

Socio-Economic profile of women working in textile units of Tiruppur district in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

In Tamilnadu, the textile industry is female dominated. There are certain unskilled and semi-skilled job categories which are specifically earmarked for women. It was found that if there is a temporary shortage of women workers, available male workers with similar background demand a higher wage. The predominance of small firms, low qualification of the workforce and limited trade union presence, contribute to the fact that exploitation and discrimination particularly in terms of women, continues to exist in the textile and garment industry. In Tamil Nadu majority of the textile and garment workforce is women and children. Among them women workers in Textile mills are about 65% mostly unskilled workers. The age group of the workers is predominantly in the range of 14 to 21 years. There are child labourers both girls and boys in the age group of 11 to 14 years and workers in the age group of 21 to 30 years are in fact a minority segment among the total workforce. The present study aims at — identifying the major issues related to socio economic profile of women construction labourers, by analyzing the job satisfaction levels, wages, their economic status by finding out their savings, loans and also examining the status of these women in social ladder and recommending measures for mitigation of the problems.

Keywords: Rural, Basic Amenities, alienation, Quality of Life.

Introduction

“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women” Jawaharlal Nehru

India is the world's second largest producer of textiles and garments after China. It is the world's third largest producer of cotton—after China and the USA—and the second largest cotton consumer after China. The textile and garment industry in India is one of the oldest manufacturing sectors in the country and is currently its largest. The textile and garment industry fulfills a pivotal role in the Indian economy. It is a major foreign exchange earner and, after agriculture, it is the largest employer with a total workforce of 35 mn. In 2009 textiles and garments accounted for about 16per cent of industrial production and 18 per cent of export earnings. The industry covers a wide range of activities. These include the production of natural raw materials such as cotton, jute, silk and wool, as well as synthetic filament and spun yarn. In addition an extensive range of finished products are made. The Indian textile industry accounts for about 24percent of the world's spindle capacity, making it the second highest after China, and around eight per cent of global rotor capacity. Also, it has the highest loom capacity including hand looms—with a 63per cent share. India accounts for about 14per cent of the world's production of textile fibres and yarns. This includes jute, of which it is the largest producer. The country is the second largest producer of silk and cellulose fibre and yarn, and the fifth largest producer of synthetic fibre and yarn.

The textile industry in India is vital to the economy of the country. It contributes to over 6 per cent of the gross domestic product of India and earns 18 per cent of the Total foreign exchange earnings of the country. The textile industry consists of three distinct sectors, viz., ginning, spinning and weaving. The industry is the largest employer next only to agriculture which is the mainstay of the economy. Over 50 percent of the

employees are women who help to sustain the family income. The garment industry alone employs four million workers and helps to support labour working in ancillary manufacturing buttons, zippers, sewing thread, embroidery thread, metal studs, poly bags, cartons, cardboard sheets, etc.

Women throughout the world play critical role in economic growth and development and their contribution have an impact on households, communities and national economies. Women contribute to the family economy, by participating in the labour force, thereby earning an income and contributing to the family and also by undertaking the primary responsibility for household maintenance, childcare and there by sustain the family.

The status of women is directly connected with their economic position, which in turn depends on opportunities for participation in economic activities. The economic status of women is now accepted as an indicator of a society's stage of development. Participation of women in the work force has also been found to be an important element in the adoption of the small family norm, essential for the achievement of the twin goals of economic development and population planning. It is of utmost importance therefore that the country makes full and effective use of its human resources by providing economic empowerment to women who constitute 50 percent of it. The long term objectives of the developmental programmes for women would be to raise their economic and social status in order to bring them into the mainstream of national development. Women were needed in the mills to run the machines and would be paid for their work. The mills opened up an opportunity for unattached women dependent on relatives to feel useful and independent by earning their own living. Textile mills employed mostly young women because they were docile and could be paid lower wages than male. In India too there are many textile mills which are employing women in an extensive manner.

Textile industry is the only industry to have employed women workers since long time. Women workers unlike the majority in the informal sector have been exposed to rigorous work, discipline, fixed working hours, specific production norms etc. They have also enjoyed the benefits of being part of an organized workforce in receiving security of employment, bonus, sickness benefits etc.

The women are ready to work for very low wages and for longer hours under exceedingly inhospitable conditions of work. Their "oriental docility" normally does not let them join unions and agitate against the management. The sole reason behind the differential distribution of male and female workers of different branches of industry is the gender gap in wages in manufacturing. Moreover, garment manufacturing has been one of the most women intensive sectors in India from the beginning.

In Tamilnadu, the textile industry is female dominated. There are certain unskilled and semi-skilled job categories which are specifically earmarked for women. It was found that if there is a temporary shortage of women workers, available male workers with similar background demand a higher wage. The predominance of small firms, low qualification of the workforce and limited trade union presence, contribute to the fact that exploitation and discrimination particularly in terms of women, continues to exist in the textile and garment industry.

In Tamil nadu majority of the textile and garment workforce is women and children. Among them women workers in Textile mills are about 65% mostly unskilled workers. The age group of the workers is predominantly in the range of 14 to 21 years. There are child labourers both girls and boys in the age group of 11 to 14 years and workers in the age group of 21 to 30 years are in fact a minority segment among the total workforce.

Over the decades, women have been gradually replaced by men in most of the mills. The decline of women's employment has been gradual but quite steep in the textile sector. There are, however, regional variations. The economic conditions of women have profound effect not only on women's own but also on that of their children and families and on subsequent generations.

Textile Industry of Tamil Nadu is the forerunner in Industrial Development and in providing massive employment in the State. It is predominantly Spinning-oriented. The State Textile Industry has a significant presence in the National economy also. Out of 2049 large and medium textile mills in India, 893 mills are located in Tamil Nadu. Similarly, out of 996 small units in India, 792 are located in Tamil Nadu. The 893 large and medium textile mills include 18 Cooperative Spinning Mills, 17 National Textile Corporation Mills and 23 Composite Mills.

The society and the family are two crucial influences that can raise the status of the Working Women in India. The husband and other family members need to be supportive of the woman's work outside the home. They need to share the household responsibilities in order for woman to be able to utilize her skills outside the home. India is a traditionally patriarchal and male-dominated society. Therefore, without the positive and liberal mindset of the average Indian male to encourage the working women, a real elevation of the working women's status in the society is going to remain a distant dream. Overall, a conducive and safe social environment and a proactive support from the family, corporate, government and other social networks can help to transform the Indian Working Women's status for the better. But above all, the assertiveness

and initiative of the working women themselves for their own rights can do more for their empowerment than all other forces combined.

The present study aims at — identifying the major issues related to socio economic profile of women construction labourers, by analyzing the job satisfaction levels, wages, their economic status by finding out their savings, loans and also examining the status of these women in social ladder and recommending measures for mitigation of the problems. The following are the objectives of the study:

1. To understand the personal background of women construction workers in the study area.
2. To estimate the job profile of women construction workers in the study area.
3. To study the economic status of women construction workers in the study area.
4. To assess the support given by family members in household works
5. To give suggestions for improving the conditions of women construction workers.

Methodology of the Study

The present study was undertaken to conduct a micro level study on the occupational empowerment status of women construction workers. This chapter explains the purpose, design of the study, objectives, hypotheses, participants, instruments, procedure and statistical techniques used.

Women have been identified as key agents of sustainable development and women's equality and empowerment are seen as central to a more holistic approach towards establishing new patterns and processes of development that are sustainable. The World Bank has suggested that empowerment of women should be a key aspect of all social development programs (World Bank, 2001). According to Kabeer's (2001) definition, "The expansion in women's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them." We have to examine the different facets of empowerment such as personal, familial, economic, political and entrepreneurial.

Government of India has shown increasing concern for women's issues through a variety of legislation promoting the education and political participation of women (Collier, 1998). International organizations like the World Bank and United Nations have focused on women's issues especially the empowerment of poor women in rural and urban areas. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also taken on an increased role in the area of women's empowerment (Sadik, 1988). NGO's, previously catering to women's health, entrepreneurial and educational needs have moved beyond this traditional focus to addressing the underlying causes of deprivations through promoting the economic and social empowerment of women. (McNamara: 2003).

Economic participation and participation in decision-making progress are the two important results expected out of empowerment process. This study aims at exploring the economic activities of SC community women for their individual as well as family growth.'

Formulation of the Problem

The issue of empowerment of Indian women is one of the neglected areas of development. The concept of women empowerment is the major concern among the developing countries because of her responsive and forfeiting role in the

families. Most of the evidences in India point out that the empowerment of women is still in the budding stage and needs more and more motivation for a woman to participate in the developmental activities of families.

The researcher keeping all these in his mind and also to gain more knowledge on the occupational empowerment of SC women living in Kinathukkadavu taluk, of Coimbatore dist. of Tamilnadu and the factors influencing the concept of empowerment of women, the present topic — Socio-Economic Profile Of Women Working In Textile Units of Karathozuvu In Tiruppur District in Tamil Nadu has been formulated.

Research Design

A research design is the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure. The research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data.

The research design adapted in the present study is a Descriptive Research Design. This design is found suitable because the study deals with an area, in which only a small number of researches have been conducted. Yet there is a vast scope for further research. The proposed research is descriptive in nature rather than experimental

Universe

The study is planned to be conducted in Karathozuvu Taluk of Tiruppur district in Tamil Nadu. Women working in textile mills residing in Karathozuvu Taluk of Tiruppur district in Tamil Nadu constitute the universe for the study.

Sample

The researcher selected 50 respondents on the basis of simple random sampling from the universe.

Tools of the study

The study involves primary data collection. A pre-designed questionnaire is employed to gather the data required for the study.

Analysis of data

Collected data is to be analyzed using the SPSS package. The relevant frequencies and tables for the major variables will be studied and interpreted in terms of the objectives of the study. Descriptive statistics and other suitable techniques of statistics will be used to interpret the data gathered by the researcher.

Limitations of the study

1. The present study is limited / restricted only to Karatholuvu taluk of Tiruppur District in Tamil Nadu. Hence there is a less scope to generalize the data to other Community Women.
2. This study is concentrated only on Women.
3. All respondents have been measured through questionnaire and no attempt has been made to cross validate the result.

Results and Discussion

The garment sector is of major importance to the Indian economy. Not only contributes the industry substantially to India's export earning, it is estimated that one out of every six households in the country depends on this sector, either directly or indirectly, for its livelihood, the present study is a fact-

findings exercise to know the socio-economic status of the workers in textile mills, the various problems faced by the workers and the extent of satisfaction derived and the factors influencing the satisfaction of the workers on working conditions in the textile mills. The competition in global market led to flexibility and feminization of labor in textile industry of Tamil Nadu. The massive growth in garment exports has coincided with absorption of female labor in the industry in large numbers since 1985. This labor force however, faces number of problems during or after the course of their employment.

Findings and Suggestions

The study on, Socio-Economic Profile of Women Working In Textile Units of Karathozuvu in Tiruppur District in Tamil Nadu has revealed the following findings.

Findings

- 10% of the respondents were in the age group of less than 20 years. 38% of them were in the age group between 20 – 30 years. 30% of them ranged between 31 – 40 years of age. 22% of them ranged between 41 – 50 years of age.
- 44% of the respondents were found to be married. 20% of the women were found to be unmarried and 16% of them were single. 16% of the respondents were widows.
- 40% of the respondents in the study were found to belong to BC. 20% of them belonged to SC community. 30% of them belonged to MBC. All of them were Hindus.
- 64% of the respondents were literates and 36% of them were illiterates.
- 56% of the respondents were found to have attended school till the primary level. 36% of them were illiterates and 4% of the respondents had education up to secondary level. None of the respondents were found to be graduates.
- Nearly 20% of the respondents were found to be the only earning member of the family. Nearly 80% of the respondents were found to be supported by their family members.
- 20% of the respondents had at least 3 dependents in their families. 20% of them had no dependents. They were the respondents who were found to be single or divorced. 60% of the respondents were found to support either one or two of the family members.
- 72% of the respondents were in permanent job and 28% of them were in temporary jobs
- Nearly 50% of the respondents entered this job due to poverty. 32% of them found this job as they had no other employment and forced to take up work as being widowed or even abandoned by spouse. 8% of them took up the job as their family members were already in the same job. Only 10% were found to have taken up the job at their own willingness.
- 64% of the respondents were working in spinning section. 10% were in winding and 12% of them were found to be working in cleaning. 28% of the respondents did all the above works as per instructions from their superiors.
- 10% of the respondents had been working for more than 25 years. 40% of the respondents had an experience of 1-5 years in their jobs. 6% of them had working experience between 16 to 20 years. 4% were found to be working for

21 to 25 years. Nearly 32% of them were found to work for 15 years.

- 10% of the respondents earned an income between Rs. 8,000 and Rs. 10,000. 46% of them were found to be earning an income between Rs. 6,000 and Rs. 8,000 and 28% of the respondents earned an income between Rs. 4000 to Rs. 6,000. 16% of them were found to be earning an income between Rs. 2,000 and Rs. 4,000. It is evident that 44% of the respondents were found to have an income not exceeding Rs. 6,000 per month.
- Likert ranking scale was used to estimate the job satisfaction levels of the respondents. Out of a sample of 50 respondents, 54% of the respondents were found to be satisfied or highly satisfied with the job. Nearly 36% of them were found to be either unsatisfied or highly unsatisfied with their job. These women are forced to work due to poor economic conditions, in order to maintain sustenance of their family. 10% of them were neutral in their opinions.
- 76% of the respondents had awareness about trade unions. 24% of them did not know about trade unions.
- Only 3 respondents had registered as members with trade unions. It was mainly for sake of pension in their old age.
- 50% of the respondents recognized their superiors to be friendly. 42% of them found them to be kind. But 8% of the respondents identified their superiors to be arrogant.
- 48% of the respondents did not face any type of provocations in their work place. 16% of them faced sexual harassment from their superiors. 12% of the respondents faced verbal abuse in their work place. There was no complaint about physical beating or eve teasing. 8% of the respondents felt that they were unnecessarily criticized for their work.
- 48% of the respondents lived in their own houses whereas 52% of them lived in rented houses.
- 88% of the respondents did not take any loans. Only 12% of them had taken education loan.
- The 12% of the respondents who had taken loan for educational purpose had taken it from banks and SHGs. They did not prefer banks because of too many formalities followed by the banks. Many of the respondents were illiterates and it goes without saying that they were not interested in the formalities of the bank.
- 24% of the respondents complained that they were beaten up, found their spouse to be in affair with another woman and very bad drinking habits
- 54% of the respondents had the support of the family members in their household works. They were found to be assisted by their children, husbands, sisters and even parents. When women work for the sake of their family it is the responsibility of the family members to help them with their household works
- 26% of the respondents' family members did all the household works like cooking, washing clothes, cleaning house, taking care of the children etc. 28% out of 27 respondents were assisted in various activities each

Suggestions

Improving the livelihoods of textile workers is the right thing for the industry to do. But ultimately factory work will not be empowering for women workers unless the disadvantages they

face are tackled head on. Paid work can and should create opportunities for women to realize their rights, express their voice and develop their skills. Women need access to independent workers organizations that can empower them and represent their choices and interests in the workplace. Trade unions must be able to form, organize and to bargain on behalf of workers. Barriers that prevent them from doing so should be removed. By their own admission, workers organizations also have work to do to better represent women workers. Special measures should be taken to eliminate discrimination and universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender sensitive educational curricula, increase enrolment and retention rates of the girls, improve quality of education for lifelong learning as well as development of occupation/vocational/technical skills of women.

Conclusions

The violations of human rights of female textile workers in Tamil Nadu occur at different stages in different forms. They are lured by false promises and money at young age. They are usually underpaid without any contract. The lump sum amount binds them to the job and has taken the form of bonded labor. They face discrimination; being a women. They have limited right to freedom of movement and face occupational hazards and dangers. They are also subjected to sexual harassment and abuse at the hands of their supervisors. The reasons for the abuse and violations are socio economic and cultural.

The need of labour and competition has led employers to introduce schemes that focus on attracting women at a young age. Their poverty, caste and socio economic status makes them vulnerable to exploitation. The human rights framework and labor standards provide protections but the rights are still violated. Corporate sector have a mixed response towards the situation. Some actors especially manufacturers deny the abuse and see the problems in understanding of cultures. Others have recognized the problems and taken action. There is still a lot that corporations can do and should do. It is clear they should not end their relationship with the suppliers in case of non-compliance. The loss of business for these textile units would not make things better for the workers. The solution lies in engagement rather than alienation.

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