

WORK AND URBAN ENVIRONMENT IMPACT ON THE LIFE OF WOMEN SLUM DWELLERS IN BANGALORE CITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to study the work and urban environment impact of on the Women living in slum areas of Bangalore City. The sample for the study consisted of 100 working women from four different slum areas of Bangalore City. Women in slums due to their lack of education, lack of technical and professional skills and lack of awareness are forced to join low paid jobs. Apart from the day to day difficulties of life they face other difficulties also.

Current study focused on the problems of these disadvantaged women. Along with the difficulties of being a woman they have to bear the hardships of being a slum dweller. Hence the pressure of dual task of productive and unproductive work puts a lot of impact on the physical and mental health of these women. As a result women face weakness, fatigue, breathlessness, poor appetite and frequent illness.

KEYWORDS Employment, Women, Urban Slums, Environment

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INTRODUCTION

Slums are considered among the demographics where majority of the problems can be seen like shelter, migration, water problem, ventilation, pollution, unemployment, health and nutritional problems, crimes etc. As a result of globalization, modernization and industrialization people are migrating from villages (rural & urban) to cities in search of employment opportunities and for better lifestyle. Somehow people find an occupation but finding a dwell is difficult. Due to lack of capital and less wages they can not afford houses and start living in open places like grounds next to railway tracks, besides bus stands and across the roadside buildings. And they build huts made of sheds, tins, bombs, gunny bags, coconut leaves etc temporarily or permanent. And in these slums without proper basic amenities women of these slums have to live and survive.

The women due to lack of education and skills lead a critical life in slums. They go for daily wages, work as maids, work in sales and fields or as vegetable vendors etc. Their income is not sufficient to satisfy their basic amenities.

In these slums the majority of the work force today is in what is generally known as the unorganized or the informal sector. Women workers are manifested as paid on piece rate basis on part-time, full-time, domestic servants for a fixed payment. Informal women laborers employment is mainly concentrated in unskilled or a few semiskilled jobs where simple or traditional skills are required. The high rate of illiteracy among women, lack of skill and professional training, absence of on the job training facilities and prevent social attitudes towards their employment are some of the impediments in the employment of women at the highest level of informal women laborers is their employment or unskilled jobs as they usually shift from one unskilled job to another.

Tripathy (2003) in his study found that slum women do heavy manual work even till the day of delivery. Women were delivered by neighboring women or relatives or by traditional midwives.

During the first delivery most women stayed at home up to one year before returning to work. From the next, delivery on words they stayed for a period ranging from one month to three months. But the women workers do not know that if pregnant women carry heavy loads run a high risk of abortion. So, it is very important for the slum women who are working to have knowledge about the reproductive health. The poor health of Indian women is a concern on both national and individual levels.

The consequences of women's unfavorable status in India include discrimination in the allocation of household resources, such as food and in access to health care and education as well as marriage at young ages. Due to poverty and illiteracy, the knowledge factor of the Indian women regarding reproductive health and reproductive rights is pathetic.

OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the employment problems of slum women.
- To provide suggestions to improve the economic conditions of women residing in slums.
- To find out the health hazards due to inappropriate working conditions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sample for the study consisted of 100 working women from four different slum areas of Bangalore City. The study was conducted on urban slum women to know about their living condition, employment and health related problems. An interview schedule was formulated for data collection. A rapport was built with the respondents. Though the schedule was prepared in English, all questions were put in a conversation style i.e. Kannada. Respondents were contacted by home visits and through SHG meetings. For analyzing the data, collected information was classified in the light of objectives set forth for the study. The classified data was coded, tabulated and percent calculated for the same. The results were presented and discussed along with tables and graphs in numbers and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The respondents were women in the age group of 20-40 years. The women were illiterate and lack of education, compelled them to join low paid sectors. Majority (60%) of the respondents belonged to backward class and forty percent belonged to Schedule caste. 56% percent of the women belonged to small families having a size of 4-6 members, 34% belonged to large families with 7-10 members and 10% of the families belonged to small families consisting 1-3 members. All the respondents belonged to nuclear families. Majority (80%) of the husbands were engaged as coolie workers, 10% as laborers, 7% as vendors and 3% were not working.

Fig. 1 The occupation of the respondents

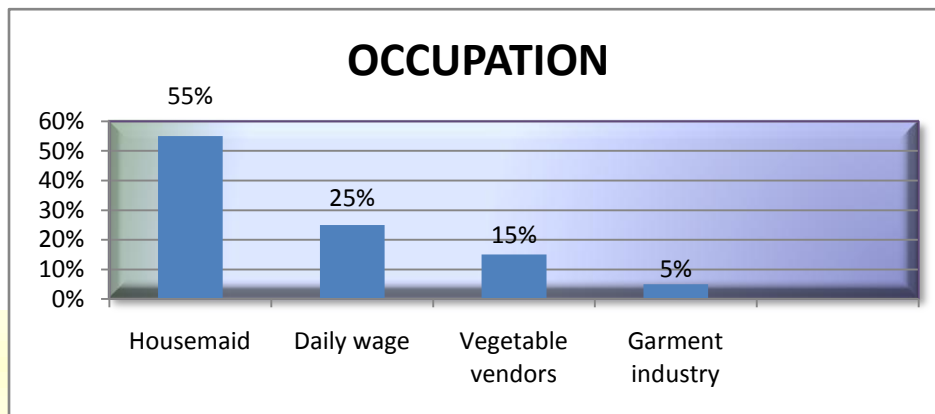


Table 1 indicates that most (55%) of the respondents are engaged as part time housemaids. They are serving in more than one house and in each house, work for a specific period of time only. Thirty Five percent of the women work as daily wage workers informal sectors and were engaged in carrying heavy weight of bricks, water, cement etc to the work place. Twenty percent of them worked as vegetable vendors and 10% worked in garment industry.

Table 2: Housing conditions

Respondents (n=100)

<i>Type of House</i>	
Kuccha	60%
Semi pucca	40%
<i>Number of Rooms</i>	
One room	82%
Two rooms	18%

Every study related to work and health among women cannot afford to avoid an explanation of household as workplace. Their houses consisted of temporary huts (Jhopadi's). Majority of the respondents (60%) lived in Kuccha houses made of wooden planks, cane, mud etc. The roofs were thatched and covered with black polythene sheets, (40%) of the respondents lived in semi pucca houses where the walls were made of bricks. Majority (82%) of the women lived in small huts with single room. All the family members lived in the same room without any proper

ventilation and in poor hygienic conditions. The floor remained swampy during rainy season. Water facilities were erratic and insufficient. All respondents used tap water supplied by municipality at different parts of street or temples once or twice a week. Toilet facilities were poor. The huts were lined with narrow pathways and open garbage. The poor environment compels women to undertake extra burden of work to make the huts livable. These conditions are completely unhygienic.

Table 3: Reasons for doing work (n=100)

Reasons	Percentage
To supplement family income	85%
To be independent	2%
Better Future	5%
Idle husband	8%

It is clear from *Table 3* that majority (85%) of the respondents were working because they want to support family income and hardly 2% were working to be financially independent. 5% were working dreaming of their better tomorrow. Hence it can be said that they are working on their own wish. Only the unsatisfactory aspect is the percentage of them is uncountable. They have learnt a lesson of deprivation for being a poor and want to build their future. While 8% were working because their husbands were idle. The low income of the family is the compelling factor for the women folk to opt for seeking petty jobs in unorganized sectors to augment the family earning to sustain livelihood.

Table 4: Nature work

	Nature of work	No. of Hours spent
Unpaid work	Household chores-Sweeping, Washing of clothes, cooking, child rearing, Fetching drinking water, Helping male member of household in minor, construction, repair of own house, thatching of roof, etc	5-9
Paid	Vegetable selling, Sweeping, Mopping dusting, Washing clothes, Child	4-8

work	care (ayah), Cooking (including grinding of grains, pulses, cutting of vegetables, fruits etc.) for household members and guests., Working in ration shops, (cleaning and packing of cereals and pulses), Helping masons in construction work (loading of cement bricks etc.)	
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Table 4 presents a list of unpaid and paid work performed by the respondents in the family and at work place. The unpaid work performed by the women at their homes was cooking, cleaning utensils, washing clothes, child rearing etc. Their spouse doesn't value this work. The paid work included vegetable selling, sweeping, helping masons in construction work, cooking etc. The women earned money by performing the same kind of job outside their households. The respondents felt that when they earned money, they were appreciated and respected by their spouses. So, the women preferred working outside the house "where their work is valued". Further there is average numbers of hours spent in unpaid work was 5-9 hours and time spent in paid work was about 4-8hours. Hence the total time spent on paid and unpaid work during the day was 9-17 hours per day with one-two hours break in between. Majority of the respondents remained busy in performing work both at home and at work place and were fully exhausted after long hours of work and go to sleep soon after dinner. And rarely they receive help from their family members. A similar study was conducted by Chant 1992, in which he found that women undertake all kind of tasks that are necessary for the sustenance of their household.

Table 5: Facilities at work place (n=100)

Drinking Water	87%
Bonus	37%
Overtime Wages	20%
Toilet	10%

It is evident from the *Table 5* that majority (87%) of the respondents had drinking water facility at their work place. Thirty Seven percent got bonus in the form of gifts or cash during different occasions or festivals. Twenty percent got overtime wages. Only 10% of the respondents were provided with toilet / urinals facilities. Lack of toilets / urinals at the work place put women to a

great deal of inconvenience. Even those who go to domestic work were not allowed to use the toilets. Either they have to go for open spaces or pay and use services.

Table 6: Problems faced at work place (n=100)

non-availability of adequate & proper work	22%
low wages	64%
exploitation by employers	12%
heavy work	40%
Humiliation	10%

- Multiple responses

Table 6 depicts the problems faced by the women worker at their work place. Majority (64%) of the respondents expressed that the wages given for them are not sufficient. And 40% expressed overburden of work. They had to work for long hours and often complained of neck pain, backache and headache and sometimes asthma attacks. Ten percent had faced humiliation by the house owners and contractors at their workplace. 12% were sexually harassed by their owners and fellow laborers, who would often tease or touch them for no reason. A similar study was conducted by Islamabad – Based Progressive Women’s Association (2000) whereby they found that every second women is a victim of a direct or indirect form of mental or physical violence and the most vulnerable are those who work in the formal sector, like domestic and brick-kiln workers.

Table 8: Prevalence of specific types of illness (n=100)

Reproductive Health Problems	54%
Lower back pain	75%
Anemia	44%
Vitamin deficiency	15%
Asthma	8%
Urinary problems	10%
Calcium Deficiency	20%

- Multiple responses

It is clear from the *Table 8* that Majority, 75% of the respondents reported low back pain and 54% respondents reported symptoms related to Reproductive Health. The most common nutritional deficiency found in the 44% respondents was of iron (anemia). And because of controlling urine for long hours caused urinary problems in 10% of the respondents. The problems related to loss of hair, gray hair, joint pains, feeling low energy expressed by the respondents showed the deficiency of vitamin and calcium among the respondents. The women even experienced frequent illnesses but they did not go for proper treatment due to the fear of losing their job, in case they were advised rest by the doctor and due to financial problems.

CONCLUSION

The study proved that lack of education and low income of the family is the compelling factor for the women folk to opt for seeking petty jobs in unorganized sectors to augment the family earning to sustain livelihood. Apart from the general hardships living in an area with a poor environment, Women of slum areas suffered from many disadvantages; they faced a heavier work burden because employment did not free women from responsibility of housework. .

SUGGESTIONS

- Environment hazards in slums: Drainage, Waste removal must be attended as priority.
- Informal women laborers should organize themselves to raise a crusade against exploitation and form a union to protect their rights.
- Launching awareness programs/campaigns for slum dwellers about health and hygiene.
- Proving skill based training and different trade related training to the women.
- Providing information about banking facilities.
- Propagation and implementation of poverty alleviation program.
- Family centered approach should be undertaken in which every family of the area should be approached for knowing their existing economic needs, locating resources of family, deciding priority among these economic needs, developing habits of doing planned expenditure.
- Income generation program launched by govt. as Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojna for self employment, Mahila Samridha Yojna, Urban based service programs, mid-day

meal programs, maternity benefit programs etc. should be propagated among slum dwellers and necessary assistance should be given.

- Economic activities on group or co-operative basis can also be chalked out where group can be formed for common economic activity for common production and marketing.
- Vocational guidance and counseling services for young women should be arranged.
- With them help and support of govt. and non-govt. organizations. Craft training cum production centric can be established for rendering training in different crafts, to women of the area and undertaking the production of school garments, hospital, uniform, sports, dresses, children's cloths, napkins etc.

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