

Brief review of construction industry: With emphasis to female workers

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Abstract

Construction industry plays important and significant role in economic development of any country. It is equally true for India also. Construction Industry is the backbone of India as creates infrastructure for country, which in turn promotes economic development of country. In construction industry female workers contribute significantly and role of female workers cannot be ignored.

Keywords: economic development, infrastructure, construction industry, female workers, government of India

1. Introduction

Construction industry is the backbone of our country because it creates the infrastructure necessary for industrial growth of Country. In India, construction industry engage large number of unskilled, semiskilled and skilled workers. Working in different constructional project that are dangerous in nature, face several challenges. Workforce especially female workers employed in construction industry work in a situation where several risk factors like injuries are there. As the scenario is changing continuously irrespective of type of Industry, female employment rate also increased significantly. The variability in labor absorption in construction industry is much more pronounced for women than for men. Different cities has witnessed tremendous growth in construction sector as now-a days, as it is the boom time for construction sector. There are many advances in infrastructure, residential and commercial projects which has resulted potential demand for corporate houses. Government of India already started initiative to implement several policies, play the role of catalyst for the construction industry. In this aspect status of female workers are very important.

2. Present Working Scenarios

Women workers are mostly unskilled casual manual laborer. They are employed in construction sites for carrying bricks, cement sand, water, digging earth, mixing cement, breaking stone. The women are given common chores including transporting of materials around the site. They are rarely found in male dominated skill trades like carpentry, masonry, plumbing, electrical wiring. In general, most of laborers are currently recruited by subcontractors. He determines the conditions of employment according to his convenience. There is wage disparity between the male and female workers. Women laborers are paid less wages. The government has enacted "Building and other Construction Workers Act 1996" for the benefit of workers. The illiterate workers are not aware of their rights provided in the act. They

are at the mercy of the subcontractor who may hire and fire them whenever he wants.

Risk involved in construction work is very high particularly for women workers who have to climb great heights with load on their heads. Accidents involving simple injury occur almost every day, while fatal accidents occur occasionally. The major causes of accidents are falling from great heights, falling of heavy objects or collapsing of ladders.

Construction workers work in difficult conditions. They have to go up and down on several floors carrying bricks, sand and cement. Workers are doing all these things very easily as they are habitual with them. But, sometimes accidents happen due to break down of foundation and slab failure, etc. The nature of accidental injuries depends upon the seriousness of an accident. Many times, female workers die in such accidents and several times they have to lose their limbs. Thus, workers are facing the problems of serious injuries.

Long working hours, lack of proper nourishment, lack of safe drinking water facilities are some of the occupational hazards due to which women are not being able to work for longer periods. Upbringing of children on construction sites is another serious issue. Mobile crèches though talked about much is a very distant dream project. Safety risks, health hazards, low wages, poor living conditions are some of the problems faced by the laborers. They are not aware of their legal rights ensured by the government. The welfare boards cannot pass on the benefits until the workers are registered with them. Crèches are compulsory where more than 60 women are employed. Contractors/subcontractors will employ less number to evade the mandatory provisions.

3. The Changing Trend amongst Women Construction Labour

According to WIEGO (Women in informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing), construction industry in India is the second largest growing sector while agricultural still remains first largest. In the construction sector women

accounted for more than 51% of total labor force in 2003. However, since mid-nineties there is reduction in demand for unskilled labor which mostly consists of women. One estimate suggests that 1.5 million jobs are lost every year.

4. Demographic and Physiological Characteristics of Female Construction Workers

Majority of the respondents (55%) were in the age group of 21-30 years, followed by 37.50% who were of 31-40 years (Table 1.4). Madhok (2005) also indicated in her report on National Commission on Women, that none of the women was over 40 years of age, as contractors prefer young women only. She further disclosed that as construction work is extremely taxing, most of the women are young (average age 25), having joined the workforce even before they reached their teens. Majority (97.50%) of the respondents were married. It was probably due to the fact that when men migrated to construction sites, they brought their wives along, so married women were part of major female workforce.

Table 1

Demographic features	No.	Percentage (%) age
Age (years)		
Up-to 20	6	7.50
21-30	44	55
31-40	30	37.50
Marital Status		
Married	78	97.50
Unmarried	2	2.50
Family Type		
Joint	32	40
Nuclear	48	60

5. Harassment and Job Injuries of Female Workers at Work Place

Sexual harassment is a serious problem for female construction workers. It has been seen that around more than 70% of the female workers face this problem. It has been observed that to overcome the problem of unemployment, female workers are forced to please subcontractor to get the opportunity of job. Though married women workers have the capacity and competent enough to do the job but they are easily harassed by the contractor. Also female workers are economically exploited by the contractors.

6. Conclusion

It is evident that though employment opportunities of female workers have increased than past but harassment by the contractors and job injuries in work place are common casualties observed. Occupational hazards are obstacles for female workers but still their role in construction industry cannot be ignored.

7. References

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