

# Knowledge and Awareness: A Quest for sustainability for Women Refugees of Odisha

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## Abstract

Refugee women may face unique or gender-related forms of persecution or violence. Hence they need to be safeguarded against arbitrary arrest or other forms of human rights violations. They also require a legal status that accords adequate social and economic rights and access to such basic necessities as food, shelter and clothing. Women refugees may be more vulnerable than other refugees, finding themselves uprooted and separated from their family members or traditional support mechanisms, or isolated from their communities. They may be at risk of or have suffered from a wide range of protection problems, including physical abuse, intimidation, torture, particular economic hardship, marginalization or community hostility. In order to overcome all these constraints it is very essential that the women refugees should have specific knowledge about the various legal mechanisms and policies and programmes of Government, by which they can be able to enhance their status. In this paper attempt has been made to analyse the knowledge and awareness of women refugees to strength their socio economic status. The present study has been carried out in three tahasils of Kendrapada district by taking 100 women refugees as the sample respondents. The purpose of the study is to assess to knowledge and awareness of women refugees of Odisha to increase their status.

**Key Words:** Persecution, Arbitrary, Vulnerable, Marginalization, Intimidation, Hostility.

## Introduction

International law defined “*refugee*” as a person who is forced to leave home for certain specified reasons and who, further more, is outside the country of his or her origin and does not have its protection.

According to UNHCR women represent 51 per cent of populations in refugee camps, worldwide. There are approximately 50 million uprooted people around the world who have sought safety in another country and people displaced within their own country. Between 75 and 80 per cent of them are women and children. The majority of people flee their homes because of war. In recent decades proportion of civilian war victims has increased from five per cent to over 90 per cent of casualties. Eighty per cent of casualties by small arms are women and children, who far outnumber military casualties.

It is always the women refugees who suffer more on account of unemployment, food insecurity as well as a threat to their physical wellbeing. Gender inequality in a patriarchal society exacerbates the situation. In the economic realm a refugee crisis may lead to further marginalization and impoverishment of women through loss of traditional sources of income. Hence combating it also requires addressing the gender inequality that is at its root.

Women's Refugee Commission calls for livelihood for displaced women and youth that recognize their skills, experience and capacity and which are targeted towards local markets, are comprehensive in approach, and promote self-reliance that is both dignified and sustainable. With refugees displaced for longer periods than ever before, the ways in which refugees—particularly women can earn a living and sustain themselves and their families must be addressed systematically. Livelihoods are vital for the social, emotional and economic wellbeing of displaced persons and are a key way to increase the safety of displaced women.

Refugees are victims of gross human rights violations. They are a distinct group of individuals without protection of National State. The linkage between human rights and refugees is clear in the sense that while gross violation of human rights makes it possible for refugees to return home safely. So the problems of refugees are of international character because of the involvement of two or more states in the sense that they flee from one state to another state. So their problem cannot be sorted without international co-operation. India is a country governed by a rule of law. Our Constitution confers certain rights on every human being and certain other rights on citizens. Every person is entitled to equality before law and equal protection of law. So also, no person can be deprived of his life and personal liberty except according to procedure established by law. Thus, the state is bound to protect life and liberty of every human being be it a citizen or Refugee. So, the State Government can tolerate threat by one group of person to another group of persons. It is duty bound to protect the treatment group from such assaults and if it fails to do so it would fail to perform constitutional and statutory obligations. So, those giving threats would be liable to be dealt with law. So State Governments must act impartially and carry out its legal obligations to safeguard several aspects of Refugee's everyday life such as – Right to work and non-discrimination; Right to education, employment on

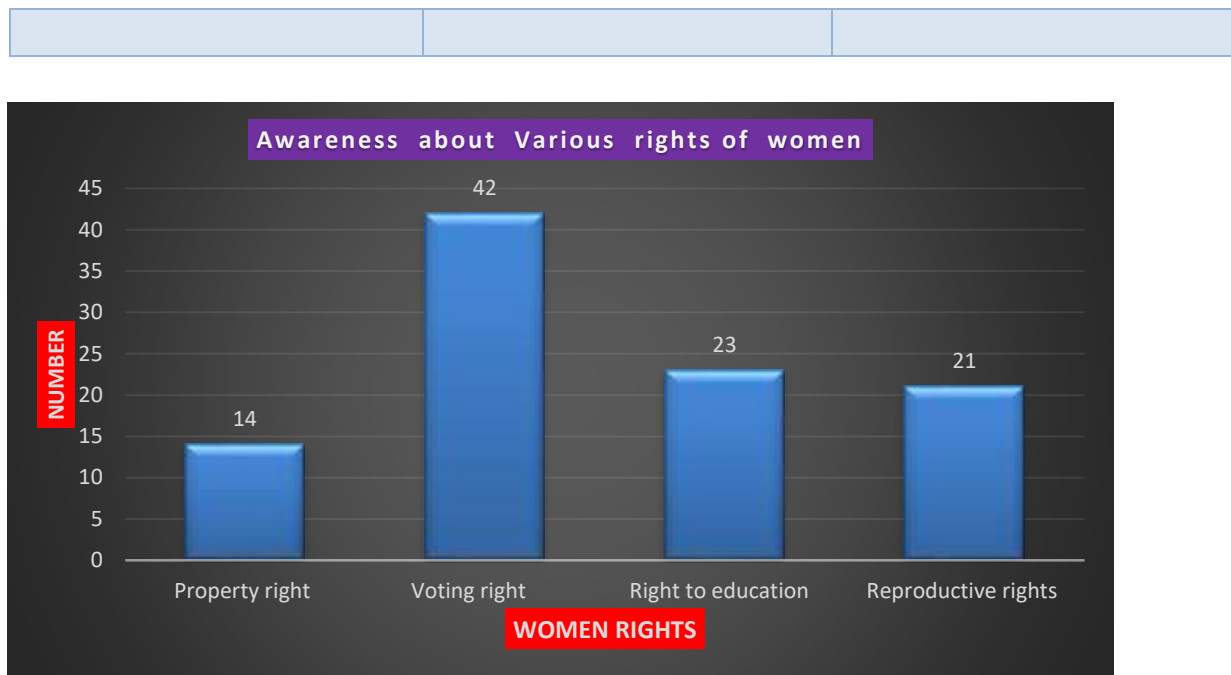
wages and salaries; Right to public assistance; Right to social security; Right to travel to courts since they are not in a position to use their own national passport; Right to life, business, such as agriculture, art, cottage industry; Right to health and well being; Right to choose their place of residence and to move freely within territory; The Right not to charge taxes of any description higher than those which are or may be levied on their Nationals in similar situations; Right not to impose penalties on refugees who have illegally entered into their territories without authorization; Right not to expect a refugee lawfully in their territory or on grounds of National Security or Public Order; Right to marriage and self help; Right to acquire both movable and immovable property; Right to form association which must be non-political and Non-profitable; Right to enjoy asylum and Right to return to their own country. So National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) established by Protection of Human Rights Act of 1993 can also play an active role in Indian refugee policy is often guided by political compulsions, not rights-enabling legal obligations. The first mass influx following the Partition of the country in 1947 was met with a number of legal, executive and administrative mechanisms designed to assist and eventually integrate the incoming Hindus and Sikhs into the national mainstream. The first ‘foreign’ influx of refugees occurred in 1959 from Tibet when the government, politically uncomfortable with China, set up transit camps, provided food and medical supplies, issued identity documents and even transferred land for exclusive Tibetan enclaves across the country for cultivation and occupation along with government-provided housing, healthcare and educational facilities. The Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, having arrived in India in three waves beginning in 1983, have also been relatively well received in the geographically and ethnically contiguous State of Tamil Nadu where a large degree of local integration has occurred. In comparison, the Chakma influxes of 1964 and 1968 saw a subdued and reluctant government response. Perhaps the largest mass influx in post-Partition history occurred in 1971 when approximately 16 million refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan sought safety in India. Enormous amounts of socio-economic and other resources were expended by the both the Central Government and the governments of the neighbouring States to deal with the crisis. Although most of the refugees returned within a year, the India has received and accommodated mass influx refugees from Tibet and Sri Lanka in special camps with varying facilities for health, education and employment. Asylum seekers who enter India individually after a mass influx has taken place are granted asylum after a preliminary screening mechanism. This process continues in the case of Tibetans and Sri Lankans who enter India in small numbers and must fulfil certain criteria before they are registered by the Indian Government. In 2003, the UNHCR handled, *inter alia*, 10,283 refugees from Afghanistan and 940 refugees from Myanmar. The UNHCR also handles refugees from Iran, Somalia, Sudan and other countries. Experience left the Indian government both bitter at the non-responsiveness of international organisations and complacent in the confidence of being able to deal with future mass influxes.

Refugees who are not extended direct assistance by the Indian Government are free to apply to the UNHCR for recognition of their asylum claims and other assistance. To this end, the UNHCR is mandated by its parent Statute to conduct individual refugee status determination tests and issue certificates of refugee status to those who fulfil the criteria of the Refugee Convention. The Refugee Certificates issued by the UNHCR are not formally recognised by the Indian Government, making them legally unenforceable in India. However, the authorities have, in general practice, taken cognisance of the UNHCR’s Refugee Certificates to allow most refugees an extended stay in India in the absence of political opposition. Therefore, while a *de jure* system of refugee protection in India does not exist, there is a system of procedures and practices that serve to create a *de facto* refugee protection regime in India. The ambivalence of India’s refugee policy is sharply brought out in relation to its treatment of the UNHCR. While no formal arrangement exists between the Indian government and the UNHCR, India continues to sit on the UNHCR’s Executive Committee in Geneva. Furthermore, India has not signed or ratified the Refugee Convention. This creates a paradoxical and rather baffling situation regarding the UNHCR where India sits on its Executive Committee and allows the UNHCR to operate on its territory, but refuses to sign the legal instrument that brought the organisation into existence.

Awareness plays an important role in enhancing one’s knowledge and ideas about a particular thing. when one becomes aware about one particular issue then he/she can able to avail it in a very perfect manner. Awareness plays an important role for the illiterate women in general and for women refugees in particulars. As the women refugees are excluded by the society and lack education, so for them awareness about various laws and government policies is very much essential.

Regarding the women refugees awareness about various rights the responses has been recorded in the following fig 1

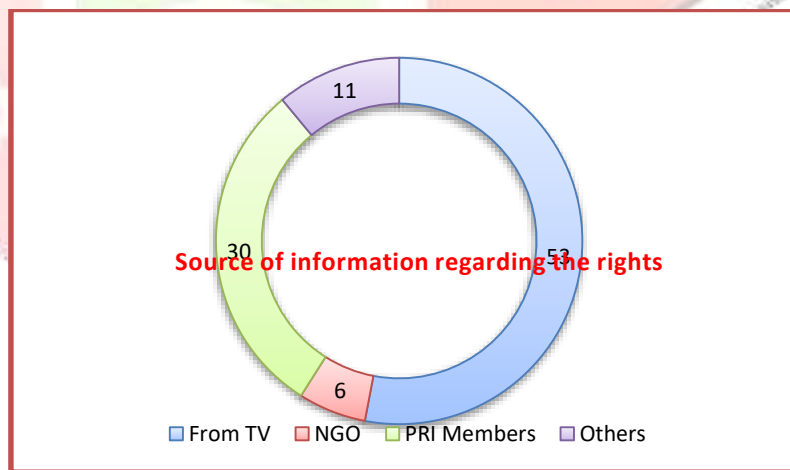
**Fig-1**  
**Distribution of respondents on the basis of awareness about various rights.**



The fig- 1 states that about 14% of women refugees are aware about the property right. Maximum percentage of respondents i.e. 42% are aware about the voting right. This shows that the women refugees are the concerned about their rights as citizen of India. 23% of respondents have knowledge about the right to education whereas 21% of respondents are aware about the reproductive right. So almost all the respondents have some knowledge about different rights whether they are availing these rights or not but they have the knowledge about it.

When the refugee women show their positive response regarding their awareness about various rights, then they were asked about the sources from which they can able to know about these rights. Their responses are indicated in the following fig-2

**F-g- 2 Distribution of Respondents on the basis of sources of information**



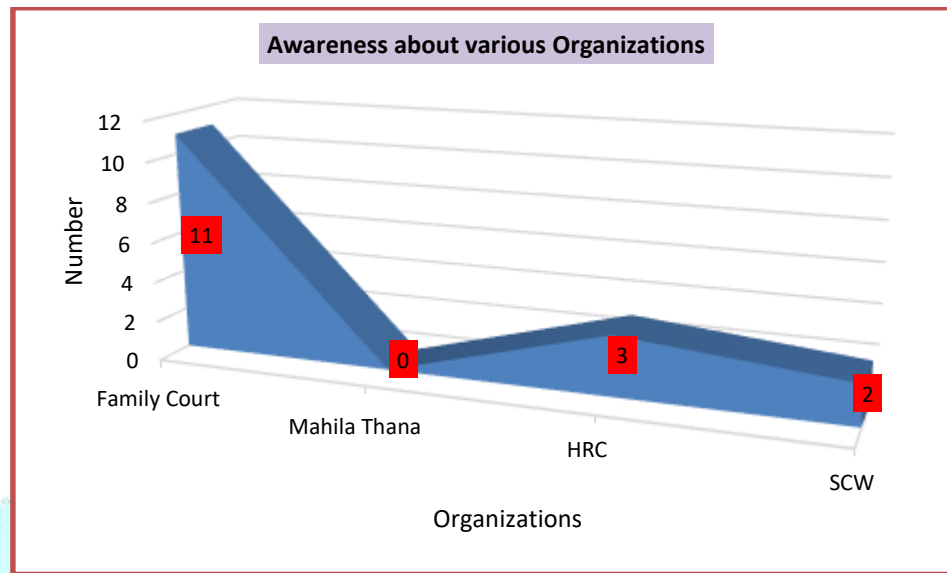
The above fig 2 reveals that around 63% of respondents have pointed out that they know about various rights from Television. Around 30% of respondents came to know about it from the PRI members of their Panchayats. Only 6% of respondents came to know about it from NGOs. When the NGOs organize some awareness programme in their village they came to know about it. Only 11% of respondents came to know about it from their friends and relatives. So the data of the above table states that more or less the refugee women are aware about different rights.

Now a days violence is a common symptom in each and every society. As the respondents are facing violence at work place and in the family so it is very essential that they should have the knowledge about different organizations for providing the help and support to overcome the problem of violence.

The awareness of women refugees for contacting the various organizations is depicted below in the fig 3.

**Fig 3**

**Distribution of respondents on the basis of awareness regarding various organizations.**



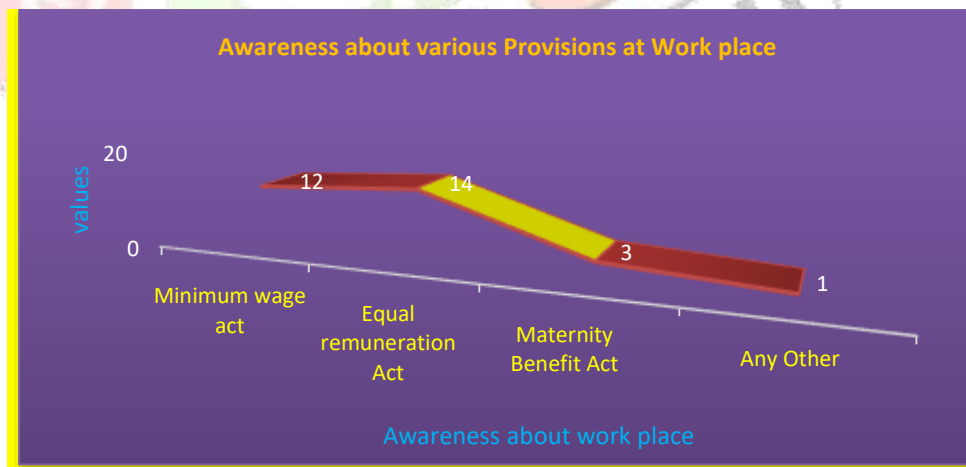
The above fig reveals that about 11% of respondents are aware about the family courts not a single the women refugees are aware about Mahila Thana. 3% of respondents are aware about Human Right Commission and 2% have the knowledge of State Commission for women.

So this figure states that a very few percentage of respondents have knowledge about different organizations to extend support and help as and when required by them. They got the knowledge about these organizations from T.V. and NGOs. Even if they have the knowledge about it but anybody have not availed the support and help of these organizations.

The knowledge of the women refugees about the various provisions at work place is very much essential to overcome any disturbances at work place. When the respondents are asked about the various acts to overcome the problems at work place they have given their responses which has been depicted in the following figure.

**Fig 4**

**Distribution of respondents about the various provisions at work place.**



The fig 4 shows that 12% of respondents are aware about the minimum wage act. Where as 14% of respondents have the knowledge regarding equal remuneration act. 3% of respondents have the awareness about maternity benefit act and only 1% of women refugees are aware about factory act.

The knowledge of the women refugees regarding various provisions at work place reveals that they have very poor knowledge about various acts to overcome any sorts of exploitation at work place. Even if they get the knowledge about various organizations from various NGOs and T.V. but unfortunately they have not applied it in their real life situation at any

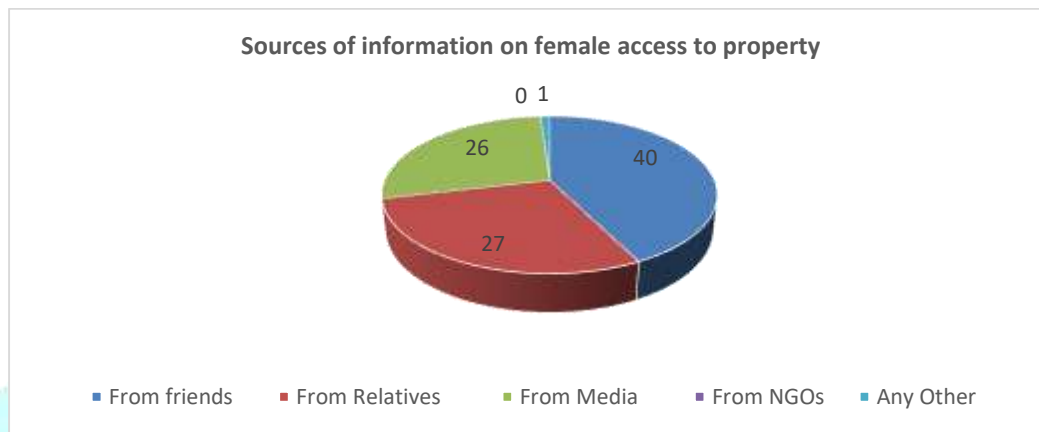


work places. If they will avail all these provisions at work place they can able to get a better work environment and will not face any sorts of exploitation at work place.

Today property rights is a serious issue for women. It enhances the economic capability of women and they make them economically empowered. For this purpose when it has been asked to them about the source of information regarding the female’s access to property, they have given their responses which has been placed in the following fig 5.

**Fig 5**

**Distribution of respondents on the basis of sources of information on female’s access to property.**

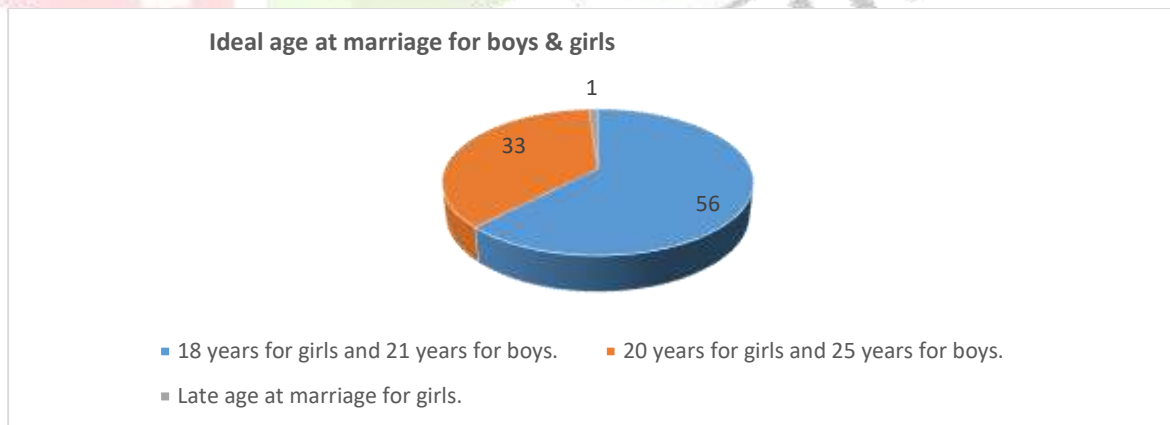


The data of the fig 5 shows that 40% women refugees came to know about the access to property by females from their friends. Around 27% of respondents came to know about it from their relatives, 26% know it from media and only 1% of respondent know it from PRI member. So this states that almost all the respondents have the got the information regarding the property right from different sources like friends, relatives, media and from PRIs. Though they are aware about it but they have not availed it in their real life situations.

Age at marriage plays an important role in determining the health status of the women in general and refugee women in particular. Early marriage leads to early pregnancy and which also leads to low birth weight babies and increases the IMR and MMR rate of the state. So in order to overcome this problem the respondents were asked about their knowledge regarding ideal age at marriage for boys and girls. Their responses has been depicted in the following fig 6.

**Fig-6**

**Distribution of respondents on the basis of awareness about ideal age of marriage.**



The above figure shows that about 56% of respondents are aware about the ideal age at marriage for girls that is 18 years and for boys it is 21 years. Whereas 33% of respondents are pointed out that ideal age of marriage is 20 years for girls and 25 years for boys. Whereas only 11% of respondents said that the late age at marriage for girls is ideal age at marriage. So the above table reveals that except 56% of respondents others are not aware about the ideal age at marriage for boys and girls. Proper knowledge about ideal age at marriage will improve the health status of refugee girls.

The overall increase in status of refugee women depends on their knowledge about the provisions of government. The refugees were asked about the Government provisions, whether they are aware about these provisions or not that can be know from their responses. These responses were reflected in the table no 1.1. The awareness regarding the Government provisions is very much essential for the upliftment of the status of women refugees.

**Table No-1.1**

**Distribution of respondents on the basis of awareness regarding provisions of Government.**

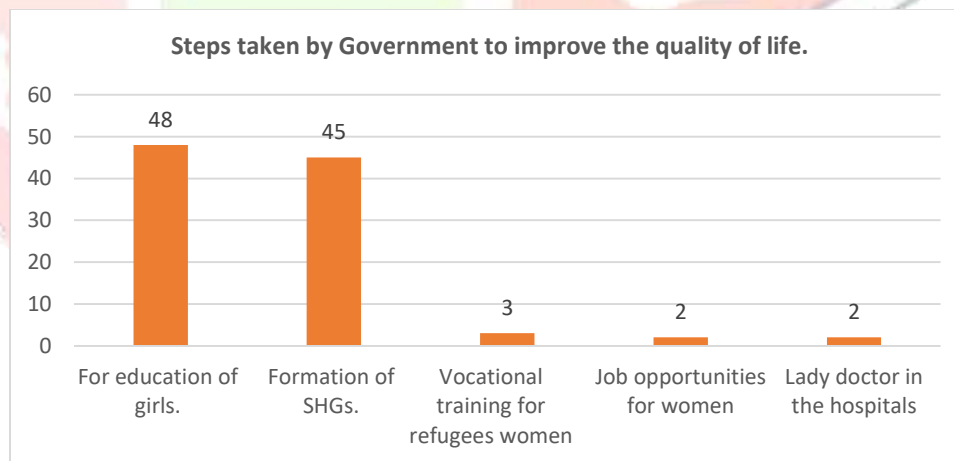
Registration Provision of Government	Frequency	Percentage
Pregnancy Registration	30	30
Birth Registration	13	13
Death Registration	01	01
Marriage Registration	--	--

The data of the above table reveals that 30% of respondents are aware about the pregnancy registration from T.V. About 13% respondents are aware about the birth registration of their new born babies and only 1% of women refugees are aware about the death registration. Not a single respondent is aware about the marriage registration. So this table shows that even if they lack education and they are not much qualified still then they have their knowledge regarding the registration provision by Government. Through this registration scheme they will be able to lead a smooth life.

Quality life is very much essential for each and every citizen of our country. So the refugee women should not be debarred from the quality life. They are asked about the specific steps taken by the Government for improving the quality of life. Their responses have been reflected in the following fig-7

**Fig-7**

**Distribution of respondents on the basis of specific steps taken by Government.**



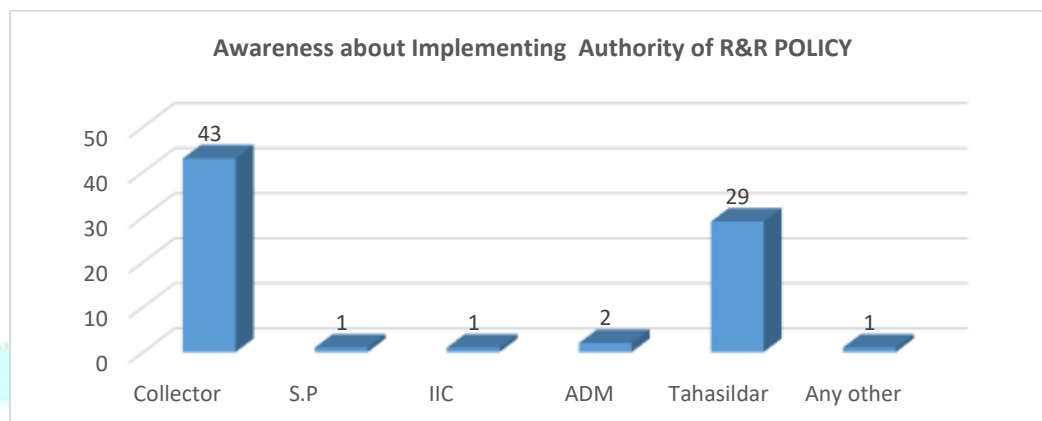
The above figure states that about 48% of women refugees are aware about the Sarva Sikhya Abhiyan Programme of Government to improve the educational status of girl children. About 45% of respondents are aware about the Government initiative for formation of Shelf Help Groups for economic empowerment of women refugees. Only 3% of respondents are aware about the provision of vocational training programme for respondents to make them self independent. A very marginal percentage of respondents i.e. 2% are aware about the MGNREGAS of Government to provide job opportunities to them and the same percentage i.e. 2% are also aware about the provision of lady doctors in the hospitals for increasing the accessibility of women refugees to the health care institutions. This shows that the women refugees are aware about the Government provisions for improving the quality of life.

Resettlement and rehabilitation is a major problem of the women refugees, as they are all migrated from different places. So their knowledge regarding Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy is very much essential for running their life in a

smooth manners. They should also have the knowledge regarding the implementing authority of R & R Policy. The following table 9.7 shows the awareness of women refugees regarding the implementing authority of R & R Policy.

**Fig-8**

**Distribution of respondents on the basis of awareness regarding the implementing authority of R & R Policy**



The figure 8 reveals that about 43% of respondents came to know about the R & R Policy from the District Collector. When the Collector comes on a visit to their village and discusses with the villagers about the issue of R & R. policy, they came to know about this, Around 29% of respondent have the knowledge about R & R Policy from the Tahasildar. Only 1% of respondents came to know about this from IIC and Superintendent of policy and only 2% know this from Additional District Magistrate. So this table gives a clear cut picture about the awareness of women refugees about R & R Policy. By getting the information from different Government official they can able to improve their quality of life. The proper implementation of R&R Policy will enhance the status of women refugees of Odisha.

The implementation of Government schemes is highly essential to improve the socio economic condition of women refugees of Odisha. In order to assess the awareness of women refugee about the various schemes of Government, they were asked the questions. Their responses were placed in the following table 1.2.

**Table No-1.2**

**Awareness about various Schemes of Government.**

SCHEMES	AWARE	NOT AWARE
NHM	43	57
JananiSurakhyaYojana	83	17
UIP (Universal Immunisation Programme)	12	88
Adolescent Health Care Practices	02	98
ICDS	1	99
NREGA	22	78
SGSY	12	88
IMY	3	97
DWCRA	2	98
TRYSEM	4	96
JRY	43	57
PDS System.	2	98
SSA.	62	38

Mid Day Meal Programme.	79	21
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The above table 1.2 states that about 43% of respondents are aware about the scheme of National Health Mission which provides health care services to the villagers. Maximum percentage of respondents such as 83%, 79% and 62% of respondents are aware about Universal immunization Programme, Mid day meal and Sarva Sikhya Abhiyan etc respectively for improvement of health and educational status of their children. Odisha Government has implemented all the schemes for improvement of the status of refugee women, but the unfortunate part of the scenario is that maximum percentage of refugee women are not aware about the important schemes of the Govt. like ICDS, DW CRA, PDS, TRYSEM etc which has the major contribution in enhancing the health, education and employment status of the refugee women and their children.

### Conclusion

The present study noted that the lack of awareness of refugee women leads to deprivations, vulnerability and exclusion. Unawareness about government policies, laws and programmes brings resource crunch for the refugee women, difficult role and responsibilities unexpected for the innocent, illiterate poor refugee women, jeopardises their rights, brings risks of multiple forms and deep magnitude and finally strains her interpersonal relationship.

Coping mechanism for improving the awareness of refugee women plays an important role. Through T.V, NGOs, PRI members, friends and relatives they have tried to improve their knowledge about various rights of refugee women.

Deprivation of knowledge is the major source of exposure to exploitation, violence at family or at work place which lead to the lack of a good quality of life, vulnerability increases insecurity and exclusion aggravates discrepancies and discriminations leading to a diminished status of the refugee women of Odisha.

Undoubtedly the availing of all the provisions at work place will help the respondents to get a better work environment and they will not face any sorts of exploitation at work place. But their poor knowledge about various acts to overcome any sorts of exploitation at work place are responsible for their poor employment status.

Deprivation of knowledge regarding health indicators and Government provisions are responsible for poor health status of the refugee women of Odisha.

However, the study concluded that all such impacts have common emanating points are inter-related. The lacunae in one aspect bring lacunae in subsequent aspects putting the refugee women in misery. Poor socio economic status of refugee women creates a risk trajectory and stepping up shortfalls.

Awareness of refugee women regarding the sources of information about R&R policy is essential for running their life in a smooth manners. The miseries of migrants increases due to their lack of knowledge about the policy.

Resources are limited for poor refugee women. The roles and responsibilities undertaken by them are under compulsion and do not commensurate to their status. They are debarred from enjoying their rights. Risks are insurmountable for them and they continue with strained interpersonal relationship which reduces the overall status of women refugees.

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