the respondents were either unaware or unwilling to accept the fact. Severe health problems are noted in 80% of the families affecting not only the beedi rollers but also the young and old of the family. The noted health problems include cough, sinusitis, cancer, breathing problems, joint pains, numbness of fingers, discoloring of nails etc,

Many of them work till late night under light or lamp which results in problems with eye sight, regular head ache etc. Some of them have pakka houses with electric connection which enable them to work at night under better lighting conditions but voltage problems and power cuts become hindrances in their regular work.

The health problems get aggravated when they have to finish the target within a short period for which they sit hours together. The respondents of the present study, who are employed elsewhere, are unable to reach the target hence they do not make any higher targets that is unachievable.

Though the women work day and night and earn money, they have no control over their earnings. The patriarchy works as a draw back in this respect. Economic empowerment of the women workers need to go along with political empowerment, which could improve their bargaining power both in household and at work. Organizing women workers in the informal sector could have beneficial effects only if efforts are taken to empower them politically and economically. Access to resources such as credit and information and power of decision making should be combined for the holistic development. The unorganized women beedi workers contribute largely to the maintenance of informal economy, still they face multiple constraints which otherwise compel them to live a life full of compromises. Since they work from home they don't have control over the working hours. Since the work is a mixed up with household work, it is often difficult to count the hours of work strictly devoted to beedi making. However, the pressure to fulfill targets being high, women often make adjustments with their time for food, sleep, rest, entertainment and social obligations.

Conclusion

The present study is limited to the extent that it considered mostly the home based independent, unregistered workers in one of the districts of Karnataka. The study mostly has thrown light on the impact of the unorganized nature of work. But the study will open up the possibility of extending the exploration to wider areas covering all types of women workers in all fields of economy. There is further scope for studying the overall trend in participation of women in labour force in India. The low rates of female employment and declining trends in women's labour force participation rates in India can be further explored. The employed women have greater bargaining power with positive repercussions on their own well-being and that of their families and when they stay out of work these possibilities will be limited. Thus the study opens up new horizons of studying the working women and the related issues.