



## Women construction workers: A case study of Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka

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### Abstract

Women are an integral part of Indian society. All round development of a country is possible only if women are treated equally with men. Construction sector is one of the important and leading industries of Indian economy. It provides job opportunity to skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Dakshina Kannada district well known as coastal district of Karnataka has a fast-developing construction sector, which attracts good number of workers from all over the country. Women workers easily find job opportunities in construction sector as it is major part of informal sector. The present study is undertaken to study the role and problems of women workers working in construction sector in Dakshina Kannada district. The study is based on the primary data which is collected from 60 women workers working in construction sector in Dakshina Kannada district, through direct interview with the help of structured questionnaire. The study is based on the objectives, that is to study the socio-economic conditions, issues and challenges of women workers working in construction sector in Dakshina Kannada district and to suggest innovative policy approaches/intervention that helps to mitigate the challenges faced by women workers working in construction sector in Dakshina Kannada district.

**Keywords:** informal sector, construction industry, women workers

### Introduction

The First Indian National Commission on Labour (1966-69) defined unorganised sector as “those workers who have not been able to organize themselves in pursuit of their common interest due to certain constraints like casual nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy, small and scattered size of establishments”. Most of these labourers are engaged themselves in family-based shops, street vendors, handicraft and manufacturing enterprise, flooring work, mining work, construction work, daily labour work, agricultural labours, household and domestic servants, factories, shopping malls, schools, hospitals and hotels. Informal sector has become an increasingly popular subject of study, not just in economics, but also in sociology and anthropology (Naik K. A. 2009)<sup>[10]</sup>. Keith Hart was the first person to introduce the term Informal Sector in September 1971(ILO 2010)<sup>[5]</sup>.

According to the 2011 census, there were nearly 487 million workers in India, the second largest after China which supports 1.41 billion population of the World. Of these 487 million 94 percent work in unorganized sector ranging between pushcart vendors to home based diamond and gem polishing operations (Census 2011)<sup>[3]</sup>. India's workforce comprises nearly 93 percent in the unorganised international segment and 91 percent of it are women workers (Economic Survey 2007-08). As per the survey carried out by the National Sample Survey Organization (2009-10), the total employment in the country was of the order of 46.5 crore comprising of around 2.8 crore that is 6 percent in the organized sector and the remaining 43.7 crore that is 94 percent workers in the unorganised sector. Majority of the unorganized workers engaged in farm-activities, construction work and manufacturing sectors. In India 96% of female employment is in the unorganised sector as against about 91% of males. In urban areas, the percentage of unorganised sector workers is close to 65-70% (NSSO 2010). Over half of India's national output comes from the unorganised sector (Joddar P. & Sakthivel S. 2006)<sup>[8]</sup>.

Around 16 percent of India's working population depends upon construction industry for their livelihood (Kalpana & Kiran 2013)<sup>[2]</sup>. Indian construction industry employs about 51 million people and the second largest employer and contributes around 9 percent to the GDP of the country. Directly or indirectly it also creates 45 million additional job opportunities (India Today 2020). Indian construction industry is classified as commercial construction, residential construction, industrial construction, transportation infrastructure construction and energy & utility construction (Mordor intelligence 2022)<sup>[9]</sup>. India is expected to become world's third largest construction market by 2022 (IBEF 2022)<sup>[6]</sup>. Construction sector in India is dominated by male workers. But a good number of unskilled female workers are found working in the construction sector due to easy availability of job opportunities all over the country.

### Review of Literature

Women in India's construction sector are largely employed as daily wagers. They stay in informal settlements in and around the construction sites and have high exposure to particulate dust and gaseous matter. The women are also affected by pollution due to the solid fuel used for domestic cooking like wood, charcoal and cow-dung cakes. Children of these workers are also exposed to pollution and their health is also a matter of concern. These concerns are rarely taken into consideration by the construction companies (Sri Krishna 2022)<sup>[12]</sup>.

Construction workers are the backbone of the economy as they help in creating infrastructure necessary for industrial growth. Women are almost unskilled workers and they easily find jobs in construction sector but they face a lot of problems like wage discrimination, gender and sexual harassment, unhealthy job relationship, lower wages etc. Despite of all these barriers construction industry continues to attract a greater number of women workers. The female

employment is very high in the construction sector even though they work as helpers or unskilled workers (Kalpana & Kiran 2013) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Construction industry is dominated by men. Out of all the people working in the construction sector, women comprise only 10.9 percent. Considering that women make up 47 percent of the workforce, construction sector is only benefiting from about 1.25 percent of women in the workforce. There are several factors that explain this enormous fact, including unconscious gender bias, lack of training and negative perception about women workers working in the construction sector. Despite of these barriers women continue to build their path in the industry. As new construction industry jobs are expected to balloon by almost 2 million in 2022, companies are looking to recruit more women than ever before to bring their skill sets into the field (BigRentz 2022) <sup>[1]</sup>.

Women in the construction industry are mainly employed in manual work and perform various unskilled jobs in the industry like cleaning building sites, carrying bricks, gravel, cement, mortar and water up to the skilled carpenters and skilled masons, irrespective of number of hours they worked, they are not upgraded from unskilled to skilled as males (Jhabvala & Kanbur 2002).

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the socio-economic condition of women workers of construction industry in Dakshina Kannada.
2. To understand the issue and challenges of women workers of construction industry in Dakshina Kannada.
3. To analyse the existing legal measures and to suggest innovative policy measures for the empowerment of Women workers of construction industry in Dakshina Kannada.

### Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data.

#### 1. Primary data

Primary data has been collected from 60 women workers of construction industry in Dakshina Kannada through direct personal interview method with the help of well-structured questionnaire and explained in simple percentage method.

#### 2. Secondary data

The secondary data has been collected from various books, district statistics, research papers, magazines, newspapers, journal articles, thesis, and reports published by Government of Karnataka, Government of India and from website of different government agencies.

### Statement of the Research Problem

Women construction workers play a key role in assisting the process of providing infrastructural facilities to the fast-developing urban areas in India. Due to fast expansion of educational institutions in the city, there has been an increasing demand for residencies/ flats in the study area, Dakshina Kannada District. Women construction workers have a complicated work environment compared to women workers in other sectors. Unskilled women workers easily find a job in the construction sector. There is a good demand for women workers in the construction sector because it is profitable for the contractors to employ them due to causal

nature of work and lower wages. There are a few existing studies in India which focus on the problems of women construction workers. But in the study area no attempts have been made to study the same. In this contest an attempt has been made to investigate the problem and perspectives of women construction workers in Dakshina Kannada District.

### Findings and Analysis

In this section, the results of this research are discussed and presented according to the three objectives of the study. The findings of the study are as follows:

#### 1. Socio - Economic Profile of Women Construction Workers

As age is one of the important indicators of demographic feature, among the respondents 15 (25%) of them belong to the age group of 18 to 20 year, 12 (20%) belong to the age group of 31 to 40 years and 33(55%) belong to the age group of 21 to 30 years which indicates that majority of the women working in the construction sector are of young age. As educational status of the respondents has an impact on the selection of job, it is found that, a majority of 39 (65%) respondents have just studies up to primary and the rest 21 (35%) are illiterate. Among the respondents, a majority that is 50 (90%) respondents are married and rest 10 (10%) are unmarried. Among the 50 respondents who are married, a majority that is 38 (76%) of them have 3-4 children, 9 (18%) have 1-2 children, and just 3(6%) of the respondents have no children. Among the respondents, majority belong to Below Poverty Line category. 32(53.3%) respondents have a monthly family income between 5,001 to 8,000, 13(21.7%) have family income between Rs 8,001 to 10,000, 5 (8.3%) have a family income above Rs 10,000, 10(16.7%) have a monthly income of Rs 5,000 and below. Among the 60 respondents 52(86.7%) are debtors, when it comes to the amount of loan, 29(55.8%) have borrowed loan amounting of Rs 25,000 to 50,000, the rest 23(44.2%) have borrowed loan below Rs 10,000. When it comes to place of stay, a majority that is 41(68.3%) respondents stay in a rented house and the rest 19(31.7%) stay at the accommodation provided by the contractors. As water is an essential element, at the place of stay in Dakshina Kannada all the 60 (100%) respondents had access to tap water / pipe water provided by the corporation. At the place of stay in Dakshina Kannada District, all the 60 respondents had access to either home or shared toilets. Among the respondents, a majority, that is 15(25%) use fire wood as the main source of fuel for cooking, 27(45%) use LPG for cooking and rest 18(30%) use kerosene as source for cooking. Women construction workers usually face a lot of common health issues. Among the respondents, all experience a regular back pain due to head carrying heavy red stones, bricks, sand and other construction materials. Among the respondents all spent below Rs.15,000 for their annual health expenditure. The study also explores that, the children of 44 (73.4%) respondents go to school and rest 16 (26.6%) do not go to school and brought to the work sight.

#### 2. Issue And Challenges of Women Construction Workers

Among the respondents a majority 35 (58.3%) have been working in Dakshina Kannada district (D.K) for last 5-9 years, 13 (21.7%) are working in D.K for 2-4 years and rest 12 (20%) have been working in D.K for less than 2 years. When it comes to the reason to work in D.K, a majority

28(46.7%) respondents opined that they have a good and supportive work environment in the construction industry, 9(15%) said that they choose to work due to plenty of job opportunities, 6(10%) say that, they get attractive wages, 10(16.6%) prefer this work because, they get regular jobs and rest 7(11.6%) opined that, their relatives are here in D.K and that is the reason they have come here to work. When it comes to kind of work, 48 (80%) respondents are head carriers and just 12 (20%) respondents are helpers. Among the respondents 45(75%) respondents opined that the work is less hazardous, 8 (13.4%) say that work is hazardous and just 7 (11.6%) revealed that work is highly hazardous. When it comes to wage rate, a majority 34 (56.7%) respondents earn wages between Rs. 400-500, 26 (43.3%) earn wages between Rs.300-400. It was observed that all the 60 (100%) respondents experienced wage discrimination. Respondents' opinion about job satisfaction revealed that a majority 36(60%) respondents are less satisfied with the work, 14(23.3%) are highly satisfied with the work and just 10(16.7%) are least satisfied with the work. Basic facilities must be provided for the workers in the work environment. Among the respondents a majority 20(33.3%) respondents have drinking water facility, 34(56.6%) have transport facility, 22(36.6%) have toilet facility and just 2(3.3%) have first aid kit/facility at the work place. Registration in the District Labour Office is a must to get various benefits provided by the Government for the welfare of the construction workers. Among the 60 respondents just 12(20%) have registered themselves in the district labour office. Among the 48(80%) respondents who have not yet registered at the district labour office 33(69%) are unaware and ignorant about how to apply and just 15(31%) opined that they have no interest in registering. When it comes to awareness about various Government schemes, 14(23.3%) respondents are aware about pension scheme, 12(20%) are aware about disability pension scheme, 17(28.3%) are aware about training and tool kit facility, 4(6.6%) are aware about housing scheme, 42(70%) are aware about maternity benefit schemes, 51(85%) are aware about Ayushman Bharath Yojana, 21(35%) aware about educational scholarship facility, 34(56.6%) are aware about Medical benefit: Karmika Arogya Bhagya scheme, 14(23.3%) respondents are aware about KSRTC bus pass.

### Suggestions

1. It is found that majority of the women workers working in construction industry are ignorant about existence of District Labour Office (DLO) and various facilities provided by DLO. Hence, measures can be taken to bring awareness among women construction workers regarding the same.
2. The study comes across women construction workers face various health issues. Hence, Reminding the women construction workers to ensure food and nutritional needs and to give first priority to their health and hygiene is a must.
3. The women construction workers in the study also mentioned that there is no provision for closed toilet facilities at the work place, which is a basic need for the working women. Thus, it is strongly recommended to provide basic facilities like toilet and drinking water at the workplace.
4. Lack of work and social security is a common feature of informal sector. As a result, women construction

workers retire with no financial security. Hence, measures could be taken to encourage savings habit in these women and provide retirement or old age benefit to these workers.

5. The study reveals that a major share of the earnings of women construction workers is paid as rent as majority of the respondents are living in rented houses. Hence, it is strongly suggested that Government can provide housing facilities for these poor women workers at a concessional rate.

### Conclusion

Women are integral part of Indian society. Women try to stand by their own and support their family and look after education of their children. A good number of the informal sector women work in construction sector. Though India has witnessed an increasing demand for women construction workers, the government is indifferent to specific needs of this sector. Services of women construction workers are very significant for the growth of infrastructure in the urban and rural areas of the country. Thus, there is a need for the Government to recognize the contributions of construction workers to the economy and support them by effectively implementing the existing policy measures which will help in empowering women construction workers.

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