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SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF WOMEN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS



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Short Profile

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ABSTRACT:

Construction is dynamic industry which is attracted by many unskilled workers including women. In case of construction works, the contractors are exploiting and discriminating women workers. Hence, socio-economic conditions of the women construction workers are analyzed by collecting primary data through interview schedules from total 200 women construction workers in Kalaburagi city. As there is lower income and exploitation of these workers, it is suggested to form Self-Help Groups and generate their own income by starting

income generating activities. Further, it is suggested to NGOs to look into the problems faced by these workers and Government has to initiate self-employment training along with financial assistance to women construction workers so as to improve their socio-economic conditions.

KEYWORDS

Socio-economic Conditions , Women Construction Workers, dynamic industry , Self-Help Groups .

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INTRODUCTION :

The construction industry has several features that distinguish it from most other industries so far as the status and welfare of the workers is concerned. The majority of construction sites are of a temporary nature, since most structures require little attention of construction workers once construction is completed. This factor, making for mobility of labour in the construction industry, raises special problems on sites, where temporary arrangements must suffice for the provision of welfare amenities. The desirable and practicable amenities would be different according to the duration of the individual work sites, which may widely vary from one another. Some works may be completed in a matter of days, some may last for weeks or months and a few large sites may last for several years.

The construction workers fall in the category of unorganized sector. Though this predicament is not exclusive to them, however, highly disorganized and fragmented state hamper their bargaining power and fight against injustice. Neither their job nor their work at a particular site is permanent or of a perennial nature. When construction starts at any place, these workers are hired on daily or monthly or may be on contract basis. The duration and security of their employment depend upon the kind of employment they enter into. It may last for days, for weeks, for months and may be, if they are fortunate, for a year so. After that, they need to look for another site and employment. So, neither the work site is fixed nor the employment is permanent. This predicament creates lot of hassles for them and provides sufficient grounds for their exploitation by the employers.

The living conditions of construction workers are no way better than the working conditions. It will not be entirely wrong to say that, the situation is still worse. They are destined to live in slums where one does not get proper (at all) civic amenities. The surroundings are totally unhygienic. There are no proper facilities for drainage, toilet, water, electricity, recreation etc. There are no local medical facilities, hospital, school and fair price shop. They need to struggle quite a lot to get ration cards, they hardly avail the facility of banking services, for postal services they have to travel to far away localities. For all these reasons, it is very difficult for them to maintain healthy community life. Most of the time construction workers are forced to live nearby or at the work site. At these sites living conditions/lack of civic and other facilities are even more appalling.

Besides the problems discussed above, the construction workers have no social security and benefits in terms of labour welfare measures and provisions. They don't have provisions like pension and insurance schemes, maternity leave, accident and death claims, concession loans and financial aid for children's education and medical needs. The struggle to get these rights compounded also because of the nature of employment in this sector, as no particular builder and contractor provides perennial kind of employment. This is not to undermine the problem if we say; under this situation it is really difficult to implement benefits like maternity leave. However, nowadays the construction workers are rising to the occasion and are organizing themselves and agitating to get all these benefits. They are becoming aware of their overdue rights and benefits. The attention of the government has also been drawn towards their plights and it is doing its own bit, albeit at a very slow pace. Recently, in 1996, the central government has enacted a few laws for construction workers in order to ameliorate their situation. However, this is just an initial and small step. Notable one of the important statutory schemes that construction workers are covered under is the Workman's Compensation Act, which entitles them to a monetary compensation in the event of an accident/injury at the work-site.

WOMEN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS:

It has been estimated that, out of total women workers, 96% are engaged in informal sectors. The women being less qualified and with abject poverty had to starve for days together to find out job of their expectation for their own survival and their dependents. They could not enter into formal sector as it was regulated and denies entry at random. It is the informal sector which is unorganized, unregulated though unprotective but is easy for one's access. The major chunk of migrated population once utilized as builders and sustainers of the city and has contributed their hard toil, have been under-estimated and thrown to informal sectors for earning their livelihood (OSCARD, 2007).

Actually, the division of work among men and women is deep rooted in our societies with patriarchal outlook. It is centuries old tradition that, women everywhere have primary responsibilities for non-market (unpaid) house work and caring jobs, which leads to family constraints on their choice in terms of labour force participation and their access to paid employment, both formal and informal (Beneria, 2003). So, when non market work becomes more important, women frequently have less paid work experience often leading to lower earnings, low paid, unstable and poor quality employment. Sometimes, it is argued that, the 'care time' is a temporary phase in the life of a woman worker and its impact can be mitigated in the long period. But equal strong is the view that, even short period gender inequalities can have long term consequences on economic growth and human development (Ranis, et al, 2000), so it would be crucial to give gender dimension to the employment analysis.

Women are also playing an important role in construction work. In case of women construction workers, the problems at work site the problems are more, as they have to look after husband, elders and children. Further, there are temporary in which they are living, which shows the lack of social security and privacy. Majority of the women construction workers are illiterates and they have no know about the work and workplace. It is the primary reason, due to which they are being exploited by the male construction workers. The sexual harassment and gender discrimination cases are more in construction work. It is also emphasized that, the wages paid to women construction labourers is also lower and discriminatory, based on the relation of the employers and employees. The problems of women construction workers are extreme, if they are pregnant or having small children. There is no system at all to take care of these children at work site. These women labourers have no leave and if absent to work due to ill health and other reasons, they have to face cut in their wages and lose their work. They just cannot take leave out of work during this period lest they would face extreme financial problems. They have no awareness about their socio-economic, political, religious and educational aspects. Hence, their status is lower and their life is neglected by the society. Women are also playing an important role in construction work. In case of women construction workers, the problems at work site the problems are more, as they have to look after husband, elders and children. Further, there are temporary in which they are living, which shows the lack of social security and privacy. Majority of the women construction workers are illiterates and they have no know about the work and workplace. It is the primary reason, due to which they are being exploited by the male construction workers. The sexual harassment and gender discrimination cases are more in construction work. It is also emphasized that, the wages paid to women construction labourers is also lower and discriminatory, based on the relation of the employers and employees. The problems of women construction workers are extreme, if they are pregnant or having small children. There is no system at all to take care of these children at work site. These women labourers have no leave and if absent to work due to ill health and other reasons, they have to face cut in their wages and lose their work. They just cannot take

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leave out of work during this period lest they would face extreme financial problems. They have no awareness about their socio-economic, political, religious and educational aspects. The status of women construction workers is lower and their life is neglected by the society. Hence, the present study is made to assess the socio-economic conditions of the women construction workers in Kalaburagi city.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The present study is made:

- ▲ To know about the social life of women construction workers;
- ▲ To look into economic status in terms of family income; and
- ▲ To know about the attitudes of women construction workers on their social status.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS:

The present study is made in Kalaburagi city. Kalaburagi city is located in Hyderabad-Karnataka backward region. The authors observed the working and living conditions of women construction workers and based on their observation, totally 200 women construction workers were interviewed to collect the primary data. The collected primary data is analyzed and discussed as under.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

1. Age-wise distribution of Respondents:

Age is an important factor to know about the level of knowledge of the respondents on different aspects. For this purpose, the information on age of the respondents is collected and represented as under:

Table No. 1. Age-wise distribution of Respondents

Age (Years)	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Below 18 years	23	11.5
19 to 25 years	61	30.5
26 to 40 years	52	26.0
41 to 55 years	57	28.5
Above 55 years	07	3.5
Total	200	100

It is observed from the above table that, of the total 200 respondents covered under the present study, 61 (30.5%) are between the age group of 19 to 25 years, followed by 57 (28.5%) are between the age group of 41 to 55 years, about 52 (26.0%) of the respondents are between the age group of 26 to 40 years, about 23 (11.5%) of the respondents are of below 18 years and the remaining only 07 (3.5%) are of above

55 years of age. It is worth to emphasize that, even though the Government is passing laws and policies to curb child labour, the present study revealed that, about 11.5% of the women construction workers are minors.

2. Caste-wise distribution of the Respondents:

Caste plays an important role in determining the status in the society. Caste also indicates the occupation of the people. The caste of the respondents is shown as under:

Table No. 2. Caste-wise distribution of the Respondents:

Caste/Class	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Scheduled Caste	60	30.0
Scheduled Tribe	22	11.0
Other Backward Class	71	35.5
Others	47	23.5
Total	200	100

Of the total respondents, 71 (35.5%) are from Other Backward Classes (OBCs), followed by 60 (30.0%) are from Scheduled Caste, about 47 (23.5%) are from other caste such as forward classes and the remaining only 22 (11.0%) are from Scheduled Tribe. Other back ward classes forms considerably major portion of the female construction workers.

3. MARITAL STATUS OF THE RESPONDENTS:

Knowing the marital status of the respondents helps to know about the social and family issues of the women construction workers. The following table shows the marital status of the respondents covered under the present study.

Table No. 3. Marital Status of the Respondents

Marital Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Unmarried	32	16.0
Married	122	61.0
Widow	28	14.0
Divorcee	07	3.5
Separated	11	5.5
Total	200	100

It was revealed from the above table that, 122 (61.0%) of the respondents are married and living with their husbands, followed by 32 (16.0%) are unmarried, 28 (14.0%) are widows, about 11 (5.5%) are separated and the remaining 07 (3.5%) are divorcees. Nearly half of the women construction workers are

single, unmarried, widows, separated and divorcees. It is also worth to emphasize that, even though married and living with their husbands, more than half of the respondents are working as construction labourers. This may be because their family income may be low.

4. Experience in Construction Work:

It was asked to the respondents that, since how many years they are doing construction work. The collected information is presented in the following table:

Table No. 4. Experience in Construction Work

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Below 5 years	48	24.0
6 to 10 years	93	46.5
11 to 20 years	34	17.0
Above 20 years	25	12.5
Total	200	100

It is noted from the above table that, among the total respondents, 93 (46.5%) of the respondents have construction work experience between 6 to 10 years followed by, 48 (24.0%) of the respondents have work experience below 5 years, about 34 (17.0%) of the respondents have work experience between 11 to 20 years and the remaining 25 (12.5%) have above 20 years of work experience.

5. Relationship with Husband:

Good marital relations are essential for happy family and healthy society. For this purpose, it was asked to the respondents, about the relationship with husband. The information collected is shown in the following table:

Table No. 5. Relationship with Husband

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Best	33	16.5
Cordial	32	16.0
Satisfactory	21	10.5
Not Satisfactory	36	18.0
Not Applicable	78	39.0
Total	150	100

The collected data revealed that of the married respondents, 36 (18.0%) are responded that their marital life is not satisfactory, followed by 32 (16.0%) are stated that their marital relations are cordial, 33 (16.5%) are stated that their marital relations are best, 21 (10.5%) of the respondents are expressed that their marital life is satisfactory and for the remaining 78 (39.0%) of the respondents this is not applicable as they are widows and unmarried women. It is surprising to note that, even though living with their husbands, about 18.0% of the respondents are expressed that their marital life is not satisfactory.

6. SATISFACTION IN SOCIAL LIFE:

Satisfaction in social life is essential while studying socio-economic aspects of the female construction workers. Hence, the satisfaction of the respondents is assessed as under:

Table No. 6. Satisfaction in Social Life

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Fully Satisfied	55	27.5
Satisfied to a Greater extent	78	39.0
Not Satisfied	67	33.5
Total	200	100

It is noted from the above table that majority that is 78 (39.0%) of the respondents are satisfied in their social life to a greater extent, followed by 55 (27.5%) are fully satisfied and remaining 67 (33.5%) of the respondents are not at all satisfied in their social life. A considerable number of respondents are expressed that they are not satisfied with their social life.

7. Reasons for Choosing Construction work:

It is known that ,the work of the women construction workers have lower status and lower income. There are inevitable reasons to choose this occupation by these workers. Hence, it was asked to the respondents to furnish the reasons for choosing construction work and the collected information is presented in the following table.

Table No. 7. Reasons for Choosing Construction Work

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Family Income is lower	79	39.5
Unemployment/ Seasonal Employment of Husband	67	33.5
Family Occupation	33	16.5
Any Other reason	21	10.5
Total	200	100

It is observed from the above table that ,among the total respondents, 79 (39.5%) are stated that their family income is lower, followed by 67 (33.5%) are stated that due to the unemployment or seasonal employment of their husbands, they have chosen this occupation, about 33 (16.5%) are stated that, it is their family occupation and the remaining 21 (10.5%) are furnished other reasons to take up this occupation. Lower family income and unemployment are major factors, due to which the respondents are working as women construction workers.

8. AVERAGE MONTHLY INCOME OF FAMILY:

Income of the family determines the economic power of the family. The following table presented the average monthly income of the respondents and their family members:

Table No. 8. Average Monthly Income of Family

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Less than Rs. 3000	48	24.0
Rs. 3001 to Rs. 4000	63	31.5
Rs. 4001 to Rs. 5000	71	35.5
More than Rs. 5000	18	9.0
Total	200	100

Average family monthly incomes of all the respondents revealed that, 48 (24.0%) have less than Rs. 3000, 63 (31.5%) have family income between Rs. 3001 to Rs. 4000, 71 (35.5%) have family income between Rs. 4001 to Rs. 5000 and only 18 (9.0%) have monthly family income of more than Rs. 5000. It shows that almost all the respondents are living below poverty line.

9. Status as Construction Worker in the Society:

The status got by the women construction workers in the society is presented in the following table:

Table No. 9. Status as Construction Worker in the Society

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Higher	14	7.0
Lower	135	67.5
No Change	24	12.0
Satisfactory	27	13.5
Total	200	100

As depicted from the above table that, among the total 200 respondents, it is surprising to note that 135 (67.5%) are stated that ,their status is lower in the society, followed by 27 (13.5%) are expressed that their status is satisfactory, about 24 (12.0%) are stated that, there is no change in their status and the remaining only 14 (7.0%) are expressed that they have higher status. Like the family, in the society, majority of the women construction workers are not getting status and respect, this may be because of the unskilled work, illiteracy and lower wages paid in their work.

10. EXPLOITATION OR HARASSMENT IN THE WORK:

Many of the women working as construction workers are exploited or harassed by their employers or co-workers. It was asked to the respondents whether they are being exploited or harassed in their work and the collected responses are presented in the following table.

Table No. 10. Exploitation or Harassment in the Work

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	84	42.0
No	116	58.0
Total	150	100

The table made it clear that,84 (42.0%) of the respondents are not harassed or exploited by their employers and co-workers, whereas remaining 116 (58.0%) are exploited and harassed by employers and co-workers. Even though the Governments passed strict laws and rules, still there is exploitation to a greater extent in construction industry as stated by more than one-third of the respondents.

11. WAGE DISCRIMINATION:

Wage discrimination is more common in informal sector. That is,wages are based on gender, caste, religion, etc rather than skills. Hence, it was asked to the respondents whether they are discriminated in payment of wages. The collected responses are shown in the following table.

Table No. 11. Wage Discrimination

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	152	76.0
No	48	24.0
Total	150	100

The above table made it clear that, there is wage discrimination as responded by 152 (76.0%) of the respondents, whereas about 48 (24.0%) of the respondents are stated that, there is no wage discrimination. Wage discrimination is there to a greater extent in construction industry as responded by majority of the respondents.

SUGGESTIONS:

Following suggestions may be made from the present study.

- ▲ The women construction workers should form Self-Help Groups and engage in self-employment, so that they can earn their income independently.
- ▲ The NGOs should address to the problems of women construction workers by counseling, guidance and legal advice, so that they are not harassed, exploited and protected legally.
- ▲ It is suggested to the Government to initiate self-employment training programmes along with financial assistance to start self-employment for women construction workers in particular and women working in unorganized sector in general.

CONCLUSION:

Normally construction workers are employed through contractors, who exploit them for their benefits. Though there are various protective enactments for these workers, but ground realities are totally opposite from legal provisions on the subject. Contractors employ these workers till they remain capable of performing the assign tasks. Whenever they fall sick or become disabled. They are thrown out of the employment without any social security benefits as specified under the Building and other Construction Workers (Regulations of Employment and Conduct of Service) Act, 1996 or Contract Labour Act, 1970. Workers are unorganized and incapable to bargain on the issue of welfare and social protection. Subsequently the enforcement mechanism provided the relevant enactments are inadequate and ineffective in enforcing the provisions in practical life. Moreover, there is no single agency which ensures the effective and efficient implementations of relevant schemes. It is the need of hour to formulate a Comprehensive protection law covering all construction workers for all adversities, not only at work place but also afterward. The proposed scheme should be equipped with single enforcement mechanism. Because the success of any scheme depends upon its implementation, otherwise the legislation remains a piece of paper for workers.

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