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BAD KARMA OR DISCRIMINATION: WAGE GAPS AMONG CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN INDIA

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Abstract
Gender discrimination in our social structure continues to favor males over females, trickling down to various sectors of society, such as the workplace. Gender wage gap persist in the world for a very long time. Wage differential refers to differences in wage rates due to the location of working place, hours of work, working conditions, type of product manufactured, or other factors. It may be the difference in wages between workers with different skills working in the same industry or workers with similar skills working in different industries or regions. Gender wage gap in India vary largely across rural and urban parts of the country and across industries. The main reason behind this gap is the skewed sex ratio and female labour force participation rate across the organized and unorganized sectors of the economy. In Indian labour market the earning and wages are considerable rises but the problem of wage differentiation is the burning issue prevailing. One the most important sector for providing the direct and indirect employment is construction sector. The Construction sector in India is the second largest economic activity after agriculture and provides employment to about 33 million people. The present study is focuses on the issue of wage differentiation in the similar construction works at working sites in Trichy District of Tamilnadu. It explores gender wage gaps among construction workers in India, along the entire wage distribution to see "what happens where".

The Data required for the study have been collected from both the primary and secondary sources. This paper analyses the issue of gender parity in wages by focusing on the evolution of male-female wage gaps for an emerging economy, India, and decomposes the gaps to understand the patterns of gender-based labour market discrimination.

Key Words: Construction Industry, Gender, Wage Differentials, Gender Discrimination, Unskilled Labour.

Introduction

Gender-based discrimination is a universal phenomenon. Research across the globe provides evidence for discrimination against women of different kinds. One of the major economic discrimination against women exists in the labour market. Almost all women engaged for labour in construction work come from lower socio- economic background with no or poor literacy and skills. These workers are categorized as unorganized workers. Women in different parts of the world are denied access to equal opportunities in employment as men. Not only this, but they are paid differently than men for the same kind of work for the same number of hours. This is popularly known as Gender Wage Gap globally. The construction industry plays a vital role in the Socio-Economic development of the country. It is one of India's fastest growing sectors. It is closely associated with nation's economy. Construction Industry is recognized as the Unorganized Sector with vast labour intensity and economic activity after Agriculture in India. This Industry generates demand for both skilled and semi-skilled labour force. Construction sector is providing employment to 7% of total world employment. Today Indian construction industry employs about 33 million people. The construction labourers are one of the most vulnerable segments of the unorganized sector as there is no permanent job opportunity for them. However unlike other Industries where they are increasingly employed in semi- skilled and skilled occupations, women are engaged almost exclusively as casual manual Labourers in the Indian construction industry. The construction Industry thus plays a major role in combating the high level of employment and in absorbing surplus labour from the rural areas. The construction industry as an economic entity has a profound impact of the GDP and overall economy of the Nation. Combining the potential for employment and providing the Infrastructure facilities for practically every economic activity. The construction industry plays a decisive role in the development of the Nation. Construction workers are the backbone of the economy as they create the infrastructure necessary for industrial growth. In a globalizing economy, it is the construction workers who are constructing the new economy. Therefore one can say that the construction workers are literally the builders of modern India. The earning and wages considerably rise but the problem of wage differentiation is the burning issue in the prevailing Indian labour market. The wage differentiation can be seen not only in the different occupation but also in the same occupation and same type of work. This problem is much prevalent in the unorganized market. This study is an effort to identify gender discrimination among construction workers and identify the means of empowering women construction workers in Trichy District of Tamilnadu.

Review of Literature

The overall literature on wage discrimination in India is vast, and covers a very broad array of disciplines and methodologies. Since our study is empirical and focuses on the Rural Employment, we refer to the relevant literature here.

Kumar B. Ravi (2013) had made an effort to identify gender discrimination among construction workers and identify the means of empowering women construction workers with special reference to Vijaywada, Andhra Pradesh in India. The author had collected data through filled-up questionnaires from 440 women construction workers who were selected through stratified sampling technique. This study concluded that many women construction workers are illiterate, widows, the only earning member of the family, from depressed class and from low income families when compared to male construction workers. Women construction workers were discriminated against in wages and promotion. The findings of the study also show that the important reasons why women are not 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 the construction Industry. The findings also show that women construction workers are competent enough to be trained to become masons and they could be first formally trained and then informally trained to become masons in the construction industry in India.

Dileep Kumar M. (2013) studied on the problems of construction labourers in Pune, Maharashtra in India. In this study, he had selected a sample of 1119 construction workers from 82 construction sites in Pune. The questionnaires were filled-up by the personal interview at the working sites. The study concluded that the condition of the worker's in the construction industry is very much deplorable. Neither the law nor the contractors are showing mercy to this socially and economically poor segment of the population. It seems that getting construction firms to follow the law of the land regarding fulfillment of basic rights related to employment, safety and welfare of workers and ensuring better quality of life is still a distant dream. The results of this study can be extrapolated to other construction sites that are employing migrant workers.

Jeyanthy (2006) conducted a study on socio economic conditions of women construction workers in Tiruchirappalli. She studied the socio-economic conditions, working conditions, nature of benefits and facilities in the workplace, contribution of income to household and the problems faced by women construction workers in Edamalaiputhur area in Tiruchirappalli.

SEWA (Self Employed Women s Association 2000) The Study has been undertaken by Self Employment Women's Association [SEWA] (2000) on Construction workers in Ahmadabad City. This study was primary data based for which 250 construction workers were selected. Out of them 125 were male workers and the rest were female workers. The results show that

1. Almost all the women workers were engaged in unskilled jobs (manually carrying/transferring construction materials).
2. 60% of the male workers were occupied in this work from one generation to the next while 40% had joined this work for the first time - The average daily wages of the female workers were found to be substantially lower than the male workers. The average daily income of the female worker was Rs. 60, as against Rs. 128 for the male worker, who earned more than double of that of women.
3. The incidence of physical strain during work was more in the case of the women workers. Around 88.8% women complained of fatigue and physical strain during work, while only 74.4% of men complained about it.
4. 70% of women workers complained about chronic body aches, especially in their limbs, hands and head after they joined the construction sector, while some 16% also complained about back-pain, chest pain, skin diseases etc. In the case of male workers, 77% of them complained of pain in their limbs, hands and headache.

Kaveri (1995) notes that in Tamil Nadu women and children on worksites are called chithals, literally small people. Male workers on the other hand are periyal or big people. On large construction sites, periyals act as watchmen. They often have the responsibility for curing operations at night that require watering freshly laid cement at intervals so that it sets without cracking. The periyal's wife is expected to help him with this job but it is he who gets paid for it. Women construction workers in Tamil Nadu are employed only on a temporary and casual daily basis as unskilled workers (lifting earth loads, cutting soil, mixing cement, breaking stones) and not as masons. There is also considerable hostility from the contractors and male workers to women masons.

Harilal K.N. (1989) had focused on issue of gender wage discrimination in India. The gender wages gaps are analysed for regular wage workers in India using the 66th round of NSSO Employment – Unemployment Schedule (2009-2010). The author had examined the wage gaps across different quantiles of wage distribution. He had also estimated the standard OLS wage equation for men and women. The main finding is that of a sticky floor effect, that is, the phenomenon of declining gender log wage gaps across the quantiles.

Limitations of the Study

The present study is based upon the results of a survey conducted on 120 construction workers in Trichy District, The results of the study are subject to the limitations of sample size, regional territory, psychological, financial and emotional characteristics of surveyed population.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the Socio-economic profile of the construction workers in Trichy District of Tamilnadu.
2. To examine the wage differentiation between the male and female workers Trichy District of Tamilnadu.
3. To find out the probable reasons for this wage differentiation and
4. To suggest suitable solutions.

Hypothesis to Be Tested

H0: There is no significant difference in the total rank of wage rate among the male and female construction workers.
H1: There is significant difference in the total rank of wage rate among the male and female construction workers.

Methodology of the Study

The Data required for the study has been collected from both the primary and secondary sources.

1. **Primary data:** schedules and questionnaires filled by the construction workers in Cuddalore District, Tamil Nadu.
2. **Secondary data:** The secondary data have been collected through various government publications, reports and websites.

Sample Size: 120 construction workers in Trichy District of Tamil Nadu were interviewed by interview method through convenience sampling method.

Tools of Analysis

The collected primary data have been analysed by using SPPS (Statistical Package for Social Science) software. The statistical values like averages, standard deviation (SD) and correlation coefficients were calculated. For measuring the wage differentiation between different sections **t**-test has been used.

Results and Discussion

Table No – 1: Socio Economic Status of Sample Workers

Characteristics	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Age	23-30	64	53.34
	30-40	31	25.83
	Above 40	25	20.83
Educational Qualification	Illiterates	42	35.00
	Primary and Below	34	28.34
	Middle	28	23.33
	Secondary, Higher Sec.	16	13.33
Community	SC/ST	84	70.00
	BC	14	11.67
	MBC	22	18.33
Religion	Hindu	82	73.34
	Muslim	10	8.33
	Christian	22	18.33
Marital status	Married	22	18.33
	Unmarried	28	23.33
	Divorced	26	21.67
	Widow/ Widower	44	36.67
Status of Work	Permanent workers	98	81.67
	Informal workers	22	18.33
Working Hours	4 to 8 hours	20	16.67
	8 to 10 hours	85	70.83
	More than 10 hours	15	12.50

Source: Primary data from the field survey

1. Of the total respondents, more than half of the respondents (53.34 percent) belonged to the age group of 23 years to 30 years, about one fourth of the respondents (25.83 percent) belonged to the age group of 30 years to 40 years and one fifth of the respondents (20.83 percent) belonged to the age group above 40 years.
2. With regard to the educational qualification, more than one third of the respondents are (35percent) Illiterates, more than one fourth of the respondents (28.34 percent) completed Primary and below, and more than one fifth of the respondents (23.33percent) completed middle class and 13.33 percent completed Secondary and higher secondary.
3. Of the total construction workers, more than half of the respondents (70 percent) belonged to Scheduled cast, while one fifth of the respondents (18.33 percent) were from most back ward community and 11.67 percent were backward community.
4. With regard to the Religion, more than half of the respondents (73.34 percent) belonged to Hindu, while one fifth of the respondents (18.33 percent) were from Christian and 8.33 percent were Muslim.
5. Of the total respondents, more than a third of the respondents (36.67 percent) were widows, less than one fifth of the respondents (23.33 percent) were unmarried, about one fifth of the respondents (261.67 percent) were divorced and one fifth of the respondents (18.33 percent) were married.
6. With regard to the occupation, more than three fourths of the respondents (81.67 percent) were permanent workers and less than one fifth of the respondents (18.33percent) were informal workers.
7. Of the total respondents, more than half of the respondents (70.83 percent) spend on an average 8 to 10 hours at the working site, about 16.67% and 12.5% workers work for an average of 4 to 8 hours and more than 10 hours daily, respectively.

There is certain uncertainty regarding getting the work daily, especially for the informal workers, because these workers get the work from the junction, place where usually they wait for work.

It was found that only 24.0% workers got work daily. Other workers could not get the work daily. About 41.5% workers could not get work on an average of 1 to 5 days in month. 28.5% and 6.0% of workers said that in a month, they could not get work for 6 to 15 days and more than 15 days respectively.

Wage Differentiation

In the present study, seeks to explore whether wage differentiation prevails between different groups of labourers grouped according to different criteria. For examining the wage differentiation in the construction sector, the data on wage rate has been classified according to the gender, sector and types of labour. The researcher also tried to examine the wage differentiation by using the independent samples t-test. For applying the t-test on the data of wage rate, it is necessary that the data should not violate the assumption of this test. The most important assumption of independent sample t-test is that the data should be normally distributed. Therefore first of all an attempt to check the normality of data on wage rate was made by using the Kolmogorov-smirnov test and Shapiro-Wilk test. The assumption of this test is that the data are not normally distributed. If the significance value of this test is more than 0.05, we can say that the data are normally distributed. Then we can proceed further for independent sample t-test for compared means. But this test suggests that the data are not normally distributed and there should be other non-parametric test for comparing the means. The most popular test for this is the Mann Whitney U test. The following table shows the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Shapiro-Wilk test for normality.

Table No – 2: **Test of Normality for Data on Daily Wages**

Variables		**Means**	**Kolmogorov-smirnov Test**	**Shapiro-Wilk Test**
Gender	**Male**	253.20	0.000	0.000
	Female	227.20	0.000	0.000

Source: Computed

Inference

The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Shapiro-Wilk test for normality shows that the data on wage rates of construction workers according to sectors, gender and type of workers are not normally distributed because the values of significance level are less than 0.05, so here we do not reject the null hypotheses that the data are not normally distributed. Therefore for comparing the means wage rate of workers according to the gender, sector and type of workers we have used Mann Whitney U test.

Wage Differentiation between Male and Female Workers

The gender wage discrimination is not a new phenomenon. In this study we found that the wage rates are different for different workers. Wage differentiation also exists at the same work place. Out of total female workers, about 43% got the wages of less than Rs. 250 daily. This figure was just 19% for male workers. On the other hand, 34% of the male workers and only 12.0% of the female workers belonged to the category of wage rate between Rs. 251 to Rs. 350. So it can be said that male workers got higher daily wages than female workers in construction sector. This conclusion is also strengthened by using a statistical test. The statistical difference of wage rate between male and female construction workers had been examined by using Mann Whitney U test.

Table No – 3: **Classification of Daily Wages by Gender**

Wage Rate (in Rs.)	**Gender of respondents**				**Total**
	Male		**Female**		
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**	
Less than 200	11	18.33	26	43.34	37
201 to 250	27	45.00	27	45.00	54
251 to 300	20	33.34	7	11.66	27
301 to 350	2	3.33	0	0.00	2
Total	60	100.00	60	100.00	120

Source: Primary data from the field survey

Table No – 4: Mann Whitney U test for wage differentiation according to gender

Gender	**Mean Ranks**	**Mann Whitney U test Value**	**Sign.Value**
Male	118.52	3198.0	0.000
Female	82.48		

Source: Computed

Inference

On the basis of above table, the mean rank of wage rates is higher for male workers than female workers. The mean rank of wage rates is 118.52 for male workers and 82.48 for female workers. The Value of Mann Whitney U test is found to be 3198.0 and its significant value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, we do reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that significance differences exist in the wage rates of the male and female workers.

Concluding Comments

The findings of the study show that many women construction workers are illiterate, widows, only earning members of the family, from depressed class and from low income families when compared to men construction workers. In the construction works the majorities of workers follow the Hindu religion and belong to the scheduled caste category. The cross-tabulation of wage rates with gender clearly shows that there is a wage differentiation between the male and female workers, Informal workers and permanent workers and workers in the organized and unorganized construction sectors. The average daily wages of these group workers were reported to be Rs. 300 and Rs. 200 for male and female workers, Rs. 350 and 250 for Informal workers and permanent workers respectively. Whether wage differentiations between the gender and type of workers are statistically significant or not is an important task from the point of view of policy implementation. Therefore, first of all we tried to use the t-test to compare the means of wages, but it was found that the data on wages were not normally distributed. Hence we applied the Mann-Whitney U test for comparing the mean rank of wages. According to the results of this test, the wage differentiation is statistically significant in all the cases.

The gender discrimination is clearly reflected from the wage discrimination. In the case of Informal workers and permanent workers, it is found that the permanent workers enjoyed the certain level of work security as they work under the contractor during the specific construction work. There were several laws in the practice like Regulation and Abolition Act-1970 for contract labour, Equal Remuneration Act-1976 for equal wages for equal work, Unorganized Worker's Social Security Act-2008 etc… But the effective implementation of these laws will be possible by collective efforts of the government and non-government organizations. As a part of corporate social responsibility, the contractors and the builders should also provide better quality of living to the women workers. For this it is necessary to take steps to remove wage discrimination in the construction sector.

Scope for Further Research

The present study provides scope to intersect the trajectory of all workers in different sector with a gender dimension. It also provides the platform for further research in the area of wage differentials, health and living conditions with special reference to the gender dimension. The role of state in formulation and implementation of gender specific rules and regulation for women in construction work, pertaining to health, housing, education of children, crèche and restrooms; and safe working environment in urban spaces also provide scope for further research.

Foot Notes

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