

# Status of Women Employees in NGOs: A Qualitative Analysis

Dr. R. Nalini\*

Associate Professor, Dept. of Social Work & Head (i/c),  
Centre for Women's Studies, Pondicherry University-605014, India

K Krishnakumar

PhD Scholar, Dept. of Social Work, Pondicherry University-605014, India

## Abstract

The scope for best practices in social work profession is largely evident from understanding the functioning of Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs). The economic aspect of any profession is crucial in determining the dignity of life of the employee. It is especially noted that, in most of the NGOs, women form the major workforce especially at the field work and project implementation levels (Vasan, 2004). Loads of admiration for achievements of NGOs are often boasted out; however a little is heard about NGOs as employers. The wages paid to the NGO workers are found to be very less. The study briefly analyses the economic exploitation which happens in the NGOs with the help of three case studies. The study also looks into the gender aspects of economic division. A brief enquiry is made through the opinion of the selected subjects about any gender based disparity existing in NGO sector in terms of economic allocations. The paper points out to the need of self reflection from the part of social work professionals. The study increasingly identifies the fact that actual practice is far away from what is being preached. Gender and economy are the two crucial aspects while considering NGOs as workplace (Mitra, 2013). The paper highlights the need for fixing standardized salary and working conditions for the workers, especially women and also the need for adopting a special labour policy for the employees in NGOs. This study also hopes to provide suggestions for making NGOs gender sensitive workplaces.

**Keywords:** NGO employees, Economic exploitation, Gender disparity

## 1. Introduction

Women form the major workforce in the world. Women workforces have entered every job setting including that of developmental organizations. The current study focuses on the economic and gender induced harms of women working as employees at the Non-governmental or Non Profit agencies. Indeed problems of women working as field workers, project officers, animators etc at NGOs are rarely studied of.

NGOs as employers need to look into different components of economic welfare of their own employees. Major troubles of the women employees with respected to wage and gender are briefly discussed through few case studies in this study.

## 2. Statement of the problem

Most of the Non Governmental Organizations except a few often nominal low wages to the employees. That too women are habitually paid less than male employees. This is exceedingly true for the women who work at the grassroots levels of the organization. These women frequently engage in the most vital roles in the NGO operation process as they are the ones who directly relate with the populace at the grassroots level. Most often women are employed in the NGO positions with the presupposition that women have to be paid less thus again to the fiscal security of the employing organization. Thus low wages has its roots in the Gender Based discrimination. This indeed is inhuman. However in Social work being a value based profession, employees needs to treated with much more dignity and equality

### 2.1.1. Methodology

The following study is a qualitative analysis for finding out the wage issues related to Women Workers at NGOs. The researchers have adopted case study method for availing data from the respondents. In-depth interview was used to reveal the actual feelings and perceptions of the subjects. A semi structured interview schedule was used for the purpose. Three cases were selected purposively for this study that expected to necessarily represent women workers of NGOs. Few conclusive remarks are made after analyzing the cases.

### 2.1.2. Objectives of the study

1. To know whether optimum wages are ensured for women employees of NGO Sector.
2. To find out whether there is any gender based disparity in wage payment in NGO Sector.

## 3. Case Studies

### 3.1.1. Case-1

Lakshmi is a professionally qualified social worker working in a NGO working for community development.

She is working as a field coordinator in a rural development project of the organization. The Project totally employs six people of whom four are women. The men are given office responsibilities while the women work in the field. Each field work day of Lakshmi starts by morning Nine and extends to about half past seven at night. Despite being working for the whole day, she is paid rupees twelve thousand per month. This salary do not have a structure like basic pay, Dearness Allowance etc. however is fixed to rupees twelve thousand per month. Ironically the male employees who come once in a limelight are paid rupees eighteen thousand per month. Lakshmi joined the particular organization two years before, and sadly there has been no advancement in the salary for her. She says “No one ever had the courage to ask the management for advancement in salary because they would just ask us to leave. Individual dignity and social work values especially in the context of NGO employees is an irrelevant matter to discuss upon”

### 3.1.2. Case-2

Mathi is employed in an organization which is carrying out community development activities around the city. Mathi is a Graduate in Social Work. She is employed for two years as field coordinator and receives a monthly salary of rupees eight thousand. She is basically involved in slum development project and works from morning nine to evening six to make a living. She is concerned about her safety, especially due to the antisocial activities in the slums. However, she is continuing her job for the minimal income which she gets from the NGO. She complains that she is prompted to dine outside at most of the time due to the field work involved. This incurs additional expenses to her. The sad fact is that at the end of the month there is nothing to save. According to Mathi, there is a gender discrimination existing in NGOs in Wage payment. In her NGO there are only three male employees who are paid the most. In the current project, she is the senior most person by experience but there has been no advancement in the salary till date.

### 3.1.3. Case-3

Mary is a professional social worker employed in better established firm. She is a project coordinator there. She has about two years work experience in another organization and it has been one year since she has joined the present organization. Mary is married is a mother of a child. She was initially paid rupees eighteen thousand as salary, after an year a dearness allowance of rupees two thousand was added to it making the total salary as rupees twenty thousand. She says that the struggle which the social workers have to take in career is immense. As a fresher, she was forced to work for rupees five thousand. Through three years experience she had a hike in the salary. She is happy with the salary paid to her. According to her even though the salary is less while comparing to other professions, for a social worker, this is a better position. However, Mary complains that the field workers in the particular NGO are paid very less.

Mary is not having an opinion that there is a disparity in paying salaries to men and women for the same work. However, she has an opinion that for most of the positions, the management prefers to take male employees. The NGO office is equipped with good facilities where Mary has got a cabin also. According to Mary women working in NGOs have a lot of troubles; however people working at the field are the worst sufferers. Mary says that “The life of social worker is of adjustments and sacrifices” She says that one has to patiently wait for gaining experience in the social work field, for better positions and minimum salaries.

## 4. Analysis and findings

The first two cases comprised of professionally qualified women employees working in Grassroots level NGOs where as the third case represents an employee from a well reputed NGO. In the first two cases, the NGO workers get a very meagre salary whereas the third case has a moderate salary.

Through these case studies the researchers find that women employees at many NGOs are paid less or there exist great difference in wage payment according to their experience in the field. Gender based disparity in wage payment and recruitment is also visible by analysing the available cases.

## 5. Discussion

All the subjects under consideration do not receive the wages that they deserve. Queries of optimum wages, benefits such as health care, insurance and safety at work place, are hardly ever raised in the NGO sector as employees are rightfully classified as volunteers, trainees, staff in various projects or part timer workers receive a honorarium rather than a wage or salary. (Vasan, 2004). But it is specially noted that the employees have a perception that they are not paid in a way according to the various tasks accomplished by them.

Many of the women were receive nominal honorariums. (Mitra, 2005) As commented by a subject, they are forced to dine outside which is expensive and is not looked after by the NGO authorities. Another study in Bangladesh indicates that NGO Workers eat irregular meals. When the Women NGO workers have to eat out, they have to go to restaurants, which are expensive and unhygienic (Ahmad, 2002). Through these case studies, it is clear from all cases that there is gender based discrimination in the NGOs in one form or the other. According to the first subject, women are employed more in NGOs with the perception that they have to be paid less. The NGO sector is not immune from gender discrimination in employment. (Women’s Resource Centre,

2008)

The third case also discussed about the gender based disparity in providing employment at the NGO. Even when well qualified women are existing, priority is given to male candidate of equal qualifications during employment, a gender bias generate a hindrance right from the recruitment stage. (Barati, Arab & Masoumi, 2014)

## 6. Conclusion & Suggestions from Social Work Perspective

The study reveals that the salary paid to the Women employees of NGOs are not adequate to the needs of the time. Moreover there exists a Gender based disparity either in wage payment or in recruitment process of the NGOs. These indeed do not comply with the Social Work Values and principles. All these are the characteristics of unorganized sector. It is a shocking fact that the governmental agencies have ready data available about the personals employed in most of the unorganized trades, but it does not count the unorganized social workers.

A special labour policy as per the expectations of NGO workers, especially women, should be framed out by governments at various levels. Also there should be strict checking mechanism for ensuring that the NGO employers comply with the laws pertaining to employment of women at a particular setting. The NGOs needs to be gender sensitive and the Social Work professional have the greater responsibility to be models for other professional by preaching and practising gender friendly policies.

**Note:** The names used in this article are for reference purpose only and are not original names of the subjects.

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