



## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF BUILDING CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN SOUTH INDIA**

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### **Abstract**

The present investigation of “Socio-economic conditions of house construction workers in Vijayawada city” is the first study of this kind in study area. The sample was selected from construction households from Vijayawada (urban), 55 respondents are selected from randomly, among 22414 registered workers, the analysis done to understand the socio economic conditions of house construction workers, and also to analyze the workers economic status by using the category of labour i.e. skilled, un-skilled basis. The results shows the problems of construction workers, like low wages, lack of social security, exploitation from contractors and degraded social status and also the problems from money lenders. By using structured questionnaire data was collected, results are discussed and recommendations are offered for improving the economic conditions of construction workers. This paper aims to analyse the problems of workers in construction industry. Construction industry is one of the most important sector which generates employment opportunities and improve the standard of living of many people in rural and urban areas. In fact, majority of people depend on this industry for employment and income. It is important to note that this an unorganized sector which is the basis for economic development. The workers engaged in construction works are socially and economically backward and so that they are unable to organize themselves in pursuit of their common interest. This is because of certain constraints like casual nature of employment, ignorance, illiteracy lack of mobility poverty, small scattered size

of establishment and lack of co-operation among the workers. Consequently, construction workers face a lot of problems such as lack of work security, low wage, more hours of work, and lack of social and medical welfare facilities. Generally construction workers face financial problems, health problems, diseases, mishaps and even loss of life. Moreover, lack of social welfare measures and social security and medical benefits affect the construction workers.

**Keywords:** Construction sector, employment, illiteracy, medical benefit, occupational diseases, social security, welfare measures.

### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

India’s construction industry is large and visible, engaging 3.2 crore workers nationwide. For most of these workers, the construction industry is their “principal” source of employment. Construction activity is an integral part of a country’s infrastructure and industrial development; it includes hospitals, schools, townships, offices, houses, and other buildings, urban infrastructure (including water supply sewerage, drainage) highways, roads, ports, railways, airports, power system, irrigation and agriculture systems, telecommunications etc. The construction becomes the basic input for socio-economic development of country. Construction workers may be broadly classified as skilled and unskilled. Though child labour is prohibited, children are engaged for unskilled jobs. Most of the workers in this sector are employed on a casual basis. Unstable employment / earnings and shifting of workplaces are the basic characteristics of work for construction workers. Employment in construction is usually interspersed with periods of unemployment of

varying duration, mainly due to fluctuating requirements of labour force in each worksite. The nature of work is such that there are no holidays. It is established that female workers do not in general get minimum wages. The problems of construction workers differ from place to place and work to work depending on the noise, chemicals, tools or equipments, availability of safety measures, height and environment. However, the problems faced by the construction workers are more than that by the workers in other sectors. Hence, the study of problems of construction workers is important and it has drawn the attention of researchers throughout the world. So, the present study also analyses the issues of construction workers in Kanyakumari District. It is seen that construction workers undergo various problems such as casual nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy, wage discrimination, irregular work, absence of social security, uncertain working hours, unsafe working environment, occupational diseases, injuries, improper implementation of labour law, lack of labour welfare activities, bad habits, exploitation, noise, temperature and ultra violate radiation, excessive vibration, working at height, non-availability of raw materials, delay in wage payment, and cost of materials in the study area. The existing labour laws applicable to construction workers are based on inspection, prosecution, fines, etc. However, legal process is so time consuming that the aggrieved worker may be out of employment or employed elsewhere by the time redressal materializes. He / She cannot leave his / her worksite, foregoing his / her daily

**Table-1 Classification of House Construction Workers**

Skilled Workers	Unskilled Workers
Mason, centring foreman, flooring foreman, plumber, carpenter and fabricator, painter.	Male and Female Helping Hands

## 2. PROBLEMS OF WORKERS

### A) Casual Nature of Employment

The nature of employment in construction industry remains casual and uncertain. In fact, no one either contractor or owner gives an assurance of job to the workers. It is seen that construction activity is slack in rainy seasons which reduces the demand for workers. On the other hand, shortage of water in summer season also affects

wages to go elsewhere to pursue complaints against violation of laws. The existing laws do not give adequate protection to workers against victimization.

The social safety network of building workers is built around kinship and tradition, and trade unions have not yet found a place in this system. Contractors are paternalistic; their style of management may be authoritarian. A contractor may tight-fisted in fixing rates of payments and may not spend on latrines, urinals and other facilities at worksites. But he would be generous when a worker sought help from him for celebrating his daughter's marriage, attending to illness in the family etc. One of the statutory obligation of a contractor is that he should provide workers, at his own cost, with living accommodation of given specifications. In so far as the quantitative compliance of the statutes was concerned, contractors had met their obligation of providing residential accommodation by contractors. All respondents who lived at worksites used community toilet facilities, drew water from site sources and depended upon site lamp-posts for lighting.

### 1.1. CLASSIFICATION OF WORKERS:

As stated earlier the workers in the house construction industry were broadly classified into two categories viz. skilled workers and unskilled workers. Mason, centring foreman, flooring foreman, plumber, carpenter/fabricator are the workers incorporated in skilled workers, whereas all the male and female helping hands are included in unskilled workers.

the demand for workers in construction industry. The study shows that out of the total respondents, 89 per cent workers suffer due to this problem. Hence, this is one of the most important problems faced by the construction workers. It affects the family income and standard of living and it develops tension, stress and dependency in the construction workers.

**B) Absence of Social Security**

The workers in the building construction are far away from the benefits of social security and labour welfare programmes run by the government. As a result, workers work under the conditions like uncertain work, no medical facilities, unsafe working environment and lack of fair wages and insurance facilities. Thus, there is a total absence of social security schemes in construction sector. It affects the hope of the workers and discourages them. Therefore, this study analyses the views of workers in construction about the absence of social security. Most of them realize that this is one of the problems which affect their interest and attitude towards construction sector. It is seen that out of the total respondents, 93 per cent suffer due to lack of social security. Thus, this problem cannot be neglected in construction industry.

**C) Uncertain Working Hours**

Uncertain working hours is another problem faced by the workers in construction sector. There is a fixed hours of work in government and non-government departments or organized sectors. Generally, the working hours of workers ranges between 6 or 8 and 10 in all sectors except the construction sector. It is true in almost all types of construction works such as painting, plumbing, electricians, welding and building. Normally, construction works begins at 8 or 8.30 a.m. and continue upto 4.30 or 5.0 p.m. every day. However, this working hours is not possible on all occasions, sometimes construction workers should work upto 5 or 6.30 p.m. In other words, they should work more than the normal hours. Out of 100 respondents, 54 per cent faced this problem in the study area.

**D) Unsafe working conditions**

Construction works require safe conditions to protect the workers from getting injuries, mishap and occupational diseases or at least keep themselves safe in the working environment. The construction workers should have equipments, made of rubber, plastic or metal to protect the skin, nose, lungs, eyes and hands and safety drinking water. Such measures help to maintain the efficiency and health of the workers in construction sectors. Lack of safe working conditions causes labour absenteeism, sore sickness, feebleness, allergy and despondency. So it is essential for work

and health. The lack of safe working conditions has drawn the attention of scholars and researchers and they carry out a host of studies which conclude that safety measures and good working environment are necessary to avoid injuries, mishaps and even loss of life. The study found that out of the total respondents, 57 per cent have this problem. Therefore, the study observes that unsafe working condition is one of the problems found common in the construction sector.

**E) Occupational Diseases**

The respondents face occupational diseases in construction sector. In fact, the study observes the diseases like cough, asthma, allergy, lungs, body pain and bronchial diseases. This is because the construction workers work in unsafe conditions in mud, stone, cement, steel and iron nails, sand, bricks, and unhygienic water. Most of the masonry works depend upon cement mix material. Moreover, the workers do not wear socks or gloves, or shoes or any other safety devices. Similarly, carpenters smoke wood dust and cement mix which affects the respiratory system. Further, helpers who engage in construction activities do not use or wear any safety measures. Thus, construction workers get affected by any one or two of the occupational diseases. The study of occupational diseases of construction workers has drawn the attention of scholars and researchers at national and international level. The study displays that out of the total respondents, 31 per cent suffer from occupational diseases. It is also understood that some occupational diseases affect the respondents chronically whereas others frequently. However, construction works are subjected to occupational diseases. Consequently, they have to loss their health and wealth.

**F) Injuries**

Construction activities are subjected to get injuries which cause physical, mental and fiscal problems. This happens when they use hammer, cutting machine, sickle, spade, big axe, chisel and other sharp equipments and tools fastly and carelessly. The careless handling of such instruments causes severe pain, wounds and loss of blood and even they may cut nerves or fingers. Thus, masons, carpenters, electricians, painters, lumbers and helpers get injuries and face many problems. It is seen that out of the total respondents, 29 per cent got injured. Hence, this

problem is felt seriously in the construction sector.

### G) Noise

The use of modern technology causes noise which affects the hearing capacity and working efficiency of construction workers. In fact, cutting machines, drilling machines, breaking equipments and concrete preparing machines create intolerable noise. Noise causes giddiness, vibration and loss of hearing. Moreover, sudden and violent noise shocks the workers. As noise disturbs the workers in construction sector, the study examines the views of sample respondents. The study found that out of the total respondents, 49 per cent suffer from noise pollution.

### 3. DATA ANALYSIS:

To attain the objectives of the study, the data was tabulated and made the following analysis, descriptive statistics with chi-square, ANOVA, Regression analysis and correlation analysis was conducted between the study variables. The results are reported in the following tables. Ho1: There is significant linier relationship between Category of workers and economic conditions of construction households. One way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), to ascertain the influence of the personal variables of the employees such as gender, age, education, total experience in textile industry, over their perception on organizational climate

**Table-2 ANOVA with Type of workers and economic conditions of construction workers**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Do you save money	.594	1	.594	5.708	.020
Type of house	40.076	1	40.076	31.867	.000
Lighting	.303	1	.303	1.514	.224
TV	2.912	1	2.912	10.156	.002
Refrigerator	.109	1	.109	2.120	.151
Two-wheeler	1.467	1	1.467	10.600	.002
Bicycle	.003	1	.003	.006	.940
Bed	.245	1	.245	.964	.331
Sources of finance	.027	1	.027	.044	.835

### FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION:

An analysis of the study carried out to examine the Economic conditions of construction workers,

- ✓ It is observed that in skilled category of workers, majority 79 per cent of respondents are belongs to 31 to 45 years of age, and in unskilled category of workers, 52 per cent are belongs to 15 to 31 years of age. It conceptualizes that in child category mostly working as un-skilled labour, i.e. helping hands.
- ✓ It is noticed that the major portion of men workers involved in skilled labour, where as women working as un-skilled labour.
- ✓ It can be observed that the family system of construction households 53 per cent are living as joint family and fourty seven per cent are living as nuclear family.
- ✓ It is observed that the majority of respondents i.e. 44 per cent are has 3 to 4 persons in their family, and 27 per cent has 5 to 6 persons in their family. This discloses that construction households recognized the importance of joint families to improve their economic conditions and family support in the time of contingences.
- ✓ It is noticed that 53 per cent of construction households has rupees 4000 to 6000 income per month.
- ✓ The major portion of respondents forty per cent are illiterates, i.e. where 27 per cent are primary educated persons.
- ✓ It is observed that where 34 per cent of construction households getting finance from money lenders, and a eleven per cent from contractors. Whereas a small

percentage i.e. one per cent are getting loans from co-operatives.

Finally it is concluded that the nature of the house construction activity is seasonal, hence, worker engaged in house construction were unemployed in off season. It is therefore, essential to provide them a year-round employment. Building contractor and Government should do something positive in this regards. And provision for fair wages should be made for workers in the house construction. Government should take lead for the appointment of wage fixation committee for the workers working in construction sector to uplift the economic condition of the workers, and Care should be taken in implementation of various labour laws like, The Payment of Wage Act-1946, The Minimum Wages Act-1948, The Migration Act-1980, The Contract Labour Act-1970, Unorganized Sector Worker Security Bill-2005, The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act-2005 etc. should be strictly applied to and enforced, in the house construction sector and also by formation of common welfare fund for construction workers is essential in uplifting the economic conditions of construction workers. The present study observes various problems faced by the workers in construction sector. The problems such as casual nature of employment, absence of social security, lack of labour welfare activities, uncertain working hours, unsafe working conditions, occupational diseases, injuries, wage exploitation and differentiation, noise, working at high places, non-availability of raw materials, mobility of labour, lack of co-operation and satisfaction and bad habits affect the workers and reduce their labour efficiency in construction sector. Hence, efforts should be taken to reduce

or eliminate such problems with a view to maintain the health and wealth of the construction workers. In fact, every individual has the right to earn and enjoy life. Hence, it is the responsibility of the government to provide those facilities which protect the construction workers and improve their life in all respects.

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