



Working Conditions and Exploitation of Women in the Unorganised Sector

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ABSTRACT

The unorganised sector plays a significant role in the Indian economy, employing a large proportion of women workers. However, the conditions under which these women work remain largely unregulated and vulnerable. The present study aims to examine the working hours of women workers in the unorganised sector and to analyse the level of exploitation they face in their workplaces. The research focuses on identifying issues such as extended and irregular working hours, low and unequal wages, lack of job security, absence of formal contracts, and limited access to social security benefits.

The study also explores the socio-economic factors that contribute to their vulnerability, including gender discrimination, lack of awareness of labour rights, and the invisibility of domestic and informal labour. Data collected through primary and secondary sources highlight that women workers often experience unsafe working conditions, wage discrimination, and minimal legal protection. The findings reveal that informality and weak policy implementation further intensify exploitation and economic insecurity.

KEYWORDS *Unorganised sector, informal sector, women.*

Introduction

Associated with these trends, informal work overwhelmingly continues to dominate total employment in India. In 2004–05, informal workers were estimated to account for 96 per cent of all workers, and there is little evidence to suggest that the share of formal work would have increased greatly since then. The incidence of self-employment (most of it highly fragile and vulnerable) has actually increased as a proportion of non-agricultural work, and the only reason for its overall stagnation is the decline in agricultural employment, particularly in the number of self-employed women workers.

Meanwhile, as noted, the share of the informal sector in GDP fell quite sharply during this period of high growth. The recent period of most rapid acceleration of national income (NNP) was also the period of the sharpest fall in the share of unorganized incomes. Thus, while the formal organized sector has substantially increased its share of national income, it has done so without drawing in more workers in the standard Lewisian trajectory.



Over the years since independence, different arms of the Government's statistical apparatus have examined features of the unorganized, or informal, sector. However, the scope, volume and periodicity of such evidence have lagged when compared with data collection relating to the organized sector. In particular, as the National Statistical Commission (2012) notes, comparable and complementary evidence on different segments of the unorganized and organized sectors is still scarce or even absent.

Part of the problem is the variation in definitions of the unorganized or informal sector, which attempt to draw boundaries between organized and unorganized and formal and informal by focusing on differences in features, such as technology, employment size, legal status and organizational form. In addition to the definitional variation, most surveys have limited themselves to parts of the organized sector, such as manufacturing, trade or other services, but leave out construction – an area that accounts for a significant share of income and employment in the economy.

The result is that the statistical basis for fully understanding the factors that underlie the persistence and reproduction of informality remains limited. However, there has been progress over time; in addition to the censuses (both decennial censuses and the few economic censuses conducted since the 1970s), the NSSO conducts periodic surveys that cover the unorganized sector: in the employment Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and unemployment surveys and the enterprise surveys as well as a special survey of the informal sector.

These surveys capture the non-organized sector under such labels as the “unorganized sector”, the “informal sector” or “unincorporated enterprises”. But definitions even of the unorganized sector vary.

Review of Literature

The current number of domestic workers in India range from official estimates of 4.2 million to unofficial estimates of more than 50 million. Two-thirds of the total domestic workers in India live in urban areas and about 75% of them are women ([Ghosh, 2013](#)). The women work as part-time or stay-at-home domestic workers, and their household expenses are predominantly met through the income they earn. In spite of the large worker population, domestic work is not recognised as ‘work’ and is always treated as the lowest in the occupation hierarchy. This structural issue of injustice where the society deny recognition of the domestic workers as ‘workers’ have left them at the mercy of their employers ([Chandramouli, 2018](#)). Domestic workers face tough working conditions and are left without any social security protection. They are unprotected by labour legislations except for the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008 ([Ghosh, 2013](#)), the benefits of which mostly do not reach the workers due to the informality of the contracts and ignorance about the social security provisions. National Policy for Domestic Workers has been drafted by Government of India to ensure the rights and social protection of the workers formally through legislative measures but has yet not been materialised.

In India, women participation in domestic work sector is a common feature which indicates

feminisation of domestic work ([Augustine & Singh, 2016](#)). Low wages and lack of legal protection ([Neetha & Palriwala, 2011](#)), unpaid overtime and occupational health problems ([Paul et al., 2018](#)), absence of a formal organisational framework for domestic workers, lack of representation of domestic workers in associations, exclusion of domestic workers from legal rights for minimum wages (Bhattacharya et al., 2010; [Chandramouli, 2018](#)) were found to be issues affecting social justice of women domestic workers in various studies.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted in the Pollachi Taluk considering the following attributes. **Pollachi** is a town and a [taluk headquarters](#) in [Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu state](#), India. Located about 40 km (25 mi) to the south of [Coimbatore](#), it is the second largest town in the district after Coimbatore. Pollachi is a popular [Marketplace](#) for [jaggery](#), vegetables and [cattle](#). **Pollachi** is a town and a [taluk headquarters](#) in [Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu state](#), India. In this study, the snowball sampling method was adopted. 200 women informal workers were chosen from the fourteen Town Panchayat of Pollachi taluk. In total, 200 females samples were collected from the one hundred and fourteen villages of Pollachi taluk. The primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire, comprising optional type and Likert’s five-point scale type questions. The questionnaire covers the socio economic condition of informal women workers

Objective

1. To know the working hours of the women worker in the Unorganised sector
2. To study the level of exploitation faced by the women in Unorganised sector

Table No. 1 Chi-Square Tests Type of worker with the Days of work in a month

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	40.891 ^a	10	.000
Likelihood Ratio	33.850	10	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	22.348	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	200		

The above table analyses the relationship between Days of work in month and Type of worker in unorganized sector during the normal days. Since the P value is less than the chosen significance level ($p= 0.05$) null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted. Thus the number of days work in a month depends upon the type of worker such as regular worker, contractual worker and casual worker.

Hence there is significant relationship between Type of worker and Days of work in month in unorganized sector.

Table No.2 Cross tabulation of Marital status * Days of work in a week

		Days of work in a week					Total
		1-2 days	2-3 days	3-4 days	4-5 days	5-7 days	
Marital status	Married	10	11	28	78	39	166
		6%	7%	17%	47%	23%	100%
	Single	1	2	2	6	2	13
		8%	15%	15%	47%	15%	100%
	Widow	3	2	5	7	4	21
		14%	9.5%	24%	33%	19.5%	100%
Total		14	15	35	91	45	200
		7%	7.5%	17.5%	45.5%	22.5%	

Table 4.18 shows the crosstab results of Marital status and Days of work. It is interpreted that 6% to 7 % of Married women work for 1- 3 days in a week, 17% of Married women work for 3-4 days in a week, 47% of women work for 4-5 days in week, 23% of women work for 5-7 days in a week. There are 13 single women respondents out of total respondents. Only one respondent work for 1-2 days, 2 respondents work for 1-2 days, 2-3 days, 5-7 days in a week each remaining 6 respondents work for 4-5 days in a week. In case of widow, out of 21 respondents, 3 widows work for 1-2 days 2 widow work for 2-3 days, 5 widow work for 3-4 days, 7 widow work for 4-5 days,4 widow work for 5-7days.

Majority of the women respondents are married and they work for 4 -7 days in a week. Majority of the widow and single women respondents work for 4 -5 days in a week. The above table throw light on the fact that women has to work for 4-5 days in a week with average earning of Rs.500-600 earning per day to support the family.

Table No. 3 Level of Exploitation faced by Unorganised women workers

S.No	Type of Exploitations	SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Weighted Avg Score	Weighted Avg Rank
1	Heavy work than capacity	295	164	114	82	21	3.38	1
		29.50%	20.50%	19.00%	20.50%	10.50%		
2	No Facilities provided	230	172	120	68	37	3.14	2
		23%	21.50%	20%	17%	18.50%		
3	Less Wages	110	204	159	96	26	2.98	5
		11%	25.5%	26.5%	24%	13%		
4	More than 8 hours of work	150	204	144	82	30	3.05	4
		15%	25.5%	24%	20.5%	15%		
5	Sexual harassment from male counterpart	180	200	138	76	30	3.12	3
		18%	25%	23%	19%	15%		
6	Ill-treated by Male Coworkers	185	96	111	56	74	2.16	7
		18.5%	12%	18.5%	14%	37%		
7	No proper Sanitation facilities	165	156	93	66	64	2.72	6
		16.5%	19.5%	15.5%	16.5%	32%		

Table No.3 shows the response by the Unorganised women labourer on the level of exploitation faced by them. Heavy work than capacity is type of exploitation faced by unorganized women worker with the highest mean score of 3.38. No facilities provided is the second highest mean score of 3.14 followed by sexual harassment from male counterpart with the mean score of 3.12. Fourth level of exploitation is working for more than 8 hours of work with the mean score of 3.05 followed by less wages, No proper sanitation facilities, with the mean score of 2.98 and 2.72. Least

importance is given for Ill-treated by male co-worker with the mean score of 2.16.

It is obtained from the above table that Unorganised women labourer strongly agree on the type of exploitation such as heavy work than capacity and No facilities provided with 29.5% and 23%. On the other hand they agree with More than 8 hours of work and Sexual harassment from male counterpart with 25.5% and 25%. They strongly disagree with Ill-treated by male worker and No Proper Sanitation facilities.

It is concluded from the above table that Heavy work than capacity, no facilities provided, sexual harassment from male counterpart is three major level of exploitation faced by unorganized women workers

Conclusion

Women workers in the unorganised sector continue to occupy a marginalised and vulnerable position in the labour market. Despite their significant contribution to household survival and the broader economy, their work remains undervalued and largely unprotected. The absence of formal employment structures, social security measures, and effective grievance redressal mechanisms further deepens their insecurity. Long working hours, low wages, lack of job stability, and unsafe working environments collectively weaken their socio-economic status.

The prevailing vulnerability of women workers emanating from the informality, invisibility and non-recognition of domestic labour is largely obvious. Informal contracts, irregular labour, exploitative and undefined wage and working conditions as well as policy and legal loopholes aggravate the social and economic insecurity of the women workers.

In addition to these challenges, gender discrimination, limited bargaining power, lack of awareness about legal rights, and restricted access to education and skill development opportunities further intensify their exploitation. Social norms and patriarchal attitudes also confine women to low-paid and insecure forms of employment. Therefore, there is an urgent need for comprehensive labour reforms, effective implementation of existing laws, social security coverage, and empowerment initiatives to safeguard the rights and dignity of women workers in the unorganised sector. Ensuring recognition, fair wages, regulated working hours, and social protection will contribute significantly towards improving their quality of life and promoting inclusive economic development.

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