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Women and Employment in Textile Industries

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ABSTRACT

Any discussion on working women touches on the fundamental question of the plight of women in employment in which they are working. Women find employment both in public and private sectors due to the growth of industrialisation and urbanisation. However, their employment is characterised by a high incidence of casual labour; intermittent jobs; and are provided extremely low wages. Women employment in spinning mills is in existence for more than two decades now. In other words, textile mills are being an attractive destination for job seeking women. The fact that the employers think that it is not wise to recruit men on permanent basis, as an alternate they seek women so that the employers do not have to take labour welfare responsibilities. Therefore, women working in industries are almost excluded from the umbrella of the social benefits and remain the victims of 'hire and fire' policy.

Keywords : Women and Work; Working Patterns & Conditions; Health

INTRODUCTION

Employment of women in itself is a modern phenomenon in Indian society, and is perceived as a part of modernisation process itself. Any discussion about working women cannot be done in isolation. It touches on the fundamental question of the position of women in society. Due to development and modernisation women's roles have changed. The efficiency of women have increased due to their work in both private and public sectors of spaces. With the growth of industrialisation and urbanisation, landless labourers particularly women due to the absence of assured source of employment migrate to urban areas in search of employment. In urban areas, women are mostly employed in intermittent jobs with extremely low wages in informal sectors and they are almost outside the reach of most laws which seek to protect labourers' security and hence are exposed to various kinds of exploitations and discriminations. About 90 per cent of working women are employed in the unorganised sector, without minimum wages and occupational amenities. It may be noted that about one-thirds of our country's income come from this sector, while two-thirds of its labour force are female workers and among them 46.2 per cent are working as industrial labourers, according to SAARC Guide of Women.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

In Tamil Nadu the concentration of textile industries is found to be more in Coimbatore, Dindigul, and Tirupur. Available literatures have shown that there is a high concentration of women in textile industries, particularly in spinning mills. Nowadays, though the employers have a tendency to recruit 100 percent women workers many of them are not ready to provide in-house accommodation and other facilities for them. The fact that, there are few empirical studies conducted on working women in spinning mills highlighting working conditions, their problems as well their perception on women in employment. In Dindigul, a sizeable population depends on industries, trade and other avocations. This district has thriving handloom industries where art silk sarees and Sungudi sarees are produced which are famous throughout India. Therefore, it is quite natural that most of the spinning mills focused in the study area are in and around of Dindigul where a sizeable women are working in these industries. Hence, it is a felt need to conduct a study on women working in industries

like these to throw more light on their working conditions and employment patterns.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the socio-economic status of the women working in spinning mill;
- To probe the process of women became as labour in the mode of production;
- To understand their working patterns and conditions;
- To bring out the problems they that face in employment;
- To know the labour welfare measures extended to them; and
- To elicit their perception towards employment in industries.

SETTING OF THE STUDY

Of the total of 149 women working in the selected spinning mill half (75) of them were randomly selected as respondents for the present study. The required data were collected from the women-respondents by using a structured interview schedule. Both for convenience and to collect systematic and unambiguous data all the respondents were interviewed outside the work premise. To arrive at general conclusions the collected data were analysed and interpreted by applying descriptive methods such as percentage, proportion, ratio, and mean for some selected variables and summarized.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Who were Working in Textile Industries

The age of women workers, educational level, religion, caste, place of residence, household size, birth order, marital status, family occupation and income were analysed to assess their social status. The study found that they were in their early adulthood and 23.2 was their mean age. Only 41.3% of them had secondary/higher secondary education. A large majority of the women were Hindus (80%) of which 60% were Scheduled Castes followed by Backward (30.7%) and Most Backward (9.3%) Castes.

Among the total sample 68% women were from rural areas. They hailed from the families which had an average of five members and many were third birth ordered in their families. Spinning mills mostly absorb unmarried than married women.

The proportion of unmarried women in the total sample was 52%. A large majority (84%) of them were living in their own house. Agricultural labour (37.3%), farming (22.7%), construction (17.3%), cattle rearing (12%), and sundry works (10.7%) were their family occupations through which their families earn an average of Rs.2,113/- per month.

How Women became as Labour in Industries

While probing the process of women became as labour in industries it is found that 40% of the women are fresher or new entrants to employment while another 24% had earlier work experience in various industries whereas the remaining 36% involved in sundry works previously. Problem in wage, far to reach the destination of the work place, work load, dissatisfaction with working hours, and marriage were various reasons to leave from the previous work. While investigating that who suggested the present work, they stated that their family members, relatives, friends, and acquaintances had played a great role in making them chose the present job and 13.3% had chosen the job on their own.

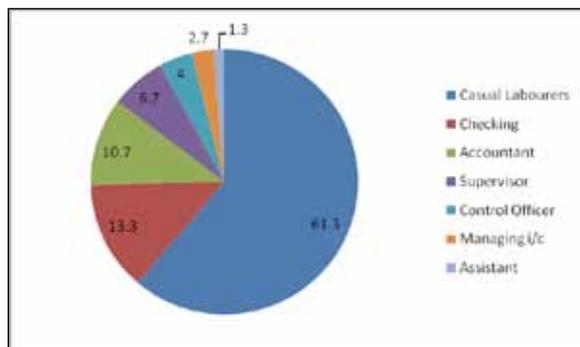
The proximity to work premise from their place of residence is also one amongst the causes for women became labour in industries. A large majority (80%) of them was residing within 10 km radius and the average distance from their place of residence to work place was 5.8km. They reach the work place either by foot or cycle and few of them by bus.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of them were working in industry for about 6-10 years. The mean for their work experience in industries was 9.3 years. About half (45.3%) of their families were in debt and the debt amount ranged from Rs.10, 000-30,000/-. Most of them were in debt to moneylenders. The average debt amount for their family was Rs.17, 059/-. Money for medical expense, marriage, education, and to celebrate the family functions and others were the reasons for their indebtedness.

Work Pattern and Conditions

The analysis of their working pattern shows that they were working in all positions in the industry. They found as casual labourers (61.3%), checking personnel (13.3%), accountant (10.7%), supervisors (6.7%), control officer (4%), managing in-charge (2.7%), and assistant (1.3%). Figure 1 illustrates this.

FIGURE 1
Working Pattern of Women



Nearly three-fourths (73.4%) of the total women were working as temporary and casual labourers. Only 26.6 per cent in the total were permanent employees. The casual women labourers' ratio to permanent workers was 3:1. About 59% of the women's monthly salary ranged from Rs.2000-3000/-, whereas Rs.3000-4000/- was for another 29.3 per cent. Their monthly mean income was Rs.3, 363/-. Nearly two-fifths (37.3%) of them were forced to do overtime work for an average of Rs.1,321/-per month. However, they have been engaged in work for an average of 8 hours, per day.

They were provided proper ventilation, light, and lavatory fa-

cilities. However, retiring room and first-aid facilities were kept away from them. About 40 per cent of them were not provided medical allowance; 60% in the total were not covered under ESI; 67% in the total had not availed Gratuity. However, all had availed provident fund. They received an average of Rs.2, 647/- towards bonus. Table 1 presents the mean value for some selected variables.

TABLE 1
Mean for some selected Variables

Variable	Mean (N=75)
Age	23.2
Birth Order	3
Monthly Income of the Family (in Rs.)	2,113/-
Monthly Salary (in Rs.)	3,368/-
Income through Overtime Work (in Rs.)	1,321/- (N=28)
Family Debt (in Rs.)	17,059/-
Experience in Industrial Work (in Yr.)	9.3
Working Hours	8
Bonus (in Rs.)	2,647/-
Distance to Work Place (in km.)	5.8
Casual-Permanent Employee Ratio	3 : 1

Prevalent Health Problems

While probing the health problems prevalent among the women workers none of them was free from any one kind of occupational ailments. However, most of them were suffering breathing or respiratory problems. When they breathe in the cotton dust, their lungs get irritation and experience the symptoms such of difficulty in breathing (70.7%), chest tightness (6.7%), coughing (20%) and wheezing (16%), according to them. It is to be highlighted through this study that most of the workers who were suffering breathing problems were casual workers whereas others faced problems due to their stay in present employment for many years. The prime reason for their health and respiratory problem was due to denial of masks during work.

Perception of Women Workers

Half (50.7%) of the total women had cordial relationship with fellow women-workers whereas another 20 per cent in the total were not. Three-fifths (58.7%) of them opined that the working environment is 'Good' while another 33.3% felt moderate. Nearly three-fifths (56%) of them expressed their satisfaction towards bonus amount that they received while another 25.3% were dissatisfied. Majority (70.7%) of them were satisfied regarding various leave benefits availed to them. Only 48% of them perceived the present work as 'Good' while another 25.3% in the total had no idea. Almost all (94.7%) were satisfied with lighting arrangements; 73.3% were satisfied with safety amenities; 24% of the total expressed their dissatisfaction regarding ventilation; and almost all wished to have retiring room and first-aid facilities.

CONCLUSION

While concluding the present study it is to be highlighted that women working in industries came from poor socio-economic background. Low educational level, prevailing unemployment in rural areas, family indebtedness, proximity to the urban centre as well industries and the family's compulsion were the main causes for women to become 'labour' in textile industries in their early adulthood. A significant proportion of them were compelled to work overtime for a meager remuneration. Many of them were not covered under various labour welfare provisions. The study brings out the fact that the 'feminisation of labour' is in gradual progress and makes the employers free from having welfare provisions for labourers in industries through hiring more women as casual labourers. To prevent women from such exploitations and to remove their marginality in employment the existing labour laws have to be strictly observed. The managements should look at a system that would ensure safety, health, and skill development. A wide circular has to be sent out to all the textile industries regard-

ing the terms and conditions of women employment. As Southern India Mills' Association (SIMA) and TUV Rheinland had a certification programme for women employment in the mills all textile industries have to come forward to organize such programmes and the Government should recognize the certificate and certification process. Grievances related to issues such as low wages, forced overtime work and restricted

mobility has to be given of immediate attention. It is strongly recommended that all the textile industries workers must undergo periodical or annual medical check-up and these facilities have to be organized by the employers. Above all to prevent workers from occupational diseases safety amenities have to be given to them without fail.

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