

A STUDY ON THE ECONOMIC AND OCCUPATIONAL CHALLENGES OF NORTHEAST MIGRANT WOMEN WORKERS IN CHENNAI

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ABSTRACT

The primary focus of the research was to understand the problems, issues, and challenges of Northeast women who have been working in Chennai Metropolitan city particularly from the economic and occupational perspective. The objectives of the study are to find out the demographic details; identify the occupational and economic status and to document / bring out the type of abuses and harassments in workplaces. The researcher had used descriptive research design. Using random sampling, probability simple random sampling was applied in this research. Using questionnaire schedule and case studies, the primary data was collected from 100 respondents. Secondary data was also collected from the articles applied in the research journals, books, and web sources. The data analysis was done through two soft-wares such as MS-Excel and SPSS 20 version. The findings of the study revealed that employed tribal women in Tamil Nadu particularly in Chennai city undergo unfair treatment, abuses, stressful life, income and expenditure problems. This research suggests that the existing Labour laws and company acts are strict to be imposed to protect migrant female workers from abuses and exploitation and to receive their rightful salaries. Northeast Tribal organizations, Companies, NGOs, Governments need to create awareness of their rights and policies, holistic well-being grievance cell, Counselling, and recourse centers, to install safety devices and to legalize migration registration and to interstate migration, women act. Skill and self-defense training can definitely make a transformational change in their lives.

KEYWORDS: *Economic-Occupational Challenges, Migration, Northeast Women, Tribal, Empowerment*

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a decision that contributes to the welfare of the migrants, household, home community and in the end the entire economy (Azam and Gubert 2006). In the history of India, women empowerment and development is recognized as a gradual and constant vital element of India's growth in its economic and occupational realities of women. Yet even today women are considered to be homemakers, objects, not equal to men in all aspects and they are seen as sex objects. In a patriarchal society, women are to do household activities depending on the income of men while men are considered to be a breadwinner of the family. Due to poverty, vulnerability, terrorism, higher educational qualification, unemployment, lack of infrastructural facilities and lack of livelihood opportunities young women are forced to migrate from rural and semi-rural areas of northeast India to metropolitan cities such as Chennai, Delhi, and Mumbai, etc. In cities, migrant women work in different sectors of both private and government.

According to Dube (2001), women are facing innumerable problems and issues in their workplaces such as mental stress, health problems, safety and security issues, and sexual harassments, less wage, inequality of treatment, exploitation, torture and discriminatory practices. In general, women face illiteracy, poor quality life, social constraints in decision making, poor health care benefits while in particular the work-related issues are frequent headaches, fatigues, sexual exploitation, low wages, denial of their rights, circulatory disorders, emotional imbalance, burnout, work-life imbalance, back pain, mental disorders, etc.

NEED AND IMPORTANCE

The need of the hour is to safeguard, protect, guide, empower women because women were considered to be weak, slave, inferior, not capable of education and employment while controlled as a homemaker and domestic worker in the traditional and patriarchal society. But in the modern society women are playing a vital role in building up the families, societies and the Indian nation as doctors, nurses, engineers, computer scientists, etc., balancing well both domestic and professional life. Yet this is not enough because women even today go through innumerable problems and challenges in workplaces and all the more tribal migrant women from Northeast India to Chennai City.

Women face problems in manifold situations not only because they are employed but also by the fact of being as women. According to the Indian constitution article 19, women take basic freedom to move anywhere to earn and to find their livelihood. The migrant young women moved from north to south work in hospitals, construction companies, hotels, beauty parlours, banks, malls, and saloon shops and massage centers. This study is very important for the migrant Northeast girls and young women to understand their occupational and income generating problems, and to find ways and means to empower them for their holistic development and well-being.

PULL AND PUSH FACTORS OF NORTHEAST WOMEN MIGRATION

North East India comprises of eight states commonly known as the Seven Sisters - Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura and One Brother - called Sikkim. North-eastern tribal women Migrants are Young people of the various tribes moved to megacities. Anthropologists use the term 'urban migration' to the same fellow-citizen who migrates from rural areas to urban areas or cities for various reasons. Mostly pull and push factors, and even the combination of both play a vital role in improving the status of female migrants. Some of them are economic factors – employment opportunities, better occupation, lack of population and industrial growth, agrarian crisis, etc. Srinivasn S. and Illango P. (2012) mentioned that the other reasons of migration are social factors, environmental factors, demographic factors, economic factors, political and tribal ethnic factors.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher had used descriptive research design to explain how tribal migrant women confront various workplace issues, problems etc. The age of the respondents for the study is between the age group of 18-29. Probability simple random sampling was chosen to find respondents from various Northeast movements, associations, fellowships and groups existing in Chennai. The data collected from 100 respondents were empirical tribal migrant population. The mixed method was used involving questionnaire and case studies. The research was documented from primary and secondary data. The data analysis was done through two software such as MS-Excel and SPSS 20 version.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Table 1: Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of Women Migrants

Socio-Economic and Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Age of the Respondents in Years		
18 – 20	06	06
21 – 23	44	44
24 – 26	22	22
27 – 29	28	28
Marital Status of Women		
Married	16	16
Unmarried	78	78
Living in Relationship	06	06
Monthly Income of the Migrants		
Below Rs. 5000	08	08
Rs. 5001 to 10,000	12	12
Rs. 10,001 to 15,000	28	28
Rs. 15,001 to 20,000	36	36
Rs. 20,001 to 25,000	06	06
Above Rs. 25,000	10	10
Migrants - Home Northeast States		
Manipur	36	36
Assam	18	18
Nagaland	12	12
Meghalaya	16	16
Mizoram	18	18

It is obvious that little less than half of the respondents (44%) belong to the age group of 21-23 and followed by the age group of 27-29, which constitute 28% and 22% of the respondents do fall between the age group of 24-26, while 06% of them belong to the age group of 18-20. This clearly proves that young women moved to the city are immediately looking for jobs soon after their graduation, schooling and dropouts due to economic pressures, non-availability of jobs, survival struggles and fulfillment of their family basic needs such as food, shelter, clothes, and schooling and for their own survival in their own undeveloped areas.

The data reveals that the single majority of the respondents (78%) are unmarried while 16% of them married and 06% of the migrant women are living in relationship with young men living in the same area of their neighborhood.

In this research, the monthly income of the women workers is clearly given. More than one-third of the migrant women (36%) are earning a monthly income of Rs. 15,001 to 20,000 and a little less than one of them (28%) of them gain Rs. 10,001 to 15,000 while 12% of the earn only Rs. 5000 to 10,000 and 08% of them get the least amount as their salary. Women who earn more than Rs. 15,000 and above can manage their life situations in the city while those who earn less than that amount is coming from very backward areas of home district working in private sector and doing unskilled yet they are able to send a little saving for their families with financial stress and poor health every month. According to Kahn et al. 2003, migration increases the risk for family breakdown, fragmentation of social network, and psychological stress. Nearly 20% of them getting very less salary due to illiteracy, pavement and roadside shops, not having proper communication skills etc. Sometimes the recruiting companies account for the cost of migration particularly for low skilled migrants (Lucas 2005) that leave the women migrants in debt, less payment, long hours of work and unsafe working environments (Chammartin 2005).

Most of the women workers (36%) in Chennai from Northeast India are from Manipur the second highest 18% each female labourers from Assam and Mizoram respectively, while 16% are from Meghalaya and 12% are from Nagaland respectively. The push and pull factors are strong reasons for all respondents for their migration. Little less than 50% of the tribal females come from both Manipur and Nagaland region due to terrorism, bandh culture, school dropouts, lack of industry and developmental and employment opportunities, agricultural crisis, neglect of the state governments particularly the Nagas of Nagaland from the Hill districts located in Manipur region.

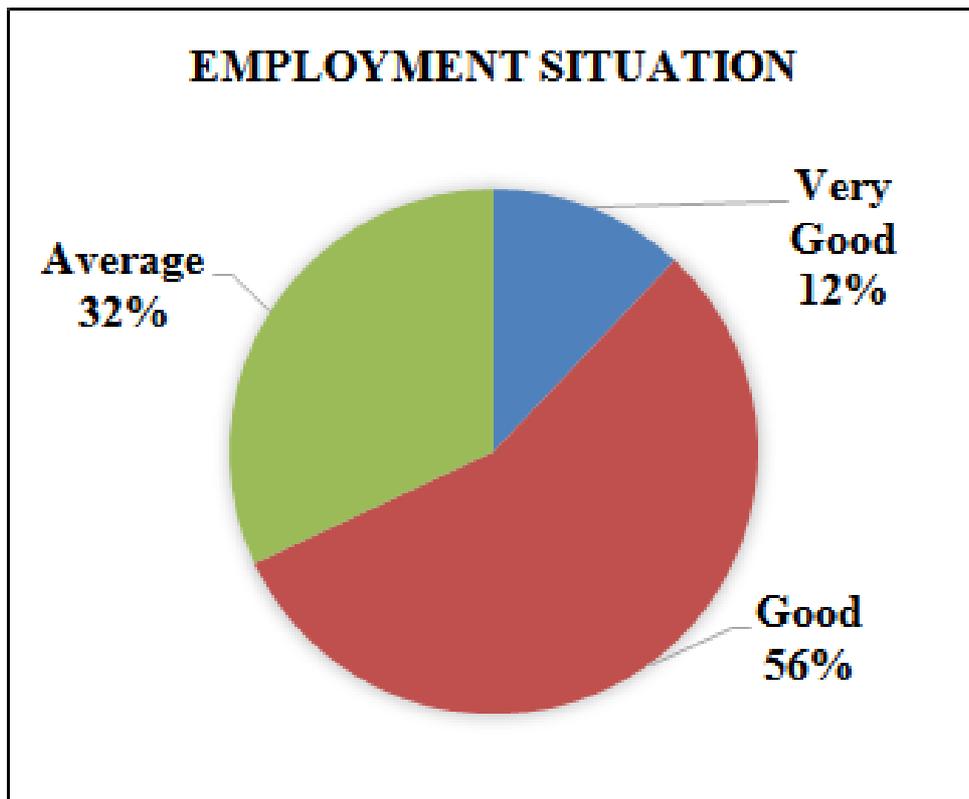


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents Opinion about Employment Situation

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of the opinion of the women migrants from the North-eastern states working in Chennai. The single majority of the women workers that is 56 % of them express that the employment conditions here in Chennai are good while 12 % of them say it is very good and 32 % of them feel it is average. This is due to lack of opportunities for employment and facilities, backwardness of their home states in their own states even though they are capable of working in different capacities. Chennai has been constantly attracting women workers from the Northeast States.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents Expenditure

Sl. No	Items of Expenses	Frequency	Percentage
1	Food & Shelter	62	62
2	Cosmetics, Clothes & Jewels	10	10
3	Transport	08	08
4	Alcohol, Smoking etc	20	20
	Total	100	100

Table 2 describes the distribution of the respondents' ways of spending their monthly income in day to day life. The single majority that is 62% of the respondents spend their earning for their daily food and accommodation. From the inference we know that the majority of them find it difficult for their survival and save something to send to their families for their well-being. Nearly 20% of them do spend income on smoking and 10% for their cosmetics, clothes and jewels while 08% spend on their travels in their life.



Figure 2: Respondents Experience of Abuses in the WorkPlaces

From figure 2 it is evident that the different types of work place abuses experienced by the respondents are classified into four categories. Slightly little more than one third (34%) of the migrant women have faced with physical and verbal each respectively. And 26% of the respondents did experience psychological harassments and abuses due to various reasons and working conditions in their lifestyle in Chennai. Some of them too confronted with sexual abuses, sexual entertainment for some favours and privileges given to the female labourers.

Table 3: Migrants' Opinion of Salary Payment on Demand

Sl. No	Items of Expenses	Frequency	Percentage
1)	Always	26	26
2)	Very Often	34	34
3)	Seldom	32	32
4)	Never	08	08
Total		100	100

Table number 3 presents about the payment of the salary to the female workers on their demand by their employers. It is observed that 34% of the respondents are paid by the company or employers whatever they demand while 32% of them seldom receive their payment which means they don't get what they demand as well as what they are promised while 08% of them never get a proper salary.

SUGGESTIONS

Women Migrant Registration & Interstate Migration Women Act (IMWA): Registration process and procedure need very urgently in-order to empower migrant women employed in the metropolitan cities. This process will give the continuous follow up of the migrants and to get help and support to solve many issues from all stages of migration, working on gender-sensitive problems. This registration is done either online or direct manual process and interstate migration women Act to provide human-rights based solutions to improve the status of all migrant women employed in both private and government sectors and to ensure that equitable and inclusive growth wages, benefits for overall development in the urban areas.

Training and Awareness Programs: Women migrant workers are not aware of the differences in skilled and non-skilled employment opportunities, dos and don'ts of the cities, labour laws, company benefits, issues and company acts, rules and regulations, salary wages act and different labour policies and so they need to be given training and awareness programs so that gender-based harassments, issues and challenges can be reduced from the beginning of their recruitment. Tamil Nadu Government together with Northeast Tribal associations can identify women migrants with Mahalir Thittam to give gender-specific training and identify unskilled workers to be educated simultaneously being employed.

Global Positioning System (GPS) and Safety Devices: Inorder to safeguard working women and avoid being sexually harassed and exploited, governments and NGOs should make it compulsory to all public working places to install Global Positioning systems in vehicles, in mobile phones used by women in the premises of working areas. This includes installing CCTV (closed-circuit television) is a TV system on strategic placement positions for observation, monitoring and primarily for surveillance and security purposes for employed migrants of the weaker sex in the night as well as day shifts.

Socio-Economic and Patriarchal Cultural Barriers: The patriarchal concept of women is prevalent even today. Women being as domestic workers doing cleaning, washing, cooking etc need to be removed beyond cultures, religion, tribes, castes, boundaries and even nations. This concepts in the mind of patriarchal owners, supervisors, managers, recruiting bodies, drivers, security guards etc need to be collectively removed and they perpetrators of crime against female workers need to be punished. This will enable the women migrants to work freely with men counter-parts, provide equal pay for both sexes and provide a better atmosphere for work.

Migrant Counseling Centers: Girls and women employed in so many sectors in the city need to have constant counseling centers by a special team comprising of both local and migrant women professionals and experts in the field. This will promote and protect women from depression, sadism, suicidal tendencies, negativity, discouragements etc. All these problems arise due to workplace issues and can be avoided. Particularly the challenges can be bravely confronted through migrant counseling centers in various parts of the city like child helpline.

Strategic Partnership and Collaboration: To protect the migrants against exploitation and to promote women migrants rights, schemes, policies, there should be a strategic partnership and bilateral collaboration (UNDP 2009) between many sectors of government ministry of law, social protection and family, social justice and government departments both at center and state, INGOs along with Northeast India Welfare Association Chennai together with other tribal welfare-rights associations and agencies.

Migration Public Service Guide, Resource Centre and Application: From the research data, most of the migrant Northeast women and girls moved to Chennai are not properly-registered live without guidance and proper knowledge. Northeast Councils (NEC), NGOs together with Tamil Nadu Government need to establish a migration public service guide, a migrant mobile application and Migrant Resource Centre (Times of India 2018) to protect them against oppression, exclusion and exploitation at different stages of migration.

Self-defense and Skill Training: Normally Northeast Women understood as a foreigner, Chinese, Japanese, chinky, and sometimes even as sexy with white skin colour and being open, there is a risk of being vulnerable very easily. And so these girls and women need to be provided self-defense training, managerial and skill training, camps on safety measures and awareness programs and martial arts to defend themselves at any time of their life.

Promotion of SHGs and Saving Habits: Women need to have economic welfare schemes to support and sustain their families in native states. Here in Chennai migrant women workers need to develop saving habits through the NGOs, bank and post office saving systems. Among the northeast tribal women workers can have self-help groups to promote saving activities and to avoid spending money in alcohol, smoking and other self-destruction activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Conservative and male-dominated society considered women as weaker sex and inferior. Patriarchal society keeps girls and women in closed walls, houses and mindset. Though modernization and globalization brought remarkable changes in empowering and developing women in all aspects such as providing education, gender justice, and employment, freedom of dress, speech and movements yet the liberation of women needs to go a long way in India. Governments, NGOs, Mass Media, Religions, educational institutions, multi-national companies, farmers, teachers and all citizen together as one united India need to make our workplace free from wrong perceptions, abuses, exploitations, harassments for working women at large and particularly the less privileged and neglected Northeast Indian women employed in Metropolitan cities anywhere in India. This will enable the entire nation to encourage and support women to discover the undiscovered for the well-being and happiness of women being at present and in the future to sustain and to lead India ahead.

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