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PROBLEMS AND PROSPECT OF WOMEN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN INDIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The construction sector has the largest number of unorganised labourers in India next only to agricultural sector. As increasing numbers of women enter the construction trades, India is a traditional country and there is diversity in religions, culture and customs. Role of the women in India mostly is household and limited to domestic issues. In some cases women can find employment as nurses, doctors, teachers the caring and nurturing sectors Women form half the workforce and by choice or by design they are not allowed to acquire specific skills that may enable them to become masons. Women join as unskilled workers and remain unskilled till the end of their working life span. However, men get training and systematically upgrade their construction skills to graduate as masons, supervisors and contractors. and health hazards faced by all construction workers, there are safety and health issues specific to female construction workers. The small percentage of females within the construction trades and the serious health and safety problems unique to female construction workers have a circular effect. Safety and health problems in construction create barriers to women entering and remaining in this field. In turn, the small numbers of women workers on construction worksites foster an environment in which these safety and health problems arise or continue. The present study focus to identify the factors preventing women employees from aspiring for construction and challenges and problems faced by women workers. Further the study try to explain the real condition of Indian women construction worker and also make an effort to clear main problems of working women these issues, the narratives of women construction workers were used to describe their experiences.



KEYWORDS : Construction workers, Gender discrimination, Sexual harassment , pathetic conditions, Unskilled labour, Risks, Prospects,

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

To study the working conditions of women construction workers in India.

To identify the issues and challenges of women construction workers.

METHODOLOGY: The research is mainly focus on problems and prospect of women construction workers in India: a sociological analysis, methodology was followed for this article, comprising literature review, and analysis of secondary data. are drawn classified from the monthly journals, article, magazines, internet and Publications of books.

INTRODUCTION:

The construction sector has the largest number of unorganised labourers in India next only to agricultural sector. Women form half the workforce and by choice or by design they are not allowed to acquire specific skills that may enable them to become masons. Women join as unskilled workers and remain unskilled till the end of their working life span. However, men get training and systematically upgrade their construction skills to graduate as masons, supervisors and contractors. A study was conducted on the career progress of 440 men construction workers and 440 women construction workers and 51 building contractors to find out the reasons why women in the construction sector were not able to acquire skills for masonry work and how they could be trained to become masons. The findings of the study show that there is an inherent gender bias against women and also the shared general belief that women construction workers are unfit to be trained informally like men in the construction sector even though they have the necessary skills, capability and desire to become masons. Though the contractors are willing to accept women as masons by giving them training and placement in the construction sector, it has been found, the social forces that have perpetuated the concept of women as inferior workers are inimical to any such move. This study also analyses the methodology of training offered to men in the construction sector in India and proposes a new methodology of training that would qualify women construction workers to become masons and empower them economically. A study on gender discrimination among construction workers and the means of empowering women construction workers with special reference to Tiruchirappalli The construction sector is the largest employer in India after agricultural labour in the unorganised sector. However women construction workers are not allowed to acquire skills and become masons. Women join as unskilled workers and remain unskilled till the end of their working life. Men, on the other hand, are trained and given an opportunity to up-grade their construction skills while working and become masons, supervisors and contractors. The findings of the study show that many women construction workers are illiterate, widows, only earning members of the family and from low income families when compared to men construction workers. Women construction workers face harassment at home and work place. There is also gender discrimination in work, wages and in promotion opportunities. The findings also show that the important barrier for women being promoted as masons is the gender bias which men and women have, and women construction workers are not given an opportunity to be trained informally like men in construction sector. It is found that women are willing to become masons, and men, especially the contractors, are willing to accept them, train them and give them placements in the construction sector. The small percentage of females working in the construction trades and the serious health and safety problems unique to female construction workers have a circular effect. Safety and health problems in construction create barriers to women entering and remaining in this field. In turn, the small numbers of women workers on construction worksites foster an environment in which these problems arise or continue. Very little information has been collected on the safety and health concerns of women construction workers. This report will summarize findings from three studies that were designed to help identify and understand the health and safety hazards encountered by female construction workers. As increasing numbers of women enter the construction trades, concerns about their health and safety are growing. In addition to the primary safety and health hazards faced by all construction workers, there are safety and health issues specific to female construction workers. The small percentage of females within the construction trades and the serious health and safety problems unique to female construction workers have a circular effect. Safety and health problems in construction create barriers to women entering and remaining in this field. In turn, the small numbers of women workers on construction worksites foster an environment in which these safety and health

problems arise or continue. Sources of information for this report include a survey of tradeswomen conducted by The prevalence of a hostile workplace, restricted access to sanitary toilets, protective clothing and equipment in the wrong sizes, and poor on-the-job training-these were significant issues that adversely impacted women's ability to perform their jobs safely. Many of the identified problems are amenable to change through engineering, behavioral, or administrative intervention. The recommendations in this report are directed at employers, labor unions, manufacturers, training programs, supervisors, and workers. Improving the work conditions for women in the construction trades will not only ensure their health and safety, it will also serve to attract and retain women as workers.

Construction workers: Development of sizing structure for fall arrest harness design The study of improving a fall-arrest harness suggested a more upward back D-ring location for women than current unisex designs to accommodate women's torso form and address their fit problem. also suggested an improved system of three sizes for women and three for men.

Stress and adverse outcomes for women construction workers: This study looked at how job stressors, such as sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination, can affect female construction workers' job satisfaction and psychological and physical health. The study found having responsibility for others' safety and having support from supervisors and male coworkers were related to greater job satisfaction. The study also found perceptions of overcompensation at work and job uncertainty were associated with insomnia. Sexual harassment and gender discrimination were found to be related to reports of increased nausea and headaches.

Trades Women's perspectives on occupational health and safety: a qualitative investigation.

The major health and safety concerns of women employed in the construction trades are discussed.

Researchers found the major concerns were: exposure to chemical and physical agents; injuries from lifting, bending, twisting, falling and being cut; lack of proper education and training; and health and safety risks related specifically to tradeswomen inadequate protective clothing and tools, etc..

Occupational health and working conditions: reviews the medical literature on safety and health hazards for women working in the construction industry. Women have a different pattern of fatal injuries and some nonfatal injuries than men. Women also report unique problems and concerns related to working in this industry.

Risks and rewards: While both men and women working in construction face many of the same risks, there are some unique issues that are of greater concern to women. Tradeswomen are more likely than their male counterparts to die in job-related motor vehicle accidents or from job-related homicide and less likely to die from falls. Of women killed by motor vehicles, worked as "

Prospects of Women Construction Workers: The construction sector is one of the largest employers of women next to agriculture in India. the data from of men and women construction workers, and proposes ways to empower women workers. Most of them are very poor and destitute, face harassment at both home and workplace and do the heaviest work. This study suggests training for women as masons to equalise their opportunities. With the rapid increase in construction sector, the number of female construction workers is increased. The problems of women worker is still not addressed adequately by health sector.

Sexual harassment is a serious problem for female construction workers. According to a 1996 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Bureau of Labor Statistics data, female construction workers had the second highest rate of sexual harassment complaints per 100,000 employed women. female miners had the highest rate. Sexual harassment in the workplace is not only an equal

employment opportunity issue but is also increasingly recognized as a safety and health issue. Sexual harassment violates laws prohibiting sex discrimination in employment. Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment; submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual; or such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment. Sexual harassment of female traffic controllers at a road construction site was the subject of Appeals Court decision in which the court ruled in favour of the female plaintiffs. Were hired as "flag persons." Immediately after the women started work, male members of the construction crew began to inflict verbal sexual abuse on the women, referring to the women with obscene adjectives Baxter returned to her car and found vulgar anatomical names written in the dust on the sides of her car.

Impact of Isolation on Safety and Health: Often a tradeswoman will find that she is the only woman on a jobsite. Twenty-two percent of respondents to the had never worked with another woman. Isolation, when experienced within a hostile workplace culture, can add to a woman's fear of harassment and assault. To quote several tradeswomen they co-workers were starting to talk really dirty. ...it was filthy stuff. Plus they were starting to touch me. I was the only woman on the job. I was the steward, but I was the only woman on the job, and we were in a shanty that I never felt comfortable in with them anyway. When you have more than one woman working with you, you have a better chance. You don't want to be alone. The stress is incredible. I had too many illnesses because of that. The more women there are, the more the climate begins to change. I don't have close friendships with the other women, but the fact that there are more women helps.

Need for women: For a number of years women have been moving into professional work such as law, accountancy and medicine, all of which require high-level qualifications and are considered attractive because of the perceived high level of social status. Today, numbers of women and men are almost equal in these sectors. But occupational sectors such as engineering and construction have not seen a corresponding change in the make-up of the workforce. Women's labour market participation has increased over recent years and their employment rates have risen, whereas men's participation in the labour market has declined slightly. Girls now perform better than boys in education and in getting Construction needs diversity to sustain development and growth. Ethnic minorities and women have a lot to contribute as members of the workforce and as clients. Demand for construction has experienced steady growth over the past five years. The industry cannot afford a skills shortage at such a time. With a strong economy, construction is in competition with other industries for non-traditional groups, Gender-based notions of the construction workplace still persist amongst men at large. Some perceived apprehensions of men towards women entering the working environment include not being equally suitable for the work or having the innate ability to use tools, understand buildings, lift heavy materials, possess natural strength and handle direct criticism or 'straight talking'. They feared trouble in the form of distraction at the job, sexual harassment litigation, and the potential for women to overreact. On the other hand, they believe that certain jobs were particularly appropriate for women like finishing jobs, plastering, tiling, joinery etc. This was based on women's aptitude for attention to detail, and good sense of design and colour and reliability. They are tidier and more careful, they tend to be more organised and work well together.

Socio-economic status of women workers in construction: The construction Industry provides job opportunity to large number of skilled as well as unskilled workforce. The workforce employed in the industry have to face several difficulties at the work place, viz., wage discrimination, gender and sexual harassment, unhealthy job relationship, lower wage, etc., despite all these construction industry overwhelmingly attracts female workers. About one third of these workers are women and children. Their skills are always at the same level and are not upgraded as they assist only the male workforce the work place. The pathetic condition is that women workers in the construction Industry. The paper attempts to analyse the Socio-economic status of women worker in Chikmagalur District of Karnataka. A study of this sector was very important to get an Insight of the present Socio-economic conditions of women construction workers in Chikmagalur District. The case study an attempt was made to socio-economic conditions of women workers in the construction industry. Core workers nationwide. For most of these workers, the construction industry is their "principal" source of employment. Thus the construction workers come under the unorganized sector. The term unorganized sector has been defined as those areas which has no proper means and ways of doing works in a systematic way or in organized way. The unorganized sector workers suffer from the cycle of excessive seasonal employment; there is no formal employer and employee relationship; because there is also lack of social security and protection. Unorganized industry workers in India include:- small and marginal farmers, landless agricultural laborers, share croppers, fishermen, and those engaged in animal husbandry, beedi rolling, labeling packing, building and construction workers, leather worker, weavers, workers in bricks kilns and stone quarries, workers in saw mills and oil mills etc. and so on. Construction is the sector which has registered a large increased in employment in the post reform decade. In construction, an estimated million construction workers, accounting of all construction workers in India in that year, were employed through contractors and did not receive minimum employment protection and benefits whatsoever

Empowerment of Women Construction Workers : Empowerment aims at creating both equality and equity between individuals or social groups. In women's empowerment, the gender and social relations are transformed in favour of women to create greater equality and equity between men and women within social groups and between different social groups. In the empowerment process, the powerless people begin to have control over their lives. Empowerment results in a change in the balance of power, in the living conditions, and in the relationships. Financial independence is very important for women construction workers as many of them are found to be single or abandoned women (Table 13). Within families too, the husbands are found to have other sexual partners and the income is split. Some are drunkards and find themselves in debts. The earnings of the women are often forcibly taken away by their husbands and total dependence on such irresponsible men too wreaks havoc on their personal lives. Economic empowerment alone can save them from the thralldom of poverty and disease. Many direct and indirect benefits can accrue from economic independence; the chief among them are nutritious diet, access to health care, education for children, proper dwelling, and even social security.

Daily work description of Women Construction Workers : The daily work description of women construction workers was studied and is given. The study shows that women workers are already performing most of the work of masons in the work sites now. This study reveals that majority of women accept that women's work is just carrying head load, sifting sand, breaking stones and mixing the mortar. Very few women say that women's work is digging, laying bricks, plastering, concreting or

levelling because these skilled tasks are not assigned to women in construction sector in India but are carried out only by men masons. But some women have reported that they are doing the tasks of masons like laying bricks, levelling, concreting and plastering. Some women have reported that they have done masonry work even when they are not paid for the work or given the job title of mason. These women do masonry tasks even though they are not paid on par with men or allowed to become masons. Productivity level of women who do the masonry task is also found to be high. Steps should be taken to educate women that they are competent to do the work of masons because some women are already doing the mason's job.

Promotions for Women Construction Workers : The women and men construction workers and the contractors were asked to specify the barriers which prevent women from being promoted to work as masons and their responses. The men construction workers and the contractors are of the opinion that the important barrier for women to become masons in construction sector is that the job involves working for long exhaustive hours and women are not fit physically; there is also no training in other areas like laying foundation, erection of structural frame, and plastering. The common belief is women are scared of heights. There is absolute complicity of both male and female workers in the maintenance of this 'lie'. The prejudices like women are scared of heights and physically not fit have to be challenged and changed. At present, women climb up the scaffolding carrying loads of bricks and sand on the head, work in multi-floor buildings with ease as chithals, and they perform all the tasks done by men like digging, breaking stones and some of the tasks of the masons. So women have the same potential and the courage like men to do masonry work. The study has shown that more women agree that there are no women masons because they consider it a difficult task, men will not accept it, they are not trained, scared of heights and they are not given opportunities. Recognition of the women laborers' ability means parity in wages. So, it is a collective denial of their ability to perform the masonry tasks. Women laborers agree with the view that cultural habits die hard, but those cannot be cited as the reason for denying women their place in the work

Risks Facing Women in Construction: Over the last couple of decades, an increasing number of women have begun to work in the construction industry. Although the number has declined since 2007, reflecting job losses in the construction industry overall. Bureau of Labor Statistics data for 2011 shows that more than women were employed in some capacity in the construction industry accounting of total construction industry. were production workers, such as laborers, electricians and plumbers percent of all construction trades workers. About half of women in the construction industry hold clerical and support jobs, one third are in management and professional positions, and one fifth work in production. Of those workers, women are most likely to be laborers and helpers, painters, carpenters, repair workers, electricians, drywall installers, truck drivers, heating and air conditioning mechanics, and plumbers. Women in construction face issues in two main areas: workplace culture and health and safety.

Workplace Culture: Women in construction face certain culture issues unique to them. These issues were identified through interviews and focus groups of women construction workers conducted by Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Women in construction are subject to belittling remarks, harassment and physical assaults. Working in such a distracting environment can cause a worker to overlook proper safety precautions, leading to injuries. Sexual harassment A majority of respondents in the surveys

reported touching, comments and gestures from blame co-workers and supervisors. Isolation Many women found themselves to be the only woman on a job site, creating additional stress.. Since mentoring of new workers often is done by colleagues, women may not receive the same attention and on-site training as their male counterparts. Job Insecurity A majority of women felt vulnerable to losing their jobs, making them reluctant to report safety hazards or harassment.

Issues challenging women in construction: Studies indicate that the construction industry's traditional, blue-collared, male-dominated, craft-based culture represents a significant barrier to women recruitment, participation and career progression. The following are issues and barriers opposing the women participation The assumptions that root the frequent argument are that woman is physically not strong to endure this strenuous task. When entering the gender segregated occupations, these women need to prove their competence despite their qualifications and experiences On top of proving their technical skills, women workers need to have the ability to fit into the accepted behaviour of the workplace which can even be more problematic. In her study on both the physical and psychosocial working environment among the Swedish construction workers, stated that most women seem to agree that they can cope with the physical part of the job, while many claimed that they need to be psychologically strong to be on a building site. The women on site feel that they need to be as good as the men. They also need to fit into the accepted behaviour of the workplace which can even mean comprising their 'female' identity .Women inexplicably run a greater risk than men of work-related musculoskeletal disorder. Studies have shown that women were twice as likely as men to leave the industry because of complaints of pain and injury. This may also be linked with low job-control and high job-demand. Women have been reported to be in this situation with low job-control and high job-demand than men. Many female workers overlook this safe limit and perform task that in the long run can lead just to avoid being stereotype by the male colleagues .Important variables for health and good work environment such as control over work, influence, meaningfulness, support and professionalism seems to be negatively influenced by gender personal offences. Furthermore the whole workplace culture poses problems to female workers on site. For example, temporary sanitary facilities are usually unisex, often without privacy and generally not well maintained. Unclean facilities can result in disease as well as urinary tract infection.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

Women in the construction sector are involved only in unskilled work. Their potential as masons is still untapped. The study has also shown that women are willing to be trained and are already carrying out some of the tasks of masons. So it is proposed that the methodology of offering informal training now practiced in construction sector to train men workers could be extended to train and empower women for masonry work. To implement this informal training it is proposed that union membership of women has to be increased and men union workers must be motivated to come forward to train women informally. The male construction workers must also be motivated to give informal training to their wives and relatives. If some women are trained and employed as masons, they will in turn become mentors to other women and encourage and train other women to do the job of masonry. Legislation could be enacted in India to make it mandatory for the contractors to offer informal training to women construction workers in government sites and employ a certain percentage of women masons in all sites. These positive steps will enhance the resource potential among women construction workers and empower them leading to the growth of the families and the advancement of the nation. After securing a career in construction, the construction organisation must continue to support this cohort

group especially those with family obligations, by developing flexible work schedule and work-hours. Hence, the industry must make the first move by actively seek women for job opportunities and creating a working environment where women will stay and be treated with respect. Whole is facing a nationwide crisis with respect to the availability of qualified labor. With the demand for labor outstripping supply, construction employers need to expand their recruitment efforts to previously untapped labor sources, including women. Thus, they need to ensure that the work environment is "woman friendly." This report will not cover the health and safety concerns of all construction workers. It attempts to summarize the additional concerns of women working in construction, and the report will propose recommendations to help employers, unions, and workers provide equal safety and health protection in the construction industry for all construction workers, regardless of gender.

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