



## Socio-Economic Status of the Women Migrant Workers in Tirupur Knitting Industry

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### ABSTRACT

This study deals with socio, economic conditions of the women migrant workers in Tirupur knitting industry. Through the field study, the paper examines if the migration of women labour to an urban space has made any significant change in their living and working conditions, in particular labour market and social security measures. This study reviewed 102 sample women migrant worker from Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Manipur, Karnataka, Kerala etc., and worked in Tirupur Knitting industry. This study has adopted the systematic random sampling technique to select the respondents for collecting the primary data. This study concentrated actual grouped situation, living and working conditions by women migrant laborers. The data was analysed by using average and simple percentage method. This study reveals that around 53 percent of the respondents earned from Rs. 100- Rs.200 per day, 31 percent of the workers earned up to Rs.201- Rs.300 and 14 percent of them earned up to Rs. 301- Rs.400 as a per day wages. Average income of the sample women workers was Rs.6107. Around 29 percent of the workers families' income was up to Rs.5000 and nearly 68 percent of the workers had their family income between Rs.5001-Rs.10000 and only 3 percent of them had family income above Rs.10000. And 39 percent of the workers affected by their work nature and muscular pain were most commonly identified disease among the knitting workers due to long working hours. From the total sample workers (102), no one women worker was getting maternity leave and wage benefits. With the minimal wages received by these workers it becomes difficult for them to procure basic facilities by themselves that are essential to survive in the city. This negatively impacts their socio-economic condition of women migrant workers in the city to an immense extent. Making awareness of rights and policies of women migrant workers will definitely make a change in their lives in the future.

### KEYWORDS

#### Introduction

Migration is not a new phenomenon, but there are several characteristics of contemporary migration that are distinctive. Today it is the changing context of a globalised world and the extent and scale of migration which makes it a key feature of the times. Most significant is the increase in female migration as independent migrants and not merely as associational migrants. According to the World Migration Report 2003, almost half of the estimated 175 million migrants worldwide are women. This phenomenon has been termed "feminisation of migration".

Migrant, refugee, displaced person, illegal migrant, trafficked person – class and location determine how these different categories are viewed. The educated, upper middle class professional woman who migrates for work, the woman who migrates for marriage, the woman migrating as labour into the export processing zone factory, the woman migrating for seasonal agricultural labour, domestic labour, entertainment –the list is vast. The experience of these women is different and is shaped by different circumstances and the position of the woman, her family, community and the nation within a globalised economy and polity. Globalisation and neo-liberal economic policies have precipitated migration due to increased opportunities for finding work in certain areas and impoverishment and disruption of livelihoods in others. The growth of export-oriented industries like garments, electronics and practices such as outsourcing and flexible labour has created a demand for female labour in certain locations. In addition migrant women are in demand in jobs of care, specifically domestic work, child and elder care. Another feature of contemporary migration which has contributed to the demand for female labour has been entertainment and tourism sector. The transnational character of production and services has created a market for migrant female labour which has led to large numbers of women migrating, nationally and internationally.

Tirupur District in Tamil Nadu state has been witnessing an increasing flow of migrant workers during the last decade. A rough estimate shows that the total number of households of workers in this area is about 124,617. The total population in these households would be approximately 444,352. Of this 207,358 are workers engaged in different fields in and around Tirupur,

especially in Knitting industry. The male-female ratio in the families of migrant workers is more or less 75:25. The composition of population in migrant families shows that children, young and adult members below the age of 45 years form 80 per cent and the rest is made up of older people. The broad idea of the paper is to analyze the socio-economic status of the women migrant labour in Tirupur district. Through the field study, the paper examines if the migration of labour to an urban space has made any significant change in their living and working conditions, in particular labour market.

#### Methodology

This study reviewed 102 sample women migrant worker from Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Manipur, Karnataka, Kerala etc., and worked in Tirupur Textile industry. This study has adopted the systematic random sampling technique to select the respondents for collecting the primary data. It has used the structured interview schedule as tool of data collection which was supplemented by observation technique for primary data collection. Researcher had collection primary data by means of interview schedule. This study concentrated actual grouped situation, living and working conditions by migrant women laborers. The data was analysed by using average and simple percentage method.

#### Determinants of Female Migration

Education can also affect women's migration potential, as it does with men. But, unlike men, while their education may impel them to move, foreign companies have frequently preferred to hire them because they are cheap and docile rather than educated.

Health can also be an important determinant of migration by the poor and an adverse effect of migration. In the poorest countries, disease (malaria, TB) is affecting agriculture, changing and reducing crop yields, and directly affecting the work of women. This is causing them to move elsewhere for survival, although we need more information on the scale and implications of this.

As gender attributes are usually assigned by cultures, the migration choices and constraints for females can vary vastly depending on their socio-cultural origins. One could argue that in

the case of the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand, the high emigration of women has been possible inter alia because of the greater flexibility in gender roles in those societies. One survey found that many Philippine and Sri Lankan women tend to take their own decision to migrate – contrary to household strategy theories – because they already enjoyed considerable autonomy and decision-making power within the family, also in regard to household finances (Oishi, 2002).

The more restrictive the role assigned to women in their origin countries, by culture or religion, the less actual female migration, as witnessed in the Indian state of Kerala, where the lowest proportions of migrant women were from the Muslim population (compared with the Syrian and Latin Christians (Zachariah et al, 2001)). But such restrictions can also force women to move, or to use marriage or work offered by recruiters, often clandestine, to escape such situations. In Tanzania, women have found themselves compelled to migrate – either for work or marriage – because they are excluded from land inheritance (Black, 2004a)

Government policy at both the origin and destination ends of the migration spectrum can have a gender-specific influence on migration decisions. Many poor female migrants have been more vulnerable to irregular forms of employment and deportation by having their residency status and entitlements tied to the immigrant status of the male spouse (e.g. Spanish policy before 2003). Even where this kind of status dependency also applies to male spouses, it is likely that the selection criteria for the principal migrant would (inadvertently) exclude women from many developing countries, because of their lack of educational opportunities at home. Most destination countries also still apply strict exclusionary policies to female victims of trafficking without legal migration status (Italy with its temporary residence status options is one of the exceptions).

Developing country policies related to demographic planning, such as the "one child" policy in China, or the cultural bias towards male children in India, have shifted the gender balance sufficiently in those countries to attract both voluntary and involuntary migration of women (mostly internal) to redress these imbalances (IOM, 2005d). Some governments have attempted to control female migration in order to protect their citizens from abuse abroad (e.g. Bangladesh, Pakistan, Philippines, Vietnam), but these have only driven migrants urgently needing an income into more risky, clandestine forms of migration.

Immigration policies can unintentionally reinforce traditional gender roles. For example, if the legal status of a female spouse is dependent on the male partner, then if there is spousal abuse, the female is usually liable to deportation, unless a special visa category is introduced to protect her independently (as e.g. Canada has done). Temporary labour migration programs that do not permit accompanying dependants have also inadvertently caused hardship for female spouses and families back home (e.g. in the case of Mexican and Central American families of the mostly male beneficiaries of the regularization program under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) in the US (Martin, 2004)).

### The analytical Framework

Nearly 28 percent of women migrant workers are married, 67 percent was unmarried, remaining 5 percent of women migrants are coming under separated or divorced category. Of the 102 sample respondents, 83 percent of workers are living under nuclear family system, 14 percent of workers lived as joint family, and remaining 3 percentage workers are living as individual. Of the total 102 respondents, 84 percent of women workers are Hindu, 13 percent of workers are Christians, 3 percent of them are Muslims.

Around 6 percent of women workers are Forward Caste, majority of 63 percent of women workers are Backward Caste, 22 percent of workers are coming under Most Backward Caste, and last 9

percent of women migrant workers are SC/ST. Only 7 percent of women workers are illiterate, 43 percent of workers had Primary education, 38 percent of workers were in secondary grade, 12 percent of workers had higher secondary education. The study found that no single women worker was having diploma or Degree from the sample. Half of the women migrant workers belong to prime age group of between 15 and 30 years and next age group covers 31-45 years with 34.3 percent and 13 percent fall under the category of 46-60years. Around 13 percent of workers are come under two member family groups. Nearly 28 percent of workers families had 3 members and 38 percent of workers had four member families. 14 percent of workers were living with five members in their family and only 4 percent of workers were in six members family.

Around 53 percent of the respondents earned from Rs.100-Rs.200 per day, 31 percent of the workers earned up to Rs.201- Rs.300 and 14 percent of them earned up to Rs. 301- Rs.400 as a per day wages. Average income of the sample women workers was Rs.6107. Around 29 percent of the workers families' income was up to Rs.5000 and nearly 68 percent of the workers had their family income between Rs.5001-Rs.10000 and only 3 percent of them had family income above Rs.10000. Statutory laws in the organized setup expect the workers had to work for eight hours per day, neither less or more. In case they are asked to put in more works than the eight hours, they are eligible for payment of overtime allowance, which normally will be higher than the regular wage rate. Among the total respondents(102), 43 percent of workers were working up to 8 eight hours, around 57 percent of women workers were working up to 12 hours in a day, no one worker from the total sample was ready to work more than 12 hours in a day.

Normally wage is fixed based on the time or piece rate system. The sample workers received their wages on weekly or monthly basis. Of the total respondents (102), 92 percent of workers were receiving their wages on weekly basis. The remaining 8 percent of workers were getting on monthly basis. Around 91 percent of workers were paid within time period, rest of the workers have opined that they were not paid regularly. They have to wait for four to five days or sometimes it take one week for the payment of wages. Due to this reason, to maintain their family expenditure during that time, they have to get the money in the form of loan or advances from known persons.

Among the sample women migrant workers (102), 46 percent of the women's were getting Bonus, 20 percent of them were received overtime wages, remaining 34 percent of the workers were not received any benefit from the employer other than salary. Majority of 87 percent of workers were lived in Tiled houses and 11 percent of them were in Terrace, remaining 2 percent in Thatched houses. For their rented houses, 41 percent were paying rent between Rs.501-Rs.1000, and 39 percent of the workers were paying the range between Rs.1001- Rs.1500 and 18 percent of them were in above Rs. 1500 range.

Of the total sample respondents (102), only 2 percent of workers have opined that their company running crèches for their children. And 39 percent of the workers affected by their work nature and muscular pain were most commonly identified disease among the knitting workers due to long working hours. About 49 percent of the female workers were affected by muscular pain. Asthma was identified from 7 workers due to dust causes breathing problems. Some of them have continuous cold and calf problem in the knitting field. Few women's had explained that long work, no rest, low intake of food creates problem of menstrual disorder.

Around 22 percent of the women workers had discrimination in their company in payment of wages. They felt that they received fewer wage than what the male worker received for the same work. Only 6 percent of the migrant women workers were eligible for getting ESI(State Employment Insurance). Of the total sample workers (102), 4 percent of women workers were getting PF (Provident Fund) and the interesting feature is some of them not

aware of the ESI, PF scheme. One of the company owner said the migrant workers did not submit any proof like voter id, license, Ration card etc., during the joining time, even the company doesn't know their name itself.

Only 3 percent of workers had insurance policy and rest of them had not taken insurance policy. About 2 percent of them were aware of their risk in health and taken mediclaim policy from the government based organizations. Even though they were not known about insurance schemes avail for migrant workers, more than 89 percent of the workers were ready to pay for health insurance. From the total sample workers (102), no one women worker was getting maternity leave and wage benefits.

### Conclusion

Protecting the right of women migrant workers to social security is important not only for securing the equality of treatment in social security for migrant workers, but also for extending social security coverage to currently unprotected populations. The existing labour laws must be save migrant women workers from exploitation and to receive their rightful wages. Making awareness of rights and policies of migrant workers women will definitely make a change in their lives in the future.

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