



SESSION 1

WOMEN'S WORK AND CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT

Choice and Participation of Women in the Workforce in Delhi¹

Abstract

One of the most debated issues among policy makers across most of the developing countries including India is the low and declining rate of women's participation in the labour market. In recent years, the decline in the female Work Participation Rate (WPR) in India has been primarily attributed to rural women, while the women's WPR in urban areas has remained almost stable. However, there is a dearth of studies that focus on women's participation in the urban labour market, which is considerably different from the rural labour market. In this context, there is a need to understand women's choice to participate in the urban labour market. This is vital for policy makers in order to encourage more women to participate in work in the urban areas, which can help the economy to develop and remain healthy. This paper is an attempt to look at the women's participation in the workforce in Delhi, which is highly urbanised (97.5 per cent), and among the top Indian States/UTs in terms of per capita income, which is almost three times higher than the national average. The analysis is based on secondary sources of data collected by NSSO on 'employment and unemployment' in India during the last two decades (2000 to 2019). Only adults (15 years and above) were included in the analysis.

The findings show that there was a huge gender gap in WPR, the former (67 per cent) is more than four times higher than the latter (16 per cent). The gender-wise WPR shows a contrary picture with WPR for females increased by 5 percentage points (11 per cent in 2000 to 16 per cent in 2019), while WPR for males decreased by 3 percentage points (76 per cent in 2000 to 67 per cent in 2019) during the last two decades. The female unemployment rate has always been higher than the male unemployment rate. There is a U-shaped curve with respect to women WPR and level of education. It is observed that WPR for women was very high at both; low level and high level of education. At a low level of education or no education, women are compelled to work to overcome economic constraints. As the educational level rises, social and cultural constraints become weaker to drive women outside the labour market. There is also a reluctance to take up low quality jobs with a higher level of education and aspirations also go up. This is reflected among youth and educated (secondary+) youth females, who are more unemployed than their male counterparts.

The status of employment shows that almost three-fourth (74 per cent) of adult women engaged in regular salaried work compared to 57 per cent of males. On the other hand, 39 per cent of males were involved in self-employment activities compared to 25 per cent of females. The share of women in regular employment has increased from 60 per cent in 2000 to 74 per cent in 2019 in Delhi, while their share in casual wage has declined from 5 per cent to 1 per cent during the same period. However, around 70 per cent of females were informal workers (without any social security benefit), and 54 per cent were employed in the informal or unorganised sector.

¹ *Balwant Singh Mehta, Fellow, IHD*

More than half of the women workers were engaged in low skilled service occupations such as housekeeping, restaurant service worker, personal care, shop salespersons, travel attendant, and unskilled or elementary occupations like domestic helper, street vendor, garbage collectors, cleaner and launderer. Women's participation rate in the high skilled occupations (e.g., college and university teaching professional, nursing professional) as well as medium-skilled occupations (information technology, modern health associates, school teachers, social workers, nursing professionals) has increased significantly in recent years compared to the men.

Women employment in Delhi is dominated across four broad industries or sectors: (i) public administration, education, health and other services; (ii) manufacturing; (iii) finance, banking and real estate and (iv) trade, hotels and restaurants. These four sectors together account for 98 per cent of the total adult women employment in Delhi. The two sectors (i) finance, real estate and business sector, and (ii) transport, storage and communication recorded a high growth rate compared to other sectors during the last two decades. On the other hand, construction (13 per cent) and agriculture & allied (20 per cent) sectors recorded a decline in women's employment during the same period.

Further, the sub-sectors generating substantial employment for women have been identified by considering the additional employment generated in the recent period including: nine service sub-sectors (i) activities of households as employers of domestic personnel; (ii) education; (iii) retail trade; (iv) personal service activities; (v) human health activities; (vi) financial service activities; (vii) Office administrative, office support and other business support activities (viii) public administration and (viii) information and communication service; and two manufacturing sub-sectors such as manufacture of apparel and manufacture of food products. In addition, other studies on Delhi also reveal that the hospitality and tourism sector, emerging gig economy and other modern IT-BPO and telecom services with a provision of 'work from home' option has huge potential to generate new and additional employment opportunities for women with work-life balance.

In sum, the status of women in the workforce in Delhi clearly indicates gender disadvantage in the labour market. However, one of the most significant changes observed during the last two decades is improvement in quality of employment for women, and increasing participation of women in highly skilled and modern service sectors. But still, a large proportion of the women workers continue to be engaged in the informal sector indicating the informalisation of the formal sector. On the other hand, a very high unemployment rate exists among highly educated women with around 7 out of 10 women in Delhi still attending to domestic duties, irrespective of their educational qualifications. There is a huge possibility to bring many of them into the productive labour force by providing a suitable environment for work-life balance.

Understanding Carework as Barrier to Economic Empowerment of Women Informal workers in Delhi²

Abstract

This presentation aims to highlight the findings of a study that ISST conducted in the year 2018-19 to reiterate the need to recognize, reduce and redistribute the burden of carework that poor and marginalized women alone have to bear along with the necessity of earning a living.

This study intended to understand how women informal workers in Delhi balance their care responsibilities along with their paid work and what impact it has on them as well as their children. The study collected data from 426 women respondents living across 9 districts of Delhi in areas such as Shahabad Dairy, Holambi Kalan, Rangpur Pahadi, Mangolpuri, Mandawali, Jwalanagar, Dwarka and Sultanpuri. The respondents were selected on the basis that they had at least one child below the age of 6 at the time of data collection and also worked in any one of the following sectors of informal work: domestic work, street vending, construction work or waste picking. Initially, a survey was conducted with the respondents followed by Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to get an in-depth understanding of the strategies that women adopt in managing their everyday work and the struggles that they have to deal with.

The findings of this study highlighted that irrespective of the sector that the respondents were engaged in, the major responsibility of child care work and household work inside the house was borne by women. Husbands appeared to take on negligible responsibility, but the older child in most households, mainly girl child played an important role in terms of providing support to the mother, both in looking after younger siblings as well as in doing household work of cooking and cleaning.

In terms of child care, the study highlighted that woman adopted various strategies but these strategies differed based on the sector they were employed in. While most domestic workers and waste pickers employed in godowns preferred to keep their children alone at home or in sibling care, majority of the construction workers and the street vendors carried their children with them to their place of work. FGDs revealed that this was because domestic workers and waste pickers were not allowed to bring their children to workplaces while the street vendors, being self-employed and construction workers had no such compulsion. They preferred to take the child with them to work as there was no one at home to look after. Lack of any help at home or in the community itself pressed them to adopt such difficult strategies.

² *Monika Banerjee, Research Fellow, ISST, New Delhi*

Anganwadis were not seen as a solution as they opened for a very short duration, about 1-2 hours, and this did not help the women in pursuing their work. In fact, it became more of a liability as in most places the children had to be dropped and picked from the centre.

The study highlighted that this constant juggling between paid and unpaid work had implications at several levels. One, it impacted their ability to take out time for rest. Women were found to be constantly multitasking. Two, their paid work choices appeared linked to their need to focus on their carework responsibilities. Women preferred to work near their homes and in sectors which gave them the flexibility to manage unpaid work along with paid work; hence mostly as part-time workers and for negligible wages. Three, women also had to constantly deal with problems at workplaces due to their care responsibilities. These include the inability to take leave, pay cuts, job loss, as well as threats and scolding from employers.

The study also highlights the grave impact that mother's need to constantly manage both paid and unpaid work has on the child as well as the older siblings. The child's well-being and safety came across as a constant concern as mothers are unable to provide exclusive care to them and they are mostly left on their own or in the care of another young child. The older siblings are also at risk of sharing the burden of mother's care work which not only has an impact on their health and well-being but also their ability to live their childhood, to learn and to grow.

This study thus, clearly highlighted that the invisibility of women in paid work or their choice of work options is not only linked to the kind of work opportunities that are available to them but also the care responsibilities they have. Women have to juggle numerous tasks throughout the day and while mothering is considered integral to their identity, they are rarely able to devote exclusive time to it and are usually found doing several other activities along with looking after their children. This has a negative impact not only on the physical and mental well-being of the mother but also compromises the health, nutrition and growth of the child as well as the health and education of older children.

Who Wants to Become an Entrepreneur? A Gender-based Analysis ³

Abstract

Entrepreneurship has long been the catalyst for economic growth and change (Schaper and Volery 2004; Venkatachalam and Waqif 2005). The formal labour market is saturated, unable to absorb the ever-increasing number of the labour force. Small-medium entrepreneurship is vital for economic prosperity and social stability. Women's participation in the labour force is low, but a large segment is self-employed or is a budding entrepreneur. In recent years female entrepreneurship has attracted a considerable amount of attention in academic research and many governments have taken measures to support it (Carter and Ó Cinnéide 2007). "An entrepreneur is an entrepreneur", however, the reasons for the gender gap in entrepreneurship are still not fully understood. Previous studies have suggested that psychological reasons may contribute to the gender gap in entrepreneurship (Verheul et al. 2012). They found that the relatively low-risk tolerance of women makes them less willing to become self-employed. Optimism seems to have a significant influence on male and female entrepreneurship especially in the early stages of the entrepreneurial process. Past empirical research also focused on various personality characteristics and revealed that women score different from men in characteristics such as fear of failure (Wagner 2007), risk attitudes (Caliendo et al. 2009 & 2011, Fosen, 2012), self-confidence (Koellinger et al. 2013), or the willingness to compete (Boñte and Piegeler 2013).

However, in India, women face a range of cultural, financial, and legal barriers to their ability to start and grow businesses. To enable women to fully contribute to and benefit from economic growth, barriers to women in business need to be addressed. These barriers include limited access to finance, markets, skills training, networks, and information, as well as onerous and/or discriminatory laws and regulations. Women in the region are also more vulnerable to poverty than men, not simply because they have lower incomes, but also because their ability to access economic opportunities is constrained by discriminatory attitudes that restrict their mobility, limit employment choices and hinder control over assets (UNDP 2010, Rustagi and Menon, 2009).

A number of researchers have made an attempt to identify the characteristics of an entrepreneur. Following the trait approach to entrepreneurship, previous researches from different countries have linked personality traits of locus of control, tolerance for ambiguity, need for achievement, innovation and risk-taking propensity to entrepreneur (Armstrong and Hird, 2009 & Marques et al. 2012). These studies have come up from a varied number of countries like the USA, Russia, Spain, Singapore, Turkey, etc. It is seen that research evidence from India seems to be missing. Thus, in order to build and develop the existing line of research, the present study attempts to investigate the influence of demographic, social and personal dispositional factors on entrepreneurial inclination amongst students from higher education systems in India.

³ Swati Dutta, Fellow, IHD

The previous literature has focused on the effect of specific psychological factors on entrepreneurial success hence measure the partial effects of such psychological factors. This paper contributes to the literature by taking into account the group of personality traits that can be matched to tasks of entrepreneurs i.e., self-efficacy, internal locus of control, proactiveness, autonomy, innovativeness, optimism, risk tolerance and competitiveness. The study will analyse the joint effect of task matched personality traits. For this purpose, the study will compute the index of summed scores of the task matched personality traits which we call Individual Entrepreneurial Aptitude (IEA). Acknowledging the growing number of educated unemployed youth in the country, there is a need to assess the attitudes and perceptions towards entrepreneurship among students in higher education institutions. This paper presents an interesting scope for examining the gender differences in the attitudes towards entrepreneurship and dimensions among the current college or university going students. This paper has focused on the role of individual characteristics to become an entrepreneur. In particular, a micro perspective on how the youth view entrepreneurship is examined through a first time survey of men and women in undergraduate and post-graduate colleges in NCR Delhi.

In general, it is observed that the IEA score for public institute is higher than private institutions and the difference is statistically significant. Additionally, there are gender differences within public and private institutions in terms of personality traits. Male students in public institutions were more likely to be risk takers, have control over life decisions, general optimism, competitiveness, and are innovative. On the contrary, there was very little significant gender difference in the private colleges. The students in private colleges perhaps come from upper class households and the girls are equally encouraged and motivated.

In most of the cases, gender mean differences for personality traits for technical institutions are insignificant. On the other hand, gender differences for non-technical courses exist for being a risk taker, internal vs external control and general optimism. A possible explanation is the technical institutions take the cream of the students in India irrespective of gender, hence the variation in personality traits is very low. In the non-technical course, there is wide diversity in the student population in terms of ability, aptitude and interest and this might be reflected in the differences in personality traits by gender as well.

The study also carries enormous implications for gender differences in inclination towards entrepreneurship in India. Indian society has evolved as a traditionally male-dominated one. Women tend to be considered as the weaker sex and socio-economically dependent on men throughout their life. Women mostly occupy subordinate positions and execute decisions generally made by male members of the family (Shah, 2013). This is actually reflected in lower scores in IEA for women.

The national entrepreneurship policy of the Government of India has come up with special encouragement provisions for women and minorities to promote inclusive entrepreneurship. This will finally help to close the gender gap in entrepreneurship.



SESSION 2

ADDRESSING CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN'S WORK

Home-Based Work in Informal Settlements- Integrating a Lens of Women's Livelihoods in Urban Infrastructure⁵

Abstract

This paper will attempt to understand the experience of the home-based woman workers based on the empirical research work done by ISST in Delhi. It will do so in understanding 'home' as their work-space as well as a gendered space. Basically, trying to build on the home-work continuum and what other factors affect this home and workspace boundary-infrastructure, paid-unpaid (care) work, impacts of informality etc. At the same time, home-based work continues to not be considered as 'work' and women home-based workers continue to be considered as 'supplementary' workers⁶. The paper draws from ISST's research work on home-based workers in informal settlements and homes as an extension of their work-space as well as habitat impacts home-based workers. It also draws from the ISST's recent studies on understanding the Covid and subsequent lockdown impact on home-based workers. In other words, then, the paper is an attempt to look at home-based work through a) the broad perspective of gendered work and the informality around it; b) home, habitat and work of home-based workers; c) Covid induced challenges to the vulnerability of home-based workers.

'Home-based work' as a category is a recent induction to policy and research. Both the fluidity of the nature of women's labour that spills over to multiple activities/work as well as the place of work which is 'home'⁷ for the home-based worker, have been fundamental in making up the definitions of home-based work.

A small farmer works on her farm and if it's not a good season, on other's farms as a labourer. When the agriculture season is over, she goes to the forests to collect gum or other forest produce. Year round, she produces hand embroidered items either at a piece-rate for a contractor or sells it to a trader who comes to her village to buy goods. Now how shall we categorize her trade? Does she belong to the agricultural sector, the forestry sector, or the handicraft sector? Is she the farmer or the farm worker? Is she self-employed or a piece-rate worker? For the lack of fit into a category, her work status suffers and her right of representation in the union movement is unrealized. The tyranny of definition has condemned her to be a nobody (Bhatt 2004:7).

⁵ Gurpreet Kaur, Research Consultant, ISST, New Delhi

⁶ This is also the case of many other informal women workers, however it is specifically so for the home-based workers as a peculiarity of their invisibility.

⁷ However 'home' is also always not clear, especially for populations that migrate or live in precarious conditions and therefore literature also suggests the defining of 'home' is important for the home-based worker.

The challenge with ‘counting’ or visibilizing HBW is that it is not a sector of production. It cuts across categories of “industry,” “occupation” and “activity status” by which workers are classified. Further, it has also been observed with home-based workers that they fall under the continuum of productive-reproductive activity that makes it difficult to glean out the actual working hours and economic activities. Moreover, the workplace is not always clear as ‘home’ can be inside the home, outside, neighbourhood locality etc.

Further, there is a peculiar nature of informality in home-based work- that because of its deep level of invisibilization and hidden nature, any kind of formalization (in terms of any kind of social security benefits, or coverage under formal laws) escapes the cracks that home-based work allows for. Infact it is the very nature of home-based work at the site of home as a place of work that reinforces all kinds of stereotyping of the woman worker- that the home-based worker is only a supplementary worker or helper. Infact the home-based worker herself never identifies herself as a 'worker' but talks about her work as 'time-pass' (ISST Study 2017). Further children's contributions to home-based work are another significant dimension to HBW that escapes the laws on child labour for instance, as well as enhances the labour of children, especially young girls/daughters in the household- contributing to the HBW income or sometimes doing HBW independently. And amidst all of this, the home-based worker is also involved in doing care work for children, elderly and ill. In that sense, the existence of HBW in its current form reinforces and promotes the idea that women are the primary caregivers-that is why they chose to do home-based work-which is supplementary work. And this completely takes away the fact that women in HBW are working throughout the day, putting more number of hours of work than anyone in a formal setting of work and yet their labour goes unrecognised, invisibilized and continues to remain hidden.

“Preeti, who was stitching masks from SEWA at ₹ 4 per piece till September, was cutting threads of T-shirts and tops at 50 paise per piece in November” (ISST Covid 19- Phase II study; 2021). The above quote presents to us the story of the precarity of a home-based worker in the uncertain period of the pandemic. It is reflective of the cheap labour that these workers continue to perform and of the need of work that the worker is reduced to.

Further, why talk about home, habitat or informal settlements in relation to women workers? The idea of ‘habitat’ is linked to the question of ‘home’ which forms a significant part of the life of a woman worker and therefore it is important to think about what happens when there are shifts in the home (which is also a space of work). Also in an experiential sense, *home-work-space-city* form an integral part of the continuous negotiation that women are doing as workers and as women. A space and particularly an urban informal space in the context of metropolises like Delhi is often understood in policy documents and court language as a space without a history and emptied of those who live within it. However, it is the same space where the lives and livelihood of people living in urban informal settlements and of marginalized women workers, in particular, are located. The paper will finally attempt to show the interdependency between paid work and domestic and care responsibilities and her negotiations around time as illustrated through a case study from the ISST 2018 study conducted in Delhi.

Persisting Servitude and Gradual Shift Towards Recognition and Dignity of Labour: A Study of Employers of Domestic Workers in Delhi and Mumbai⁸

Abstract

Domestic workers are increasingly becoming a large segment of the urban regular workforce reflecting a rise in both the labour supplies and demand for such work. Different factors are at play for these two dimensions, while supply side aspects have been studied previously by several scholars, focus on demand side perspectives have remained few and far between. Given the rising importance of the labour market for domestic workers, this study was undertaken with the aim to capture the demand-side story of female domestic workers by focusing on the various dimensions of the employers' perspective. It was conducted in the two metropolitan cities of Delhi and Mumbai with the objective to find answers to research questions: (i) How do employers recruit domestic workers and what are the opportunities for change? (ii) What is the perception of employers on domestic work in terms of skills required, opportunity costs? and (iii) Are employers aware that domestic work is a legitimate labour market activity conducted in an employment relationship?

This study was sponsored by ILO and the survey was jointly conducted in 2015 by the Institute for Human Development (IHD) in Delhi and the Centre for Development Research and Action (CDRA) in Mumbai. The survey followed a mixed methods approach with quantitative survey and qualitative interviews of different types of employers across different socio-economic strata. A total of 6010 households were listed from both cities, 4041 in Delhi and 1969 from Mumbai. The employers' sample of 1000 + employer households were selected through a multi stage stratified sampling (city stratification, locality/ colony selection, household listing, and identification of domestic worker employer household).

The findings of the survey indicate that the income level of the household has a positive association with the demand for domestic workers. A bulk of the employer households demand domestic workers as part time workers (90%), while the rest 10 per cent constitute 5 per cent of full-time live outs and another 5 per cent live-ins. The households employing full time live outs tend to be relatively more in Mumbai compared to Delhi given the space constraints in the former.

While the need for domestic workers is being acknowledged by employers, recognition of their work as that of any other worker, who must be protected for their rights remains low. Most employers depend on recruitment channels that are informal i.e., through friends, neighbours, relatives. Ironically, the trust on these networks supersedes the faith in identity checks and registration with Police. Preferences of employers for their domestic workers are interestingly shifting away from traditional factors such as caste, religion, region etc. to more work-related preferences such as efficiency, tidiness, punctuality, attitude to work, etc.

⁸ *Preet Rustagi (late), Ritu Dewan, Balwant Mehta, Deeksha Tayal, IHD*

The demand side of the labour market for domestic workers is segmented with different tasks being hierarchized. The tasks of washing utensils, sweeping and swabbing the floors are at the bottom of the ladder, while babysitters, cooks and healthcare workers are at the higher end.

On the issue of skill training, the employers surveyed hardly expressed any inclination towards skill development since they are not interested in paying domestic workers higher wages for the same or similar work. Employers are mostly keen on getting cheaper labour and do not consider most of the menial activities domestic workers carry out as worthy of any skill requirements.

In India, labour legislations do not provide protection to domestic workers and their rights. The prime reason being the fact that it was believed that those engaged in “personal service” cannot be covered by such laws because the household or home is not considered an “industry” to which labour laws could apply. Hence, domestic workers are currently not entitled to any minimum wages or social security benefits, and their working conditions or hours of work are also not regulated.

One of the most important points that emerged from this study relates to the general lack of public awareness of domestic work as a legitimate labour market activity, compounded by the low social status unfairly accorded to the occupation, which is reflected in the poor payments. It is not only the informality associated with this work, but also the personalized and isolated nature of the domestic work which adds to the peculiarity of these activities. It is not regulated by or moderated by any formal institutions or legal provisions. Nevertheless, the regulation and formalization of the domestic employment relationship is in the interests of both workers and employers. Specifying the rights and duties of each party will remove many of the difficulties that employers sometimes face, ranging from frequent absences, poor-quality service and quitting without notice to crimes such as theft, kidnapping, etc. At the same time, it will pave the way for gradual movement towards the realization of decent working conditions for domestic workers.



SESSION 3

**ADOLESCENT
ASPIRATIONS AND FUTURE
OF WOMEN'S WORK**

Adolescent Aspirations and the Everyday Negotiations⁹

Abstract

The period of adolescence is marked not only with rapid individual changes in one's physical, emotional and intellectual capacities, but is also a stage of life when the individual is constantly negotiating with her own aspirations and the myriad and varied expectations from her socio-economic environment. Thus, it is a period fraught with uncertainties and dilemmas that could enhance one's vulnerabilities but on the other hand, it is also a stage that represents scores of opportunities and choices to shape one's life.

'The literature suggests that adolescent's future-oriented cognitions shape their ultimate attainments, the underlying processes through which this occurs are not well understood' (Beal 2010). However, several studies point to the understanding that poverty conditions such as poor access to resources and deprivation is an important factor that constrains the realization of aspirations (Dalton, Ghosal, Mani 2015). Aspiration failure is as such seen as a result of multiple factors that are external to the individual. However, Appadurai (2004) emphasizes that the characteristics internalized by the poor result in their lack of capacity to aspire. To him, the capacity to aspire is more fully developed in the relatively rich, as greater power, dignity and material resources that the rich possess, results in a better navigational ability to grab opportunities. On the other hand, the poor live surrounded by experiential limitations 'that create a binary relationship to core cultural values, negative and skeptical at one pole, over attached at the other' (Appadurai 2004: 69). Thus, in Appadurai's contention, capacity to aspire and its realization is internal to the culture of underprivileged populations resulting in the persistence of poverty.

Keeping the above in view, the primary goal of this paper is to critically understand the determining factors in the formation of aspirations among adolescents in the underprivileged urban scenario of Delhi. The paper uses a gendered lens to understand the role played by social norms, access to resources, adolescent agency and other contextual factors in shaping the career trajectories of young adults. Further, the paper will explore the ways by which adolescent experiences and intersectionalities influence the transition of young adults into the labour market (or not). Additionally, the paper would share the voices of adolescents highlighting the influential actors and institutions in shaping their aspirations, their anxieties and fears, interests and opportunities, and over and above their experience of everyday struggle over realizing their aspirations. Based on the above analysis, the aim of the paper would be to study the dynamic relation between the internal and external factors associated with poverty in relation to adolescent's capacity to aspire. Furthermore, the paper would identify systemic changes needed in the urban underprivileged socio-cultural and economic infrastructure that would enable the adolescents to make better choices and thereby create pathways to more empowered adulthood.

⁹ Mubashira Zaidi, *Research Fellow, ISST, New Delhi*

The study was conducted in urban disadvantaged communities of Kalyanpuri and nearby areas located in East Delhi. It used a mixed methodology including a detailed survey conducted with 127 young adults in the age group of 13-25, to understand their personal and family backgrounds, access to resources, time-use, access to information, issues of safety and security, aspirations and reasons behind their aspirational choices, influential actors in their lives and affiliation to non-governmental organizations. Qualitative tools included focused group discussions (FGDs) using participatory games and tools with adolescents and young adults, FGDs were also conducted with parents in the community to understand their aspirations for their children. The FGDs focused on socio-cultural norms and experiences of adolescents and parents in negotiating the available resources and norms in their effort to realize their aspirations. The FGDs were recorded and transcribed, and uploaded into Nvivo12 for coding and thematic analysis. The survey was conducted in February and March 2018, while the FGDs with children continued for carried out in the following three months. However, the paper also includes insights of the researcher based on her continued interaction with the girls and boys of Kalyanpuri in the year 2018-19 during the first phase of the project 'Creating an Enabling Environment for Realization of Adolescent Aspirations' at the Saathi Centre of the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) that was implemented with funding support from American Jewish World Service (AJWS)

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Organising Work as Migrant Domestic Workers and Construction Workers in the National Capital Region of India¹⁰

Abstract

Exodus of migrant workers from different cities in India during the first wave of pandemic had brought the so far invisible issues of migrant workers into the light. The discourse in the public domain focussed mainly on male workers and women were portrayed more as mothers. Gender Studies scholars had always raised concerns on the overemphasis of the social angle of women's migration. This paper intends to bring forth the intertwined social and economic reasons behind women's migration and issues that emerge from women's organisation of paid and unpaid work. The objective of the paper is to unravel the "conjugated oppressions" faced by the informal sector workers in the last tiers of the supply chain. The women whose worklives have been discussed are migrant workers who work in the National Capital Region (NCR) as paid domestic workers and construction workers.

The qualitative data used in this paper are from the dataset of an ongoing study. Women were interviewed in slums and construction sites located in the south and west of Delhi and in Gurugram. The live-in domestic workers were interviewed in south of Delhi. The workers all lived with their families and had reproductive responsibilities. Narratives of thirty women workers have been used in this study, of whom twenty eight migrated from villages, only two of them migrated from small towns. Among the migrants interviewed, six were marriage migrants. For most women who migrated from rural areas, the first migration was marriage migration, from their natal villages to marital villages. However, this paper only focuses on the last migration to National Capital Region (NCR), where they were interviewed as informal sector workers.

The paper discusses the entire work continuum of women workers to see how the paid work and unpaid work are interrelated and how migration has impacted the continuum. Since they were interviewed as informal sector workers, the paid work has been used as the entry point to understand their organisation of work. The discussions are based on women's interpretations and perception of the relationship between their productive and reproductive work.

The paper discusses the reasons for migration and while doing so it throws light on the agrarian distress that emerges from most of the narratives as the major push factor facilitating migration. It underlines how women, who mostly represent socially and economically vulnerable groups, were already in the margins when they migrated to the cities. The narratives reveal lived experiences of desperation and economic distress with no support system to fall back on. The continuing agrarian distress had impacted families adversely. Urban centric economic development in India had compelled families to migrate to the cities in search of livelihoods.

¹⁰ *Sudeshna Sengupta, Visiting Fellow, IHD*

Their journeys to the cities were followed by the process of finding work. Since most migrations were both social and economic in nature, finding paid work was important. This was observed even in the case of marriage migrants. They mainly depended on social networks they had developed in their villages to access paid work. Some of the women accessed paid work through their husband's social network or through their neighbours in the cities. Already deprived of social capital in the form of formal education, the livelihood options were limited. The fragmented and gendered informal labour market options comprised of only low paid, menial jobs.

As women with reproductive responsibilities, they adopted diverse strategies in organising work. The patterns of organising work depended on the hours needed in paid work, flexibilities available in paid work, distance from the workplace and support available within families in regard to reproductive work. Many women who had strong roots in the villages kept their school going children in the villages. The relationships with villages were found to be diverse and villages played an important role in reproduction. The low wages were inadequate to sustain families and hence reproductive costs were subsidised by unpaid family labour mainly residing in the villages.

The precarious working conditions in terms of wages and leaves had influenced worklives in many ways. The wages were low, the contracts were verbal and there was no job security. Being migrants, they had lower bargaining power in fear of losing jobs. Distress migration deepened their marginalisation. The employers were described as benevolent or abusive, there was no question of rights. The workspaces at times showed overlap of productive and reproductive work and work relations for construction workers were also found to be "social" in nature. The sectoral law for construction workers was not implemented. Similarly, laws providing maternity benefits to paid domestic workers were also not implemented. The market controlled labour using the local hierarchy. The presence or absence of laws did not make any difference. It was an informal, intertwined social and economic control using the ideology of patriarchy and material accumulation. The state was absent as a provider and a regulator that allowed employers to flout laws.

Migration helped some of the workers to improve their material conditions and also to come out of their debts. But it did not change the precarity of working conditions even after decades spent in one occupation and most of them could never belong to the cities. They had nothing in the cities to fall back on when they were out of paid work.

An Exploratory Study on Women Workers in the Gig Economy¹¹

Abstract

In recent years, advancements in the field of information and communication technology (ICTD) have further casualized the market with digitally driven platforms of work. In urban India, the platform economy has seen tremendous growth over the last few years and with widespread digitization and access to cheaper smartphones, this new form of non-standard work has huge potential to grow over the next decade. In fact, the platform based apps for ride – sharing and food and logistics delivery were declared essential services by the Indian government in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent national lockdown that followed.

The platform economy continues to be male-dominated in India and the study, ‘An exploratory study on women workers in the gig economy in India’ aimed at primarily understanding the gendered experiences of the gig economy. One finds a paucity of literature globally on the experiences of women workers in the platform economy and this research aimed to fill this void. The study was unique as it covered experiences across the platform economy rather than concentrating on a singular platform or work sector. Post a desk-based mapping, the qualitative study included women respondents from four work sectors: **domestic work, beauty work, cab services and food delivery**. The study was conducted in three major cities of Delhi-NCR, Mumbai and Bangalore with women workers, platform representatives and worker trade unions and policy makers based on access; data collection before the pandemic was face-to-face but thereafter was mostly conducted through phones and Zoom keeping in mind all research ethical considerations. This presentation will focus on the salient findings of the study along with some unique findings relevant to Delhi-NCR.

The main research question for this study: What is the gendered nature of the work that women perform, and what are their gendered experiences of working in the platform economy? The research analyzed in detail the working conditions and the experiences of the women in the four sectors. The study also looked collectivization processes and regulatory mechanisms available to women in the gig economy. A unique attempt was also made by the study to map the gig economy in the country based on the understanding of the structure of the apps and companies operating in the gig economy. The study also covered some aspects of the impact of the pandemic felt by the women respondents on their work during the course of the study.

Women workers continued to be *ghettoed* in the domestic and beauty work, traditionally feminized sectors. Lack of social and legal protection makes it difficult for women workers in the platform economy because of their historical position of subordination in society. Furthermore, the research also debunks the concept of ‘flexibility and autonomy’ which is the cornerstone of this economy, as the algorithms control the workers time and capacity to earn

¹¹ Anweshaa Ghosh, Research Fellow, ISST, New Delhi

via incentives. Beyond the perceived “flexibility”, it is important to keep in mind that mostly these platforms are gendered in nature. Even when the entry restrictions are lowered, with gig platforms opening up economic opportunities, *the existing gendered practices in the traditional markets have only duplicated on these models*. The work timings, infrastructure, high demand service hours, unpaid responsibilities are some of the factors that impact the flexibility of the women worker, irrespective of whether flexibility is there or not. Under working conditions, the study found that more companies were not providing contracts to their workers. While being commendable, one found most women workers were not sure of the contents of the contract either owing to language, or general indifference to the same. Also, in some cases, women were also expected to sign a bond when they joined the company which

Further, while mapping the gig economy, two models were developed by the researchers based on the findings – (i) the gig model and; (ii) the hybrid model. Using these models as the basis, in this study, we discussed how women workers negotiate the following characteristics: ease of entry/exit, asset requirement, flexibility and autonomy, risk and vulnerability, ability/capacity to earn. Hybrid models have a mix of characteristics that are either built upon the existing market models or have additionally added new characteristics. In this study, we found that women-centric models hover around the hybrid model. Companies under the hybrid models tangibly showed more concern about women’s care responsibilities and safety at the workplace. However, scaling up was difficult in terms of business given these restrictions and angel investors were hesitant to fund such initiatives.

Notably, women continued to face sexual harassment at the workplace in the gig economy, but platforms and legal mechanisms are yet to take this up seriously. The pandemic also disproportionately affected women’s work on the platforms as their already low earning capacities and restricted movements forced most of them to quit or migrate back to their hometowns. Given the masculine nature of the unions, women’s voices were mostly invisibilized making them more vulnerable during the pandemic.



SESSION 4

WOMEN'S WORK DURING PANDEMIC AND CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Is the Multiplier Effect from Urban Women's Employment Leading to Generation of Good Quality Employment? A Look at the Female Domestic Workers in Delhi NCR and Kolkata-Asansol¹²

Abstract

Declining women's labour force participation and stagnant workforce participation notwithstanding, NSS data shows that during the period 1993-94 and 2011-12, there was an increase in the absolute number of employed women in urban India. The importance of urban employment for women has continued in the years following 2011-12. Due to increased female work participation in the urban sector, the second round of vacancies are being generated in the family space with higher demand for care workers. The second order vacancies in the care economy are mostly being filled by females, such as maids, cooks, etc. Thus, a multiplier effect of female work participation is being created. The present paper addresses itself to the question of whether the multiplier process is giving rise to decent employment with regard to female domestic workers.

The main study was based on a primary survey across the four cities of Delhi, Noida, Kolkata and Asansol involving 424 households. Significant evidence was obtained that a rise in female work participation creates a vacancy for the care work at the household level and triggers second round job creation for female domestic workers. Next, the quality of employment of the female domestic workers was examined on the basis of a primary survey conducted in the four sample cities/towns with a total of 80 female domestic workers.

The survey findings showed that the female domestic worker's employment generated in the second round as a result of the multiplier effect of urban women's employment, is informal and characterised by fairly low wages. Moreover, this employment is uncertain and has precarious working conditions.

The workers belong to poor socio-economic strata and are poorly educated and largely unskilled. The workers in Kolkata and Noida reported monthly wages above minimum wages in the country, while those in Delhi and Asansol, reported average earnings less than the minimum wages. The wages in Asansol were particularly low, raising questions whether demand for domestic workers is more of a phenomenon in metropolises rather than in smaller towns.

A high rate of job-switching was observed in West Bengal because of low wages. In Delhi NCR the highest reason for switching jobs is employers shifting to new localities, which serves to highlight the precarious nature of the domestic workers' employment.

However, the informal nature of employment notwithstanding, the female domestic workers' income does supplement their household earnings. The average household earnings in Delhi NCR vary in the range of Rs 18000-20000 a month. In this, the earnings of the domestic worker can comprise up to a third of the total. For a household with only the female domestic

¹² *Tanuka Endow, Professor, IHD*

worker as the main earner, the situation would be much harder. The respondents include widowed women who have to support themselves and their children on their own income and face a lot of hardship to make ends meet.

The precarity of this type of employment is evident from the fact that if employers shift residence to a different location, the worker loses her employment and in the absence of a formal contract, employers can replace the workers without much notice. Another dimension that adds to the uncertainty is sickness and disease. Given the double burden of income-earning work and own domestic work, the female domestic worker is crucially dependent on her health and strength. They incur considerable health-related expenditure. In particular, major episodes of illness and associated out of pocket expenses can be a significant setback, and it also poses the risk of losing one's job due to prolonged absence.

With the dual responsibility of income-earning work which involves cleaning, cooking, washing utensils, etc. and responsibilities of similar nature in own household, over and above care work for children and elderly at home, the female domestic worker does not get adequate time for rest. The time-use information shows that their daily life revolves around physical work comprising earning work outside the home which includes commuting/walking and domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, washing, taking care of family members, etc. Thus, there is a continuous exhausting cycle of work with very little rest for them.

This dependence on continued good health for her livelihood makes the domestic worker vulnerable. This vulnerability is deepened given the lack of any social security such as fixed medical leave, health insurance, pension, etc. as well as the considerable out of pocket expenses for medical treatment.

On the upside, however, the survey findings indicate that they have autonomy in the household. They have a voice in the domain of decisions regarding meals, medical treatment, communication with natal family, such as visiting them, talking to them over the phone, etc. Autonomy is less in the domains of large expenditure, social visits, etc.

If we keep in mind that more than 80 per cent of the workers in India work in the informal sector, which is characterized by low pay, poor work conditions and no social security, it is seen that female domestic workers are no exception. However, whatever meagre earnings they get does contribute to the household expenses, and sometimes towards building assets, and above all contributes towards their increased say in decision-making within the household.

The working conditions for the female domestic workers, the need for social security, their low wage levels, are all areas which need much more attention from policy-makers. Health insurance as well as pension plans are schemes that would benefit the domestic workers greatly, given that their work involves the requirement of robust health and, preferably, the strength that youth brings with it. The present study was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown. It has been widely reported that during the phased lockdowns in cities in the last one year, domestic workers have been severely hit by the pandemic in terms of loss of income and employment. This recent experience only serves to

reinforce the need for greater formalization of the female domestic workers' employment and for providing them with social security to counter the uncertain nature of their employment.

Working Women, Delhi Metro and Covid-19: A Case Study in Delhi-NCR¹³

Abstract

Access to safe, reliable, and affordable public transport facilitates women's mobility and is increasingly recognized as a critical determinant of women's economic engagement. The Delhi Metro Rail Network has ushered in a new era in the sphere of gender sensitive means of mass transit through specific provisions for the safety of women passengers. This rapid means of public transport provides a reliable, efficient and safe means of commuting for women. The paper explores the impact of the Metro on the commuting pattern of working women in the Delhi-NCR region. It tries to capture the changes in the perception of women towards using public transport in enabling mobility. It also draws attention to the travel related challenges faced by women that were magnified during the pandemic.

The paper is a part of a primary survey-based study conducted for an ICSSR funded project in the Delhi-NCR region. Quantitative and qualitative information was collected from 462 women in the age cohort of 20 years to 65 years. The women respondents in our sample are divided into three categories: (i) those who never travelled for work outside the home; (ii) those who earlier travelled for work outside the home but left their job due to some reason(s); (iii) those currently travelling for work outside the home. The survey was conducted between April 2020 and November 2020.

The study found that 47.6% of women use the metro regularly for commuting to-and-from their office on a daily basis; 28.3% use it occasionally for this purpose; and 24.1% never use it to travel to and from the office. The frequency of metro usage by working women is dependent on several factors like distance between home and workplace, extent of coverage of the metro network, age of working women, domestic work burden, and income earned by women.

Delhi metro has changed the perception of women towards mobility by public transport. Young women consider the metro to be the most comfortable means of commuting to their educational institutions, and for job search. Metro connectivity has been particularly beneficial for women travelling long distances between their home and workplace. It helps them avoid the fatigue and delays from traffic jams on Delhi roads during peak office hours. Despite the unsupportive attitude of the family members, availability of the metro facilitated women in engaging in diverse occupations. It actually helped them convince their family members to let them work outside the home. Because of metro connectivity, 42% of the women in our sample who have never travelled for work outside the home, indicated their willingness to travel to the workplace if they get a job.

The metro has undoubtedly been the preferred means of public transport for women in Delhi, but there are some challenges that still need to be addressed. **70% of our respondents raised the issue of overcrowding of metro coaches and major intersection stations, especially**

¹³ Deeksha Tayal, Senior Researcher, IHD and Aasha Kapur Mehta, Professor, IHD

during peak hours. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the problem of overcrowding raised apprehensions about the possibility of travelling safely in the metro. In our survey, we found that fear of infection stigmatized the utility of the Delhi metro for female riders. **45.7% of the women said that the affordability of metro service is a problem.** The pandemic has brought into sharp focus this widely discussed dimension of the Delhi metro. The lesser educated women, employed in unskilled occupations face increased risk of job loss due to lockdown and economic contraction. Case studies of daily wage earners indicate that low wages and unaffordable metro fares left them with no option but to **walk to-and-from their workplace.** Delhi metro has several provisions for ensuring the safety and security of women passengers. Despite all possible measures, the safety of women continues to be a cause of concern especially outside metro stations, due to the problem of last-mile connectivity or end-to-end connectivity.

The paper concludes that **the** Delhi metro has enhanced the freedom of mobility of women. Challenges such as overcrowding are being addressed by increasing the frequency of trains and the number of coaches in each train, especially during peak hours. To address the safety concerns of women in the metro, CCTV footage must be monitored on a real-time basis and immediate remedial action taken where any kind of misbehaviour is noticed.

Functional street lights, clear space on footpaths for walking, frequent plying of e-rickshaws and taxis operated by women in the evening hours, together with better police patrolling will help to address concerns regarding last mile connectivity. Lack of user friendliness of the metro system and difficulties in access for those with health issues or difficulties that are age-related are among the issues that still need attention. Support in using escalators, finding the correct platform, interchanging from one line to another, etc., are some other important dimensions that need attention in order to enable increased accessibility of the Delhi Metro network.

Locating the Processes of Non-State Frontline Workers during Pandemic ¹⁴

Abstract

The COVID 19 pandemic brought the world to a standstill. With lockdowns being announced in major parts of the world, India too went into a nationwide lockdown on 24th March 2020. The sudden announcement of the lockdown created a panic situation in several parts of the country, impacting lower socio-economic groups and those engaged in informal economic activities the most. Within these groups, women have faced the brunt of the crisis with additional care burden, responsibilities of accessing resources and shadow pandemic of violence against women that has exponentially increased during the lockdown. At the same time, we also observe women at the forefront of providing support. The state response to address the crisis has been reactive (and also charity driven) and often is not considerate to the different kinds of vulnerabilities of marginalized sections of the society. The community-based organizations and local networks however were able to address the crisis and identify the needs of the people in a more effective manner mainly using informal networks and direct engagement with the community members.

This study explores the role of non-state frontline workers including community volunteers, civil societies and local groups in providing care and support to the communities. The presentation will share the findings from the study carried out by ISST from January to March 2021. This was a qualitative study using in-depth semi-structured interviews in four slum settlements of Delhi- Seelampur, Sanjay Camp, JJ Colony Bawana and Yamuna Khadar. The presentation will provide findings from two of these areas Seelampur and Yamuna Khadar focusing on the voices of the communities experiencing this crisis and relief work by the non-state actors during the crisis. Hence, this presentation aims to highlight the local specificities of these areas which are unique and similar in their own ways and provide an intersectional understanding of the crisis juxtaposing with the role of other significant state and non-state actors in crisis management. The study, through primary and secondary data, finds that both the areas have pre-pandemic vulnerabilities unique to their location. For instance, Seelampur with the existing history of communal violence was one of the areas affected by the Delhi pogroms (a month before the lockdown) resulting in loss of lives and property which severely hit the sense of social security amongst the people and led to panic whereas, Yamuna Khadar, an unauthorized Jhuggi Jhopdi is marked with frequent demolitions led by state and extremely poor infrastructure further accentuated the sense of instability within the community.

Given these pre-pandemic vulnerabilities, the study explores firstly, the experience of pandemic, the needs from the community, how the support was received and who are being

¹⁴ *Sneha Jha, Programme and Research Consultant, ISST*
Risha Ramachandran, Research Consultant, ISST and
Ashmeet Kaur Bilkhu, Research Consultant, ISST

left out (further looking into the intersections of age, gender, social status, class, livelihood, caste, religion, geographical location etc.) and secondly, into the processes, strategies and challenges of non-state frontline workers in providing care support in these communities. The presentation will also cover the nuances of the formation of these support networks at the grassroots, their motivations, mechanisms and the understanding of the crisis within each research area. Additionally, this ecosystem of support network worked in coordination with local state actors, Asha and Anganwadi workers, and other stakeholders within and beyond the community. Therefore, through field data, it emerged that grassroots-level networking is imperative to deal with such a crisis.

The non-profit organization's long trusted relationship with the communities and interventions were pertinent in the building and expanding the network and channelize the support as and when it was required. However, there is some limitation of these groups and civil society organizations that have compelled them to work in silos and with a lot of uncertainties. The data has also highlighted much of these initiatives were on an ad-hoc basis and given an unsupportive environment for non-profit organizations in the current political scenario in India, the functioning and sustaining such a support network is also a challenge. Furthermore, the systemic issue of continuous exclusion of a significant population of the city has also been elucidated through our field data. The disparity between those who have the accessibility to the government sponsored schemes and policies and those who have not has widened even more now and once again need immediate attention to address these issues from a much deeper level. Thus, the acknowledgement to these networks, groups and organization needs a strong backup and institutional mechanism from the government where they should be seen as a community support and not let them work in fragmentation.