

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC APPRAISAL OF WOMEN BEEDI WORKERS: A CASE STUDY OF TUFANGANJ-1 BLOCK, KOCHBIHAR

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Women are engaged in various works, either in home-based work or non-home based work. One of such works is beedi making. From the very past time, women workers are engaged in the beedi industry. In the rural and semi-urban area, the beedi industry one of the largest employers of workers in India after agriculture, handloom, construction etc (GOI). Though beedi rolling a risky work for health, they continuous heir work until today. At the present time, beedi workers are suffering from the societal problem, economical problem, health problem due to low wage; uncertainty of work, one of the most cruxes is that less honor is given by other people to the beedi workers. So it is clearly observed that women beedi workers are deprived of labor. Beedi workers are vulnerable segments of the country's labor force. In this paper, a study has been carried out on the socio-economic appraisal of women beedi workers of Tufanganj-1 block, kochbihar district.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Beedi Industry, Women Workers, Socio-economic Status, Deprived Labor, Tufanganj-1 Block*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In India, beedi making is an age-old industry and one of the largest job providers for women in the unorganized sector. It is a classical example of the cottage industry in India. "beedis or beed" are hand rolled unfiltered cigarettes. A beedi consists of near about 0.2 gram of processes sun-dried tobacco flakes, rolled in a tendu leaf or temburni leaf with a particular shape of the leaf and then tied with cotton thread. Beedi rolling is one o the major informal sector activities in India. In India, rolling bidis is an industry that employs more than 5 million workers. most of them women (ILO, 2012). But the statistics may be higher as many workers did not register their name. Srinivasulu (19997) reported that 90 % of beedi workers are women. Women constitute 76 percent of total employment in beedi manufacturing and 24.5 percent are male employment of the total employment ( Sudarshan and Kaur 1999).

Beedi making is dominated by women as it a home-based work and women have to work of home like cooking, house maintains etc. so that they can do both beedi making and house maintain at the same time. Muslim women dominating the beedi making because o religious stricture they do not allow going out to work. Thus home-based work is widely acceptable among them ( Bhattay 1980; Koli 1990; Mohndas 1980; Gopal 1997). The beedi rolling activity I primarily carried out by workers having weaker socio-economic status to support their family. The condition of beedi workers from past to present has

not been favorable. As compared with others region, researchers have seen a large number of workers in the beedi industry in Tufanganj -1 block, Koch Bihar district, due to backwardness and non-availability of job opportunity. Beedi worker of this region has the same social and economical problems. Along with the problems this traditional work has a significant role to support the economic and social status of the family. For that, researchers have keen interest to study “socio-economic appraisal of women beedi workers”.

Brief history of beedi industry: There is no exact time in the record from where beedi working was started. Tobacco cultivation was started in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. At the first hookah smoking was popular. Later, beedi smoking became popular somehow. Mohanlal Patel is considered as the father of beedi industry. Mohanlal Patel and cousin Harigovindadas observed that tendu leaf is the best for beedi making. They started to beedi making by tendu leaf from Jabalpur forest. In this way, beedi industry spread throughout the country.

### **Statement of Problems**

The unorganized sectors specially beedi industry are facing many problems such as unemployment, low wages, and irregular payment of wages, non-availability of social security and welfare facilities and exploitative working conditions. Tufanganj -1 block I one the most important beedi rolling center in Koch Bihar districts. Beedi workers of Tufanganj block -1 is not an exception, they also suffer from various problems associated with societal and economical problems like low wages, illiteracy, low per capita income child labor, cut off payments, poor housing quality, low living conditions, poverty, physical stress, and health hazard etc.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study carried out to ascertain the following objectives

- To study demographic conditions and social status of beedi workers.
- To study the economic status of beedi workers.
- To study health problems faced by beedi workers.
- To suggest the recommendations for effective solutions to the issue.

### **Hypothesis**

- socio-economic conditions of women beedi workers are very poor.
- Women workers in the beedi industry face several health hazards due to beedi rolling.

### **Study Area**

The study area included Tufanganj block-1 of Koch Bihar district, West Bengal. The maximum concentration of beedi workers is found at Shikrarpur village. The latitudinal and longitudinal extension o the study area approximately is 26°17'50"N to 26°20' N and 89° 33' E TO 89°37'30"E respectively. The region is predominantly agriculture in character, with nearly 80 % of the population in a rural area and in farming related livelihoods. Another important feature of this district is that high proportion of the population in scheduled caste and scheduled tribes.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Sampling Technique**

To carry out the study researcher select the purposive sampling method to choose a sample from the total population as the researcher was willing to study a particular group of people and a total population of this particular group was also unknown. Researchers took 88 women beedi workers as sample size.

### **Sources of Data**

The data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The secondary data are collected from the census report 2011, reputed journals, Government report; block office etc. primary data are collected from the field survey directly. For that, a survey was conducted by researchers with a pre-prepared schedule. The data has been collected by face to face interview with respondents by researchers. Before the final interview researchers had gone through a pilot survey in the study area. The schedule was prepared based on the objectives of the study. Observation by the researchers in the field also helped to understand the socio-economic status of women beedi workers.

### **Data Analysis**

After collecting the data from both primary and secondary sources, all data are compiled. Thereafter, data was scrutinized for confirmation and get accurate and precise data. Then, data are tabulated. These tabulated data calculated with the help of simple statistical tools by SPSS, Excel etc software. Finally, interpretation has written by researchers with the help of these tabulated data.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Table 1: Marital Status of Workers**

| <b>Marital status</b> | <b>Married</b> | <b>Unmarried</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|
| Frequency             | 79             | 9                | 88           |
| %                     | 89.77          | 10.2             | 100          |

From the above table, it can be interpreted that most of the beedi workers are married. 89.77% of workers are married and only 10.23% workers are unmarried.

**Table 2: Age Structure of Workers**

| Age Group | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| <20       | 6         | 6.2        |
| 20-40     | 37        | 42.04      |
| 40-60     | 40        | 45.46      |
| >60       | 5         | 5.6        |
| Total     | 88        | 100        |

The above data shows that the workers under the age group 20-40 having 42.04%. Under the age group of 40-60 years, there is 45.46%. Above 60 years age, there are 5.68% workers. Below 20 years age, there are only 6.82% female workers. The overall average age of the workers is 40 years.

**Table 3: Distribution of Workers on the Basis of Education**

| Education level           | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Illiterate                | 39        | 44.32      |
| Primary school            | 20        | 22.3       |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> standard | 14        | 15.91      |
| 12 <sup>th</sup> standard | 10        | 11.36      |
| Graduate                  | 5         | 5.68       |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>88</b> | <b>100</b> |

The results reveal that most of the women workers are illiterate. Total 44.32% workers are illiterate, and 55.68% workers are literate. Among 55.68% workers, 22.3% workers completed primary school, 15.91% workers completed 10<sup>th</sup> standard, 11.36% workers completed 12<sup>th</sup> standard and only 5.68% workers completed a graduate degree. So this shows that overall workers educational level is very less and so they are forced to accept this type of work. Some of the workers are graduated but due to lack of job, they are forced to do this work.

It is said that income is an important factor to find out the standard of living of a Particular family. The income level of workers is shown in the above table. It can be observed that the Individual monthly income of workers is not high. 21.59% workers get Rupees 1000-2000 As monthly income where 21.59% of workers get below 1000 Rupees as their monthly income for beedi rolling. Only 1-2% workers earned more than 3000 rupees in a month. The average income of

**Table 4: Nature of Employment of Workers**

| Employment                    | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Organized                     | 0         | 0          |
| Un-organized<br>(Contractors) | 88        | 100        |
| Total                         | 88        | 100        |

Data analysis showed that all of the workers work under unorganized factory. No one workers work in the organized sector. The contractors supply the raw materials to the home of the workers and collect the product from home.

**Table 5: Income of the Workers**

| Income    | <1000 | 1000-2000 | 2000-3000 | 3000-4000 | 4000-5000 | >5000 | Total |
|-----------|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Frequency | 19    | 57        | 10        | 1         | 0         | 1     | 88    |
| %         | 21.59 | 64.77     | 11.36     | 1.14      | 0         | 1.14  | 100   |

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**Table 6: Income and Age of the Workers Cross Tabulation**

| Income/<br>Age<br>Group | % | 1000-<br>2000 | %  | 2000-<br>3000 | % | 3000-<br>4000 | % | 4000-<br>5000 | % | %    | To-<br>tal | %    |      |       |
|-------------------------|---|---------------|----|---------------|---|---------------|---|---------------|---|------|------------|------|------|-------|
| >20                     | 4 | 4.55          | 2  | 2.28          | 0 | 0             | 0 | 0             | 0 | 0    | 0          | 6    | 6.82 |       |
| 20-40                   | 9 | 10.23         | 27 | 30.68         | 1 | 1.14          | 0 | 0             | 1 | 1.14 | 0          | 0    | 38   | 43.18 |
| 40-60                   | 6 | 6.82          | 24 | 27.27         | 9 | 10.23         | 1 | 1.14          | 0 | 0    | 1          | 1.14 | 40   | 45.45 |
| >60                     | 0 | 0             | 4  | 4.55          | 0 | 0             | 0 | 0             | 0 | 0    | 0          | 0    | 4    | 4.55  |

From the above survey data it can be interpreted that below 20 years of age, workers do not get higher wages. Higher income concentrated within 20-60 years of age and 58 % workers income 1000-2000 rupees per month.

**Table 7: Workers Engaged in Beedi Rolling**

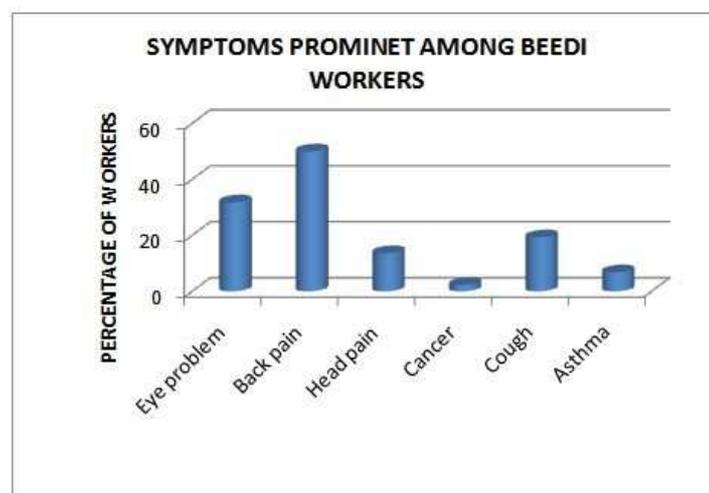
| Years     | <5   | 5-10  | 10-15 | 15-20 | 20-25 | 25-30 | >30  | Total |
|-----------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|
| Frequency | 5    | 16    | 24    | 22    | 11    | 6     | 4    | 88    |
| %         | 5.68 | 18.18 | 27.27 | 25    | 12.5  | 6.82  | 5.56 | 100   |

The above survey data shows that most of the have experienced 5 to 20 years. The aged workers are not able to do this work due to some causes. The participation rate in this work in the present time is very less. This data reveals that the workers lost interest to do this work. Only a few workers do this work to help his family in terms of money. Female workers also decrease day by day. Few female workers mainly married workers continue their work to do a little help to his family.

only 7.95 % of respondents have good health and 92.05 % showed some health problems. In the majority of the cases it is observed that beedi workers are prone to some health disease. In this survey, this is also proved that beedi workers are one of the most vulnerable groups in health status.

**Table 8: Types and Degree of Disease Among Beedi Workers**

| Problems    | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Eye problem | 28        | 31.2       |
| Back pain   | 44        | 50         |
| Head pain   | 12        | 13.64      |
| Cancer      | 2         | 2.2        |
| Cough       | 17        | 19.32      |
| Asthma      | 6         | 6.82       |



**Figure 1**

Most of the workers suffer more than one disease due to beedi rolling. From the above data table it can be interpreted that half of the workers suffer from back pain, 31.82% workers suffers from an eye problem, 13.64% workers suffers from head pain, 19.32% workers suffers from a cough, 6.825 workers suffers from asthma and 2.28% workers suffer from cancer due to beedi rolling. So it can be said that sometimes beedi workers also suffer from occupational hazards like knee pain, head pain etc. most of the workers usually suffers from back pain as workers should be in sitting position at the time of beedi rolling.

It is analyzed that around 94 % of the workers have ID cards which they get on completing 18 years of age and which is compulsory for getting benefit offered by the government. The housing condition of all workers is not good at all. More than half of the workers (52 %) lived in kachcha house. Only a few percentages of workers lived in the pucca house. Though most of the workers have a separate kitchen for cooking. It has been found that 68% of workers are O.B.C and rest

32% are S.C population. There are no others cast involving in beedi rolling in this village. Most of the workers used L.P.G gas as cocking materials which are 64% in quantity and the rest of them used firewood as cocking materials. Majority of workers work for 6 days a week, 22.72% of workers work for 5 days a week, 9.09 % of workers work for 7 days a week, 9.09% of workers work for 4 days a week and only 5.68% workers work for 3 days in a week. The average working days of the workers are 5.51 in a week. Near about one-third of the employees work for 7 hours a day. Another 23.86 % Work for 6 hours a day. It can be interpreted that more or less 88 % of the employees were working for 5 to 7 hours a day. Only 4.56% % of the workers were working for 9 hours a day. This show that working hours are as per the norms. The average working hours is 6.36 hours. So it has been observed that they do not get actual wages as their labor by time and day in beedi making. The analysis indicated that around 76.14 % of workers have not taken any loan and around 23.86 % they have taken some or other loan from different sources. This shows that the Majority of workers are not under the economic burden of repaying loans and this indicates that it's a good sign of economic stability. A major negative sign in the beedi industry is that more than 85 % of workers are not satisfied with their job, only a few percentage i.e. 14.28% of workers are satisfied with work. So the level of satisfaction among the workers in the work of beedi rolling is more or less very low. More or less ninety percent of workers are ready to accept any other type of work as they are not comfortable to work with this beedi rolling. Only a few workers have shown some interest in accepting work in beedi rolling. This may be due to low wages of beedi rolling and lack of facilities etc. Most of the respondents have cited one or more reasons for rolling beedis; even they are aware of health hazard in this job. According to workers; they are doing this job due to combination of factors such as (1) easy to learn (42.63 %); (2) No alternate source; of income (61.05 %); (3) can be managed with domestic chores (40.14 %) and (4) Easy source of livelihood (18.64 %). However, the majority of the workers i.e. 61.05 % have cited that they are doing this job because there is no alternate source of income or alternate job opportunity.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

The following suggestions are made for improving the Socio-economic conditions as well as health conditions of beedi workers:

- Minimum wages should be fixed for the beedi rolling workers to sustain a standard quality of life of them.
- The educational level of beedi workers is very low, so they don't have the confidence in taking any alternate work. Here with the help of some NGO's the government can promote training for some alternate work which the beedi workers can undertake.
- Education level among the beedi workers should be increased so that they can do an alternate job instead of beedi making.
- The beedi workers now get only Rs.110 or Rs. 100(varies with a company) for 1000 rolled beedi's. But there are some state governments who have sanctioned Rs 165 for 1000 beedi's as the minimum wage. So the state labor department should take necessary actions to implement the minimum wage rate.

- Health awareness among beedi workers should be increased.
- As beedi workers are more prone to health diseases they should be provided with free health check-up. This can be provided by the concerned authority.

## CONCLUSIONS

After studying the socio-economic appraisal of women beedi workers it is cleared that they have been doing a continuous struggle for living at present. It has seemed that struggling for better living is a never-ending process. Socio-economic condition should be uplift as soon as possible. About nine of the tenth workers are dissatisfaction with the current job and want to switchover to new jobs if they get relatively suitable opportunities. It is a positive note that most of the workers want to acquire other skills for development their lifestyle.

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