

WOMEN AND WORK: A STUDY OF THE CONDITIONS OF WOMEN IN INFORMAL SECTOR OF DELHI

Dr. Nikunj Makwana
(MBBS, MPH, PGDMCH, MA, CNM)
Research Scholar,
Centre for Social Medicine & Community Health,
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Abstract: The purpose of the study is to capture the lived experiences of working women in the informal sector using two brief case studies. The objective of the study is to analyze the conditions of working women and how the social construction of gender increases the burden of working women as compared with men. Though the informal sector itself is a very broad category, the study is limited to two categories worker, viz., work as a sanitary worker and work as a security guard on a contractual basis. The findings of the study depict how the social construction of gender and gendered norms shape the lives of these working women and induce their burden of work. The findings also show that the intersection gender, caste and poverty also intensify the problem in the lives of these women. In conclusion, it was argued that the women who were working in an informal sector have triple burden - one is due to their work, second is due to the informal sector and third because she is women. Though the role of government and their policy were very important to address concern of women who are working in informal sector, it's pertinent to change our attitude towards these women and treat them with dignity and respect.

Index Terms - Women, Work, Health, Informal Sector

I. Introduction

In India, there is about 72 % workforce is in the informal sector. Three out of four people who are working in the non-agriculture sector are in informal jobs. Of those who are in the informal sector, 42 % are in temporary employment. NSSO (National Sample Survey Office) considers informal sector as consisting of units operating at a low level of organisation with little division between labour and capital, and labour relations based on family, social relations or casual employment (NSSO Report, 2013). Informal sector jobs are full of vulnerability, lower wages and without any social securities. Now, in the informal sector, conditions of working women become deplorable due to various type of gendered societal responsibilities associated with women. As we know, Case studies are useful for human study concerns. It is one of the most effective tools for developing understanding through lived experiences of cases involved. So, here we will try to analyse conditions of working women, and we will also see that how various social construct such as gender adds to the burden of women.

II. Research Question

How are the Conditions of women who are working in the informal sector and how various social constructs affect them?

III. Objectives

1. To examine current living, working and health conditions of working women
2. To assess how Social constructs increases the burden of working women as compared with working men.

IV. Methodology

1. Case:

In my study, the definition of the case is 'Women working in the Informal sector in the area of JNU'.

2. Case study Design:

I have used 'Common multiple case design' for my case study, where I have taken a history from two cases for my case study and has tried to observe the commonalities and differences among them.

3. Tools for Data collection

Qualitative data has been obtained after an open-ended interview. The Interview was conducted with the help of a pre-structured guide, but enough space is given to cases for narrating their experiences during the interview. The interview of the individual case was conducted for more than two hours.

4. Ethical concerns:

The interviews were conducted after taking the consent of the participants. The participants were informed that their actual names would not be revealed; thus, pseudo-names were used.

V. Below is a summary of findings obtained from two different cases

Details	Case 1	Case 2
Name	Sonia	Asha
Age	28 years	34 years
Sex	Female	Female
Caste	SC	General(Other)
Education	Up to 6 th standard	Bachelor of Arts
Residence	Kusumpur Pahadi, Vasantkunj, Delhi	Old JNU Campus, Delhi
Marital Status	Married	Married
Children	3 Female (10, 7 & 1 years) 1 Male (12 years)	2 Female (12 & 10 years) 1 Male (3 year)
Family History and experiences	<p>- She is married and lives in a joint family at above residence.</p> <p>- In the family, she lives with her husband, mother-in-law, her four children, brother-in-law and brother-in-law's wife. Her father-in-law expired three years ago.</p> <p>- There are only two rooms at her house, and no facility of bathroom or toilet is her house. So, they have to use the public facility of the same which costs them Rs. 2 for toilet usage and Rs. 5 for bathroom usage. In addition to cost, public facility compels them for waiting their turn, because there is always a crowd at this facility when they go for usage.</p> <p>- House is of their own, not rented.</p> <p>- Water supply is irregular (weekly water supply), and sometimes she has to carry water from outside.</p> <p>- Her husband is doing the job as a housekeeper at JNU.</p> <p>- She and their family have Aadhar card, Ration card and election card at their above address.</p>	<p>- She is married, and her family lives with her parents at above residence.</p> <p>- In her current family, she lives with her husband, her three children and her mother and father. After marriage, she went to her husband's house in Faizabad, but since one year she came in Delhi for the job and stays with her parents. Her husband came in Delhi for job six years back, and he also stays with her parents.</p> <p>- There are four rooms at her current house with bathroom and toilet facility.</p> <p>- Their house is rented, and they have to pay Rs. 2500 / month as rent.</p> <p>- Water supply is regular and daily.</p> <p>- Her husband is doing the job as Guard in one of the hostels in JNU.</p> <p>- At her husband's house at Faizabad(where she was living till last year), there is a house, shop, petrol-pump of their own. There was a joint family there in Faizabad consisting 11 members. Due to a joint family, there was the presence of problems there in Faizabad, she says- '<i>vaha chhote-mote problems rehte the, kaam bat jata tha magar rok-tok hoti thi, har cheez ke liye pehle family ko samjana padta tha</i>'.</p> <p>-She and her husband have Aadhar card, Ration card and election card of Faizabad's address.</p>
Daily life experiences	- She wakes up 6 am at morning. Then she prepares breakfast (chai, roti) and lunch	- She wakes up 5:30 am in the morning. She prepares breakfast for the family, and then she

	<p>for her entire family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After that, she and her husband come together for their duty at JNU. -After completing the job, she goes home. Then she has to go for purchasing vegetables and daily household needs alone; her husband does not accompany her for this. She has to go for this daily. - After that, she and wife of brother-in-law have to make dinner for her family, and her mother-in-law does not help them. - She has to take care of their children and look for them throughout the day. -She feels that she has to make food for all the day, take care of children, and do other household work in addition to working on her duty. This is tiresome, and a load of her work is much greater than a daily load of her husband's work. - For entertainment, she gets very less time daily. But when she watches TV in between then also her mother-in-law gets angry (<i>chillati he</i>) and says – <i>Abhi to bartan bhi nahi dhule or TV ke samne beth gayi!</i> Evenwhen she wants to watch her favourite show, then she has to bargain with other family members, and she cannot view programme of her choice. She says- <i>'Muje serials dekhna hota he colors pe, aur unko fight dekhna hota he wwf ka.'</i> 	<p>goes to Ber Sarai for dropping their children to school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After coming to the home she does all domestic work prepares lunch and then again she has to go to pick her children back from school. - She comes for a job in the afternoon. - Her husband goes for purchasing vegetables. - After the job, she goes home and prepares dinner for her family. - She has to take care of children throughout the day.
<p>Husband's Contribution to daily household work and child rearing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Husband helps her in preparing food sometimes, but not regularly. When husband helps her then also its limited only to cutting vegetables or making 'sabji'. - Her husband does not take care of their children, and she has to take care of children alone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Her husband helps in doing household works like cooking food, cleaning utensils, etc. as she says – <i>'sab kam me hath batate he'</i>. But interestingly her husband was not doing any help when they were living at Faizabad, she says – <i>'vaha kaise help karte, sab kehte ki, dekho ye to joru ka gulam he.'</i> - Her husband takes care of their children. He teaches her children as well as drops/pick up from school sometimes.
<p>Workplace Experiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She is working as a housekeeper in the Lohit hostel of JNU. Its contractual job and she may be removed from a job at any time. - Her daily working time is 8 am to 4 pm. She has to work for 26 days in a month. She gets to leave for four days in a month. - Her salary is around Rs. 9000 / month, but after deduction, she gets around Rs. 8000 as monthly salary. - At workplace, there is burden of work as she says- <i>'kaam jyada he, one wing ka kaam usko akele ko karna padta he; workers ki bhi kami he'</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She is working as a Guard in the Lohit hostel of JNU. Its temporary job as according to need of Security agency. - At present, there are two shifts for a female guard in JNU. Shift A (7 am to 3 pm) and Shift B (3 pm to 10 pm). She is generally assigned shift B for work. - In the past, there was a night shift also for a female guard, but after some incident at Koyna hostel and subsequent complaints, now only day shift is assigned to female guard. - She has to work for all the days of the month. She does not get any official leave in a month. If she has to remain absent due to any

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regarding co-workers and students where she works, her experience is mix as she says- '<i>kuch sahi he, kuch acche he, kuch acche nahi he</i>' - When her co-workers are absent on duty, she has to do work for them in addition to her own work. And the irony is that she is not paid for this extra work, neither she gets leave nor money for this extra work. She says- '<i>Dusro ka bhi kaam karo, taken hoti he, chutti bhi nahi milti, paise bhi nahi milte.</i>' - While asking for support regarding work-related affairs, she says their union helps to raise an issue such as vacancy of workers, extra load on workers, etc. but the union also not succeeding in solving their problems. - No paid maternity leave is provided by the employer. They can get two and half months leave without pay while pregnant. She said her supervisor got some money for delivery, but she did not get money, during her pregnancy (details was not available). - She has ESIC card for temporary usage for routine health care needs of her own and her family. 	<p>reason, her salary is deducted accordingly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Her salary is Rs.300 / day. At the end of month Rs.1100 is deducted for PF and Rs.150 for ESIC facility, she gets around Rs. 7800 / month. - Regarding co-workers and students, her experience is satisfactory. Her co-workers mutually exchange duty or sometimes do extra work instead of her for few hours, when there is some work. She also has to do this vice versa. - Her supervisor scolds her even without her mistake, she says – '<i>kabhi kabhi kuch bhi sunana padta he, apni galti na ho tab bhi</i>'. - There is no union of guards for support in work-related affairs. - No paid maternity leave is provided by the employer. They can get three months leave without pay while pregnant. - She is provided with ESIC card for health care needs of her family.
Job-related problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Her job has a clear effect on her health as she always feels tired. She says- '<i>din bhar kam karna padta he, upar se half hour lagta he ghar jane me, tabiyat kharab ho jati he</i>'. She also says- '<i>ghar ka aur kam ka tension rehta he</i>' means, I have to work throughout the day. Moreover, it takes more than half-an-hour to reach home; I feel sick and tired due to the stress of work at the hostel(her workplace) and the home - Though her husband doesn't deny her to go to her sister's home, he says to return in 1 day, because more leave may deduct salary of her. - She has faced problems in breastfeeding her children due to the job. - She is not feeling any caste-related discrimination in the workplace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Her job has not much effect on her health, as she says- '<i>baithe baithe kam karna hota he isliye koi jyada problem nahi hota, magar kabhi kabhi kamar me dard hota he</i>'. Since nature of the work is such that she can sit and work so, this work doesn't create any problem; however, she suffers from backache at times. She denies work-related stress. - She and her husband usually go to social events, but tries to return within a day. - She has faced problem in breastfeeding her younger child due to the job.
History and experiences of their lives as children and teen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She has taken education till 6th standard; then she left school as she was not interested in the study; though her parents especially mother wanted her to continue schooling. - She has learned dancing and beauty parlour work before her marriage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She has graduated in Arts from Delhi. Then due to early marriage and family responsibility, she has to leave study after that. - She has also done a short course on Sewing, Typing and Shorthand writing.
Marriage life experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She has a history of love marriage. They both liked each other, and they married in spite of family disagreement, then after some time family from both side accepted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Her marriage was arranged in the same caste. The family looked a guy first and then after her consent marriage happened.

	<p>their marriage and now they live normally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There was no demand for dowry after that in any form. - She doesn't find any extra time for doing any creative activity. - Huband-Wife cannot get enough space as their house is two rooms and nine family members live in that. - Her husband doesn't interfere with her day to day life. She gives her salary to her husband, but she has the freedom to purchase anything she likes for herself or family. - Her husband or family do not deny her, when she wants to go to her parents' home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There was no demand for dowry from her, but she says dowry was prevalent in the locality of Faizabad where she lived after marriage. - She and her husband has good understanding of each other, she says – <i>'hum dono ke bich me koi problem nahi hota, wo bhi samjte he kyoki khud bhi guard ka kam karte he'</i> means there is no problem between them regarding work as he also works as security guard
<p>Entry in job market</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After marriage she was working as a housewife, then due to the responsibility for children and economic constraints, there is a need for each member of the family to work and earn money. She was skilled in running beauty parlour, but her family denied her to do the job in beauty parlour outside and insisted on opening beauty parlour at home itself. After some time she got a current job opportunity, and as her husband and brother-in-law were already working here in JNU, she accepted this job. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She is graduate. She has worked as a housewife after marriage in Faizabad. But she wanted to work, so she was going to the school of her brother-in-law for teaching. - She always thought to do something on her own, so she came Delhi after her husband and joined as a guard. She says- <i>'agar padhne ke bad bhi yehi karna he to fir padhai ka kya matlab, isliye muje bhi job karni thi.'</i> - She also used to apply for eligible posts by competitive exam. But, she says – <i>'ab age nikal gayi isliye sab jagah apply nahi kar sakti, thoda pehle socha hota to kahi acchi jagah job mil gayi hoti'</i> means she regrets that she didn't give much attention to applying for better jobs earlier as now she maximum age limit requires to apply for better jobs.
<p>Important health events and their experiences with Health service system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In their family, health problems occur less frequently, as she says- <i>'kabhi kabhi bimari hoti hai.'</i> - Whenever they have an illness, they take treatment from the private doctor in her locality. He charges Rs. 50 per visit and prescribe medicine from outside, and when there is a need for indoor admission (for glucose pint), then it costs about Rs. 700-800. - She and their family have the cover of ESIC health facility, but they are not going there as for that they have to go to Okhla or Sarojini dispensary, which is far away and also they prescribe medicine from outside. If they want to go to ESIC, then they need money for transportation. So, they prefer private doctor for their health problems. - Two years before, her husband has Appendix problem. At that time, they went to Safdarjang hospital for treatment. Their experience with Doctors and other staff was 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In her family, when illness occurs they go to the private doctor in their locality. He charges Rs.500 as consulting fee and prescribes medicines from outside. Sometimes they use AIIMS or Safdarjang hospital for treatment. - She has the cover of ESIC facility, but they are not using it as they have to go Sarojini Nagar which is far away and also there is long waiting time there. All medicines are not given from there, and they prescribe medicines from outside. - Her first two delivery was taken place in Delhi at Safdarjang hospital. She was satisfied with the behaviour of Doctors and nurses. She felt that this hospital is overcrowded and also cleanliness is not up to the mark as compared to private hospitals. Also, medicines are prescribed from outside. She received ANC for first two delivery from Health worker in Delhi. She was satisfied with the overall experience with a health worker. Third delivery was taken place at Faizabad. ASHA provided care during third pregnancy; she says- <i>'ASHA bai aati thi vaha</i>

	<p>satisfactory, but they are not satisfied with the cleanliness of hospital. Also, they had prescribed medicines and injections from outside.</p> <p>- Her four delivery took place at home with the help of local dais. She was provided with ANC care (TT inj., IFA tablet) by Health worker of that area. She was advised to go to Safdarjung hospital, if she observes any complications related to pregnancy. She doesn't know the name of that health worker or where to contact her in the routine emergency situation.</p> <p>- Her children go to the Anganwadi centre located nearby for food. Anganwadi provides breakfast once a day around 10-11 am. Anganwadi is not provided care to her when she was lactating.</p> <p>- Her children get immunization service at the Anganwadi centre by a female health worker. Immunization card was given. There was no complaint regarding immunization, and no post immunization complication occurred.</p>	<p><i>dekhne ke liye'.</i></p> <p>- Her children not using the Anganwadi centre for food, she says – <i>'ghar me bhi khana mil jata he baccho ko.'</i></p> <p>- Her children are immunized by a health worker at the Anganwadi centre. His son had swelling in thigh and fever for some days following immunization.</p>
<p>Felt differences in life before marriage and after marriage</p>	<p>- She said that before marriage she was free and need not have to bother with anything. But after marriage now there is the responsibility of children and family.</p>	<p>- She said that before marriage her father takes care of her and she could do or talk anything she liked. But, after marriage, there are many restrictions, especially in Faizabad. She says- <i>'Ab rok tok chalti rehti he, har chiz me pehle family ko samjana padta he aur bad me pati ko; pati to fir bhi man jate he, family ka pata nahi chalta.'</i></p>

VI. Analysis

In our case study, there are two cases; both cases are of women. As we have seen above, there are many commons among them, while at the same time there are many differences among them.

If we see family history, then it seems that, one case has to work outside home out of compulsion to fight against poverty, or to feed their family; while other case has comparatively better economic condition, but she wants to do job as she thinks- what is the meaning of education if she has to do just household work!

It is irony of the country like India, that even after 68 years of independence, we still cannot provide its citizens basic amenities such as daily water supply and sanitation. We have seen in our case study that how women and their families have to find public toilets or baths and have to be in queue early morning. Who has to suffer due to irregular water supply, they are women, who suffer most! They have to carry water and store it for daily usage.

Working women don't just have to complete their work at their workplace but also have to complete their household work. In addition, they have to carry the responsibilities of children, husband and their family members. We can also see from the cases that women have to prepare food, educate children, have to drop their children to schools and even to go for purchasing vegetables. And what their husbands have to do, they have to see WWF!

Though there is some change in the attitude of men and society, still gendered role and patriarchal notions play a big role in the life of a woman. Family or society allows freedom to women, but also to the extent that suits them. For example, in our case they not allowed Sonia to work in a beauty parlour, though it was her interest; and compelled her to work in housekeeping job. People notice that her family is liberal and allows her to do the job outside the home, but they never try to know the hidden story behind or to say that they are not allowed her to work in a beauty parlour. So, what's the use of acquiring a skill that Sonia has!

Even if husband helps in household work, then he will ensure that no one sees him helping her wife. He will do particular work like cutting of vegetables or preparing sabjis; he will not like to wash utensils or clothes. Here the role of society is also

significant because the change in female's societal position will happen only when society will stop giving statements to men like – '*Joru ka Gulam*' means '*wife's slave*'.

Also, work conditions of the informal sector is full of exploitation. They have no security of their jobs. They have no social security benefits. Their salary is limited, but work is unlimited! Their work is not fixed and may increase if a co-worker is absent. There is no leaves, and they have to work for all days of the month, if they remain absent for a day then also their salary is deducted. They have to face inhuman behaviours throughout their daily work. In our case study, we have seen that many students misbehave to workers and even their supervisors also scold them even without their mistake. Now, the intensity of outcome increases when a worker is women. Women will have the triple burden- one is due to their work, second is due to the informal sector and third because she is women. Unlike formal sector, women don't have the benefit of maternity leave. They even can't timely breastfeed their children. All this leads to various kind of health problems in working women. We have seen that women feel tired and suffer from backache due to the heavy burden of their work. Across the sector, whether it's a question of the domestic worker or of the agricultural labourer, they undergo severe kind of health problems such as backache, joint pain, tiredness, headache, etc. But many times society even don't consider their problem as a problem and describes it as psychogenic problems of women. Though both women are working in the informal sector, the reason for their entry in the job market was different- lower caste woman(Sonia) has to enter due to economic constraints, while upper caste woman(Asha) has not such a compelling situation, but she entered due to her choice.

The experience of health service system is almost same in both cases. They got ESIC card, but ESIC dispensary is too far. Even if they go to ESIC dispensary, there is long waiting time and out of pocket expenditure. Similar is the experience with Government institutes like AIIMS and Safdarjung hospital. Government health workers provide basic services like immunization and ANC, but they cannot be contacted when people need them (eg.at the time of delivery).This compels them to go to private practitioners, who are taking high consultation fee, prescribing medicines from outside, not following any rational guidelines for treatment. The ultimate motto of the private sector is Profit, even if it comes at the cost of sweat and blood of the poor!

VII. Conclusion

First of all, if we see the informal sector as a whole, then it has its own issue, which is often ignored and not addressed properly. And, if women are working in the informal sector then it will create a triple burden on women- one is due to their work, second is due to the informal sector and third because she is women. As we have seen, society has created gender role and patriarchal norms, which contributes to her burden. She has to do all work at home, take care of children, in addition to, her work at job place. This worsens the condition of women. She suffers from various kind of ill-health, and often society considers her health issue as psychogenic.

One thing we must remember is that women working in the informal sector are also not homogeneous group. In the Indian context, plenty of factors such as caste, class, region, religion, etc. further complicates the life of a woman. The concept of intersectionality plays an important role here. There may have some commonalities in between working women due to biology or due to nature of their work, but there may also have some common difference in between them. Problems of upper caste working women are different from problems of Dalit women, though both may be working in the informal sector.

Though the role of government and their policy becomes very important to address the concern of women who are working in the informal sector, its need of an hour that we change our attitude towards women. At least we can well behave to them, where ever we see informal sector workers. Let's treat them as humans, and not as machines!

Appendix:

Interview Guide

1. Name
2. Age
3. Sex
4. Caste
5. Education
6. Marital Status
7. Children
8. Family history and experiences

- a. Nuclear/Joint Family
 - b. Family Members
 - c. Work of her husband
 - d. No. of rooms, toilet, water-electricity supply, etc.
 - e. Rented or Own house
 - f. Status of various Government Documents
9. Daily life experiences
- a. Major points from her routine work in a day
10. Husband's Contribution to daily household work and child rearing
11. Workplace Experiences
- a. Designation, place of work
 - b. Work timing, leave rules
 - c. Salary
 - d. workload, work atmosphere, etc.
 - e. Benefits such as Maternity leave, health care provision, etc.
12. Job-related problems
- a. Health-related problems
 - b. Social problems
13. History and experiences of their lives as children and as teens
- a. School
 - b. Skills obtained
14. Marriage life experiences
- a. Type of marriage
 - b. Dowry
 - c. Husband-wife relation
15. Entry in Job market
16. Important health events and their experiences with Health service system
- a. Family illness
 - b. Health seeking behaviour
 - c. Experiences with health service system
 - d. Care during pregnancy
 - e. ICDS service usage
17. Difference in life before and after marriage