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ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Problems of Women Employees in Private Shops and Business Enterprises, Kerala



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ABSTRACT

India is the first among countries to give women equal franchise and has a highly credible record with regard to the enactment of laws to protect and promote the interests of women, but women continue to be denied economic, social and legal rights and privileges. Though they are considered to be equal partners in progress, yet they remain subjected to repression, marginalization and exploitation. This study is based on a research conducted on women's employment in private sector. The objective of this paper is to analyze the various problems faced by women in private sector and factors affecting women in their work environment. This paper builds upon existing literature by integrating research on women and employment, and the issues pertaining to it. Data was gathered using in-depth and face to face interviews and the sample consisted of 700 women employed in the private sector at different occupational levels in the 14 districts of Kerala. The study is Exploratory cum Descriptive in nature. The study was designed to provide a rich and detailed description of women's accounts of their employment attitudes, decision-making, and experiences in the workplace. This study provides a brief review of the prevalence and consequence that women face, work-family conflicts, economic precariousness, social constraints, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, occupational health and psycho social problems relating to their work and outlines social policy implications for research, legislation, and primary prevention.

KEY WORDS: *women employees, psycho social problems, gender discrimination, sexual harassment and private sector*

Introduction

Women are poised to play a significant role in the global economy in the present decade. In the male dominated Indian context, women in the earlier era were engaged with domestic works. The dynamics of the society in the modernized era have liberated them and as a result they have started engaging themselves in all realms of microenterprises. They started competing with men in terms of bringing about social and economic development to the country. A significant change in the role of women affecting the Indian culture has emerged thus moving away from their traditional roles of home maker and child rearing to social and business solutions. A huge volume of employment opportunity has been created to women in the micro-enterprises sector. As there is reasonably good proportion of population in women entering into the microenterprises sector, problems affecting them also continue to multiply. Shortcomings exist in the body of knowledge regarding the problems of women employed in the microenterprises sector. Hence, this present study is an effort put in by the researcher to understand various problems affecting life of women employees in the microenterprises sector in the state of Kerala.

Position of Women in the Indian Society

The role of women in Indian society has undergone immense change with acceptance of their roles as professionals, as bread earners in families and as independent thinking individuals. The traditional Indian women has evolved to prove her equal in many professions as well as proved better suited than men in others. This changing role of women is improving rapidly. On the other hand, incidences of female feticide, dowry deaths, domestic violence, and abuse continue to provide a macabre background of primitive barbarism (Aamjanata, 2014). Many times women entering in the commercial sector undergo threats of women rights violation, abuse, rape, discrimination and harassment at work places. The male dominated society continues to affect the rights of women in the Indian society and ensuring to suppress the powers of women. Inequality still continues to affect Indian women to a larger extent.

However, equality can be achieved when women are empowered economically. Economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways which recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth (Eyben et al., 2008). Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information is increased. Women's economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to strengthening women's rights and enabling women to have control over their lives and exert influence in society (Swedish ministry for foreign affairs, 2014) for creating just and equitable societies. Women often face discrimination and persistent gender inequalities, with some women experiencing multiple discrimination and exclusion because of factors such as culture or caste. Issues affecting women employed in the microenterprises sector are not an exemption to these kinds of women rights violation. Researches dealing with the problems of women employed in the microenterprises sector are scanty. A need for research especially in the area of employed women and their problems need to be understood in the Indian society for making any kind of progressive change.

Status of Indian Women in Employment

The female employment in India grew by 9 million between 1994 and 2010, but the ILO (International Labour Organisation) estimates that it could have increased by almost double that figure if women had equal access to employment in the same industries and occupations as their male counterparts. According to the ILO's Global Employment Trends 2013 report, India's labor force participation rate for women fell from just over 37 per cent in 2004-05 to 29 per cent in 2009-10. Out of 131 countries with available data, India ranks 11th from the bottom in female labour force participation. "Despite very rapid economic growth in India in recent years, a declining female labour force participation rates is observed across all age groups, across all education levels, and in both urban and rural areas," (ILO, 2013). "Failure to allow women full access to the labour market is an under-utilization of human resources that holds back productivity and economic growth," (Kapsos, 2007). Strengthening anti-discrimination legislation in

employment across all occupations will be essential for expanding employment opportunities for women. In addition, reducing the large gaps in wages and working conditions, often observed between women and men, could help provide a boost to the number of women seeking employment.

These low rates are largely due to cultural attitudes and social norms about women in the workplace. In terms of declining employment opportunities, occupational segregation appears to play an important role in holding women back. Women in India tend to be grouped in certain industries and occupations, such as basic agriculture, sales and elementary services and handicraft manufacturing. The female employment is high in the private sector like food and textile industries and service sectors. The majority in the female labor force is both mothers and housewives. Specific psycho-social problems and health problems are accompanying the women in the working environment. Workers at these workplaces are exposed to hazards including long standing work, long sitting work, use and various chemicals which may have deleterious effects on their health, affecting fertility and pregnancy outcomes in women. Hence they carry a heavy burden with serious repercussions on their health. Many women workers continue to suffer the worst abuses due to stress, manual handling, repetitive strain injuries as well as violence and sexual harassment at work. The situation is even more worrisome in this age.

The fact is that women are economically productive, but they are not getting the provisions of the law or acts and policies. This study focuses on the problems of woman in private sector and business enterprises. The researcher explores the various problems encountered by woman who are working in private sector and business enterprises with special reference to Kerala. The researcher tries to analyze the job satisfaction and the performance level of the women employees in the private sector, Gender discrimination in work and wage market, various health problems of the women employees, psycho-social problems faced by the women workers and occurrence of sexual harassment of woman in work place. These problems have adverse physical and mental health consequences on women and it results into a feeling of low control, helplessness powerlessness. So this study explores the various problems faced by the woman from the private sector and suggests a new environment measures to solve their problems in order to make the 'work place climate' which supports and cope up with work and family responsibilities, they may experience higher levels of work or family enrichment as well as work and family satisfaction.

Position of Women in Kerala

In Kerala, where women are relatively more educated than all other states in the country, experience relatively low female work participation (Sebastian, 2008). The National Sample Survey, reports 22.9 percent of women participating in work force in Kerala. This is much less than the work participation rate of women in other Indian states with far lower levels of literacy. States like Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharastra with around 50 percent of female literacy rate, report double the female work participation rate of Kerala. In the light of this contradiction, the study attempts to identify the factors that influence women's employment in private sector. The issues relating to female employment are qualitatively different from those of male employment. This makes the study of work participation by women more complex. The researcher explores the various problems woman who are working in private sector and business enterprises with special reference to Kerala. The researcher tries to analyze the job satisfaction and the performance level of the women employees in the private sector, Gender discrimination in work and wage market, various health problems of the women employees, psycho-social problems faced by the women workers and occurrence of sexual harassment of woman in work place. These problems have adverse physical and mental health consequences on women and it results into a feeling of low self control, helplessness powerlessness.

Research Hypothesis

This scientific research paper explores the problems that women employees engaged into job force in private shops and business enterprises and aims to answer the following questions.

- ✓ 'Incidences of sexual harassment is higher in young women and lower among older women'.

Research Approach and Method

The Primary objective of this study is to understand the problems encountered by the women employees in private shops and business enterprises. The research design adopted to carry out this research is exploratory cum descriptive in nature. The choice of selecting all districts of Kerala emerged due to the reason of higher educational status and their

perceived problems in engagement in employment force in the private shops and enterprises. In depth interviews and closed-ended questionnaires were used for a number of compelling reasons, including that these are the preferred research instrument for studies of this kind. Kumar. S., et. al. (2011) used the same technique based on their belief that interviews guided conversations designed to elicit rich, detailed information particularly when attempting to access information regarding sensitive areas of study. The intent of the interviews was to elicit personal narratives of problems faced by the women employees in private shops and business enterprises.

Sample Selection and Size

The sample for this study consisted of women employed in the petty shops and business enterprises. In selecting the sample no particulars emphasis was placed on the nature of business that accommodated these women in the job force. In terms of sample size, cluster random sampling design is used. A total of 700 samples are drawn from various districts of Kerala to form the unit of analysis. A total of 50 samples from each district were chosen. These approaches helped the researcher to elicit important dimensions that may go unnoticed when using other research designs such as self administered questionnaires only.

Key Findings

Our analysis sample includes private sector employees between the ages of 20 and 45 years. This age restriction was made in order to exclude individuals in study-to-work and work-to-retirement transitions. The study also excludes the self-employed and those drawing a salary from their own business.

The analysis of responses from the in-depth, face-to-face interviews conducted with women employees in private sector, it was found emerged that most employees do not get adequate rest, nor refreshments, have limited facilities including the basic amenities, have stressful environment at work, need to make family adjustments, do not get any recognition at work, have to encounter gender and wage discrimination, get sexually harassed, and face various other health problems during their work.

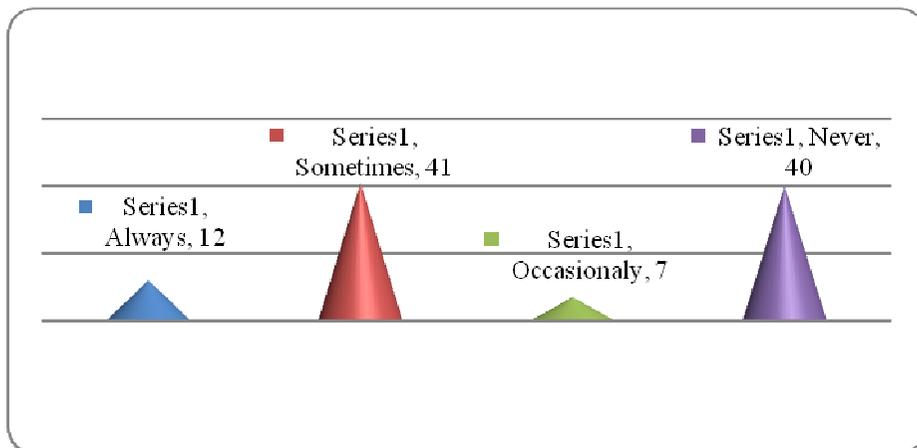
The study shows that 82 percent of working women in private sector are not getting the transportation facility from the shop. They are travelling

more than 15 Km per day to house and work place, but the employers do not arrange any necessary transportation arrangements for the employees.

It is observed that 64.3 percent of the women in working private sector have not safety to work in the night. This shows that most of the women employees in private sector are aware of the fact that they there is no safety to work at night and is risking their life, yet they are forced to work due to their varying situations in their life. The factories (Amendment) Act 2005, suggests if woman works in the night shifts, adequate transportation facility, protection of honor, and safety should be arranged. The researcher concludes that majority of the respondents do not get these provisions, hence it is evident that the employers are violating this act and legal authorities having power to enforce these acts are ignorant to this.

The Kerala Shops and commercial establishments act, 1960 guarantees “Every person employed in shops or commercial establishments to be allowed in each week a holiday of one whole day. The study reveals that 10 percent of the women working in private sector did not get a single day as holiday in a week. This means a small group of working women in private sector still not covered by getting the provisions of this act.

Figure 1: Rest provided for an hour after every Four Hours of Continuous Work



It is observed from the observe graph that 41 percent of the respondents reported of getting an hour rest sometimes after working continuously for four hours, while 7 percent of them reported of getting one hour rest occasionally and 40% of them reported of not getting rest for an

hour after a continuous work of long four hours. This we can summarize that, majority of the respondents do not get one hour rest after every continuous four hour work. The Kerala shops and commercial establishment act, 1960 guarantees the interval for at least one hour for every continuous work of four hours. Hence this reveals the violation of legal provision given in the act prescribed for employees.

This study shows that 24 percent of the women in working private sector sometimes have the provision to sit and take lunch and 4percent of them do not have the facility to sit and take lunch. The factories act suggests every factory should provide to all workers obliged to work in a standing position should be provided facilities for sitting, but this provision is not accessed by the women those who working in private sector keeping themselves in standing position in Kerala.

It is observed that 83 percent of the working women in private sector are not insured by the company. This finding depicts that the working women in the private sector have no access to the insurance benefits that should be necessarily provided by the company. This is a clear indicator that the company takes no initiative in the welfare of its employees.

Psycho-Social Problems

The second main theme, the paper discuss was about the psycho-social problems of the women in working private sector. As a human being everybody have their own inherent worth and dignity. The acceptance of worth and dignity from others is a right for each individual. The study reveals 40percent of the working women in private sector face the humiliation sometimes during work and 10 percent of the working women in private sector always suffer humiliation in work.

This study shows that 64 percent of the women in working private sector deserve recognition from customers or authorities. This shows that every human being longs for recognition and encouragement for the work they do, but many a time they receive criticism for their hard work and labour which is very pathetic. Family is the backbone of every human being. From this study, it is inferred that, 62 percent of the working women in private sector never get time to take care of their families needs and also 72 percent of the working women in private sector did not get time to spend time with children or family members. This will in fact create more problems in the life of the working women and will affect the bond between family members.

It is observed that among 50 percent of the working women in private sector that the amount of work and wage is not proportionate which means they are doing more work than the salary or wage they are getting. This is a clear indicator that there is exploitation with regard to the wage and hours of work. Results indicate that 45 percent of the working women in private sector experience stress in their life due to their work. This is because of the stressful environment they have at work place.

Gender Discrimination

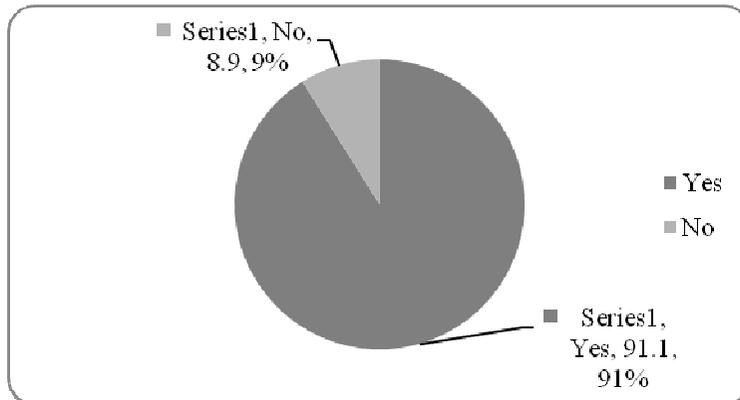
The third main theme the paper discusses is about gender discrimination at work place. Gender equality has always been seriously discussed, but in contrast, it still remains in the 'papers'. In this study 73 percent of the women in working private sector agreed that men are given more priority than women when they do the same kind of job. And 35 percent of the working women said that this discrimination always existing on the base of salary while they perform same job. 33 percent of the working women in private sector opined that men get more priority than woman in job. This is a clear indicator of gender discrimination at work place. Thus the overall picture that emerges from the data is that gender is an important factor that determines the status of women and their nature of job. The Equal remuneration Act, 1976 provides for the payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers for same work or of similar nature work and for the prevention of discrimination on the ground of sex against women in the matter of employment.

Health Problems

Another emergent factor the paper outlines is the health of the women employed in private sector. This study shows that 70 percent of the women in working private sector have been diagnosed with one or the other form of health problems after joining this job. The reason for this can be the type of job they are engaged and the work load they have to bear, both at work and family. The typical Indian background for women is one reason. The women in the family had to do all the chores like making food for the family and taking care of the children and the old. Of this 55 percent of the working women in private sector believe that their health problems are an after effect of their job. The health problems can be summarized that, the major diseases

like back pain (49 percent) and neck pain (47 percent) is the common problems to around half of the women working in private sector in Kerala.

Figure 2: Availability of Sanitary Latrine at Work Place



This study reveals that 9 percent of the women working in private sector reported of having no sanitary latrine facility at their work place. The study further reports that 79 percent of the respondents opined that they have no separate sanitary latrine facility for the woman employees in private sector. Women must be provided with quality health care in the work place. The long work hours, extensive travel, repetitive work, poor sanitation at work place may cause serious health hazards to women in private sector. Any policy for improving the quality of life of women at work place must, therefore, start with improvement in the basic facilities for women and the nature of their work.

Occurrence of Sexual Harassment

The fifth main theme discussed in this research was about the sexual violence that take place in the worksite. This study shows that 43 percent of the working women in private sector have been sexually harassed or teased while on duty. This is a clear indicator that there is still prevalence of sexual abuse taking place at work sites. And 8 percent of the women in working private sector agreed that they always suffer sexual harassment at work in order to retain their work or job, 24 percent of the working women said they encounter sexual harassment sometimes in order to retain their work or job. This clearly indicates the less percentage of women is suffering due to fear

of losing their job and subsequently their income. Again 44 percent of the working women opined that they always, sometimes or occasionally face unwanted sexual teasing, jokes, remarks or questions during work.

It was seen from the study that 19 percent of the women working in private sector suffer sexual harassment at work place from the customers, while 13 percent of them suffer sexual harassment from co-workers and 26 percent of them suffer sexual abuse from the management itself. From this it can be concluded that a large majority of the working women in this study are encountering this problem.

This study reveals that 24 percent of the working women have to approach nobody for the grievance when they face difficulties and other sexual harassments at work place. Only 2 percent of them approached to the police when they faced difficulties at work place.

Table 1: Cross Tabulation for Age and Approach to Handle Grievances related to Sexual Harassment

Age	Family members	Grievances Lodged				Total
		Co-workers	Management	Police	Nobody	
18-25	517.3%	55 7.9%	90 12.9%	2 0.3%	65 9.3%	263 37.6%
26-30	314.4%	38 5.4%	58 8.3%	3 0.4%	42 6.0%	172 24.6%
31-35	25 3.6%	20 2.9%	39 5.6%	2 0.3%	28 4.0%	114 16.3%
36-40	25 3.6%	15 2.1%	25 3.6%	4 0.6%	21 3.0%	90 12.9%
41-45	13 1.9%	12 1.7%	18 2.6%	3 0.4%	15 2.1%	61 8.7%
Total	145 20.7%	140 20.0%	230 32.9%	14 2.0%	171 24.4%	700 100.0%

Cross tabulation regarding the approaches adopted by the respondents with regard to handling grievances relating to sexual harassment, the study reveals that the highest rate of sexual harassment takes place at the age of 18-25 (38 percent) and 26-30 (25 percent). The study further reveals that

sexual harassment is prevalent among those younger than those older women. Hence the research hypothesis 'Incidences of sexual harassment is higher in young women and lower among older women' is proved by this.

Conclusion

This paper analyses the source of the problems of women employees in private-sector employment in Kerala. Our results suggest that, majority of the respondents hide the incidences of sexual harassment due to fear of losing their job as in most cases the violator himself might be the owner of the shop. These findings indicate the importance of implementing a national employment strategy designed specifically for women offenders. Women themselves acknowledged the importance of having their employment related needs met in order to prevent reoffending.

The analysis is also based on the lives, work and struggles of women in the private sector. The analysis provides strong evidence that there are gender differentials at workplace. This paper explores the key issues relating to gender and in particular it studied the discrimination of women based on the salary, promotion, working hours etc. The results also show that the monotonous tasks women had to encounter everyday in their work place lead them to many health related problems. In particular, the psycho social problems like anxiety and stress relating to family and work, is high among women workers.

To summarize, the findings of this study convey that people make a lot of personal and career sacrifices when confronted with challenges. Sleep deprivation, physical exhaustion, vulnerability to anxiety, delayed career advancement, were among the personal and career sacrifices that study participants indicated they had made. The study suggests that the Government need to strictly enforce the legal provisions made available to working women through various acts and this is the means to end all such issues affecting women in the globalised era.

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Problemi žena zaposlenih u privatnim radnjama i firmama, Kerala

A P S T R A K T

Indija je prva medju zemljama koja je dala ženama jednake franšize i ima visoko pouzdane rezultate kada je u pitanju donošenje zakona o zaštiti žena i promovisanju njihovih interesa ali ženama se i dalje uskraćuju ekonomska, društvena i zakonska prava i privilegije. Iako se one smatraju jednakim partnerima u napretku, i dalje su podvrgnute represiji, marginalizaciji i eksploataciji. Ova studija se temelji na istraživanju koje je sprovedeno na ženama koje rade u privatnom sektoru. Cilj ovog rada jeste da analizira razne probleme sa kojima se žene u privatnom sektoru suočavaju i faktore koji utiču na žene u njihovom radnom okruženju. Rad se zasniva na postojećoj literaturi u koju integriše istraživanje o ženama i zaposlenju, i problemima koji u toj oblasti postoje. Podaci su sakupljeni koristeći dubinske i intervjuue uživo, a uzorak obuhvata 700 žena koje su zaposlene u privatnom sektoru na različitim nivoima i zanimanjima u 14 oblasti Kerale. Studija je istraživačkog i deskriptivnog tipa. Napravljena je tako da može da pruži detaljne opise iskustava žena i njihovih stavova ka zapošljavanju, donošenju odluka i iskustvima na poslu. Ova studija pruža kratak pregled prevalenci i posledica sa kojima se žene suočavaju, konflikt posla i porodice, ekonomske

nesigurnosti, društvenih stega, rodne diskriminacije, seksualnog uznemiravanja, psiho-fizičkih društvenih problema koji su vezani za posao i da ukaže na implikacije društvenih propisa o istraživanju, zakonima i primarnoj prevenciji.

KLJUČNE REČI: *žene zaposleni, psihološko društveni problemi, rodna diskriminacija, seksualno uznemiravanje i privatni sektor.*

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