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**SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF FEMALE WORKERS:  
A STUDY IN TEXTILE RETAIL SECTOR**

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**ABSTRACT**

In a globalised era, growth and development of an economy largely depends on the proper and planned utilization of human resources especially female laborers. India is now in the phase of demographic dividend where share of working age population is high which will benefit the long-term growth of the economy. This study attempts to examine the socio-economic problems of female workers in textile retail sector and brings out some major findings also. This paper points out the fact that women in this sector suffers from lower wages, gender discrimination, long working hours, lack of proper sanitation facilities, lack of social security and rigid working arrangements.

**Keywords:** women workers, textile retail shops, challenges

**INTRODUCTION**

In a modern society women are playing multiple roles as productive workers, eminent entrepreneurs, efficient managers, investors etc. The economic developments of many countries are stunned because of the underutilization of feminine workforce. If we are willing to acknowledge their economic significance there is no doubt, they will absolutely excel in their performance and finally lead to long term economic growth. But unfortunately women are facing great difficulties in their workplace and existing laws proves ineffective and inadequate.

According to National Commission For Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS) “unorganized sector consist of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers”. In India unorganized sector plays a crucial role in our economy in terms of employment and its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product, savings and capital formation. More than 90% of the workforce is in unorganized sector and nearly 50% of GDP are accounted from the sector .A high proportion of socially and

economically weaker sections of society are engaged in the unorganized economic activities in India and Kerala.

Employees belonging to the unorganized have lower job security, meager income, indebtedness, poor chance of growth, absence of leaves and paid holiday and lower protection against employers as compared to employees in the organized sector. The unorganized workers are subject to exploitation, face poor working condition and especially lower wage. Most of them are unskilled or semiskilled and this makes them more vulnerable among workforce. In Kerala, Directorate of Employment and Training is the nodal department to take measures to reduce instances of unfair practices existing in the unorganized sector.

As mentioned above for the development and wellbeing of the society, participation of women and their active involvement in productive work is very much vital. In Indian society traditionally preference are given to men and women are considered second grade citizen. In education and employment scenario the situation is not different. Women in the informal sector do hectic manual work even in the absence of social security and proper work environment in order to supplement their family income. According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, women are involved in doing 67% work of world; still they are socially and economically deprived. They are receiving only 10% of the universal income and have 1% part in global assets.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Development history of Kerala is globally recognized for its achievements in human development indices. Position of women in Kerala is far above compared to other states of India in terms of Physical Quality Life Index. High standard of living and low infant mortality rate due to greater access to educational and healthcare facilities along with favorable sex ratio are the reason for high PQL. Despite these impressive gains, Kerala women face many issues like Women's low female work participation rate, high unemployment rate, concentration in unorganized sector, economic and gender discrimination. State of women workers in the textile sales sector is very pathetic in such a way that they are exposed to health issues, gender bias, wage gap, lack of social security, heavy work schedule, mental harassment from employer etc.

Finally women employees conducted a 'Sitting Strike' under the banner of Asanghaditha Meghala Thozhilali Union-AMTU-(Unorganized Sector Trade Union) in Thrissur, Kerala. In fact this was a protest to obtain a legal acknowledgement from the textile sector management that the right of sales employees to sit during work hours is a basic human right that cannot be violated. Recently Kerala Government has approved an amendment in Kerala Shops and Commercial Establishments Act and it allows sales staffs to sit during their prolonged working

hours. In this context it is very important to study the condition of women in textile retail outlets of Kerala. This study focuses on the working condition and socio economic background of women workers in textile sales sector in Thiruvananthapuram Corporation.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To analyze the socio economic background of women in textile sale sector of Trivandrum Corporation area.
- To find out the depth of gender discrimination and exploitation in textile sales sector.
- To highlight the challenges and issues of sales women in textile sales sector.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study is confined to Thiruvananthapuram Corporation. The capital city of Kerala has large number of textile retail outlets including small, medium and large. The sample size of the study is limited to 120 from various shops. The process of data collection was difficult since the women workers had an inhibition to respond and in some major shops the managers didn't allow them to interact with outsiders. It is observed that the big shops were reluctant to cooperate with interview. In some cases data is collected in accordance with their convenience. Data availability from the respondents was at minimum as they were indifferent to this. So this study is based on the data collected regarding the socio-economic situation of women workers in textile retail sector in Thiruvananthapuram Corporation

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study of the socio-economic condition of the women workers in textile retail shops of Kerala tries to make an analysis of the economic position and the working conditions of the women workers in textile retail outlets. One twenty women workers were selected randomly and collected data regarding their age, marital status, wages, income (individual and family), work conditions, educational qualification, job satisfaction etc

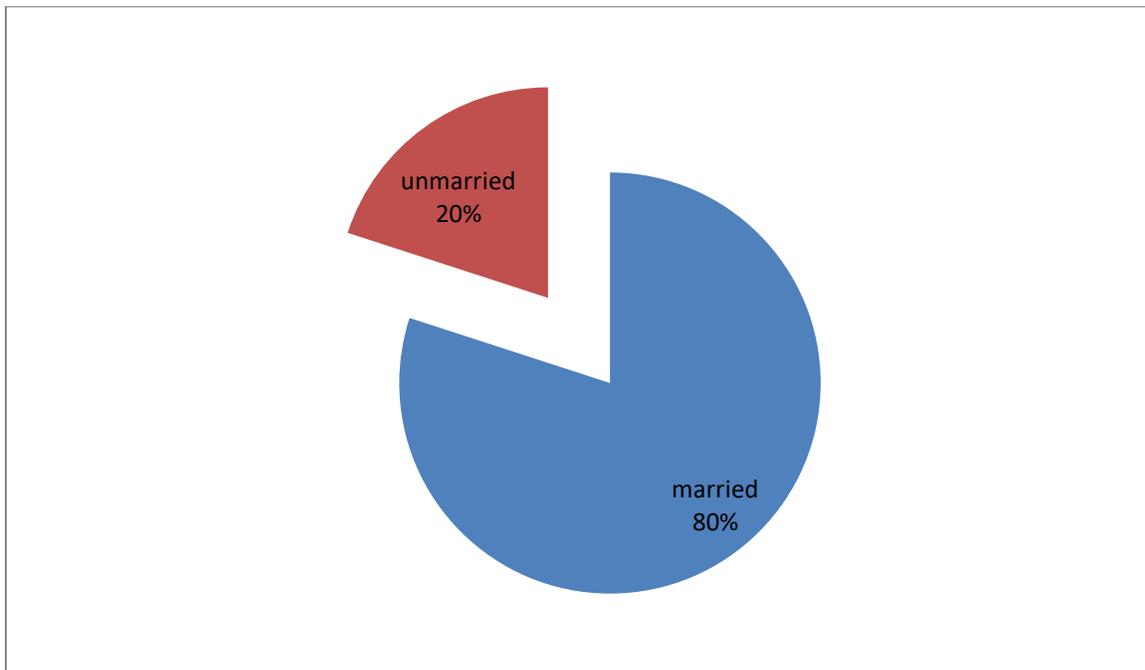
**AGE OF WOMEN WORKERS**

Sl. No.	Age Group	No. of Workers	% of Women workers
1	20-30	33	27.5
4	30-40	27	22.5
5	40-50	54	45
6	Above 50	6	5
.	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey Data

The age wise analysis shows that most of the workers were aged between 40 and 50 years. Around 28% workers are within the age group of 20-30 years. The 40-50 age group workers are having many years of experience in the textile sale sector, but in different textile outlets. The age groups of above 50 seem rare. It might be because of the employer’s preference to young female workers.

**MARITAL STATUS**



Source: survey data

The data explicitly shows the dominance of married workers. A small percentage that is 20% (24) of them are unmarried. Even though 80 % (96) are married, majority of them are widows and forbidden wives. It is observed that they are not legally divorced, and are not getting any kind of financial assistance from anywhere. With their subsistent wage, they take up the responsibility of the entire family and educate their children in better means.

### SIZE OF THE FAMILY

Sl. No.	Members in Family	No. of Workers	% of women workers
1	3 members	24	20
2	4 members	27	22.5
3	5 members	51	42.5
4	6 members	18	15
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey Data

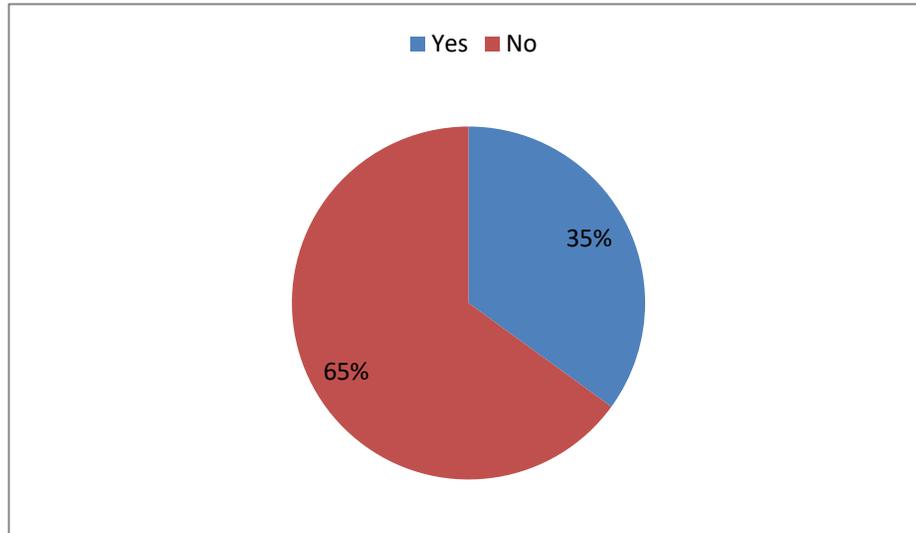
The above data shows that 42.5% of the female workers family is having 5 members. Only 20% workers belong to small family. So the fact is that in addition to the children, there are old age people in these families, contributing to high dependency rate.

### INCOME OF WOMEN WORKERS

Sl. No.	Income	No. of Workers	% of women workers
1	Less than 5000	15	12.5
2	5001-10000	60	50
3	10001-15000	42	35
4	Greater than 15000	3	2.5
.	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey Data

**EQUALITY OF WAGES**



Source: Survey Data

It is clear from the study that women engaged in textile sale sector have hectic work load but are getting very low wage. Majority of them get wage below 10000. Women worker of 8 years experiences also receives the same. During the festival season they have to work overtime without sufficient time for refreshment. Their level of income is not proportional to the work load they take up. Most importantly there still exist discrimination on the basis of gender. Women workers are receiving lesser wage compared to their male counterpart.65% women workers accepted the fact that they were experiencing wage gap.

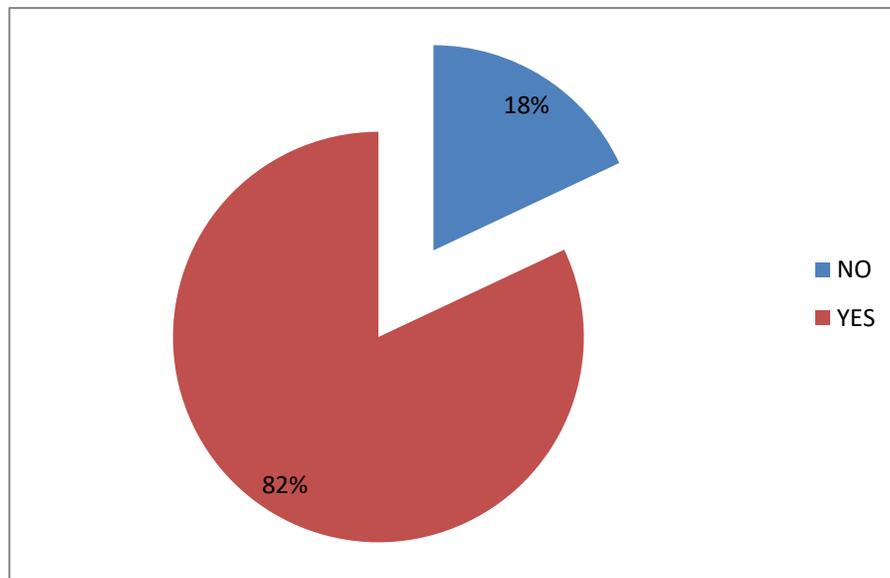
**FAMILY INCOME OF WORKER**

Sl. No.	Income	No. of Workers	% of women workers
1	Less than 10000	18	15
2	10000-15000	42	35
	15001-20000	36	30
3	20001-25000	21	17.5
4	Greater than 25000	3	2.5
.	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: survey data

It is evident that majority of the workers family income is less than 25000 and But most of the families are large in number. In fact the needs of the all family members are met by the minimal income of the female worker. Around 80% of their families are BPL.

**WOMEN AS THE EARNING MEMBER**



Source: survey data

As we mentioned above in majority of families, the bread winner is the female worker. The women workers have to perform dual role of working outside and also making their home. This makes them more independent in their attitude.

**EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION OF WOMEN WORKERS**

Sl. No.	Qualification	No. of Workers	% of Women Workers
1	SSLC	72	60
2	Higher Secondary	42	35
3	Graduate	6	5
.	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey Data

Most of the female workers are literate and have passed the SSLC level of education. Around 80% have completed higher secondary level. Only two workers are having degree. Of the two one worker have completed B.A and other TTC. The engagement of female worker in this sector is very much high because of the easy accessibility and non requirement of skilled labour.

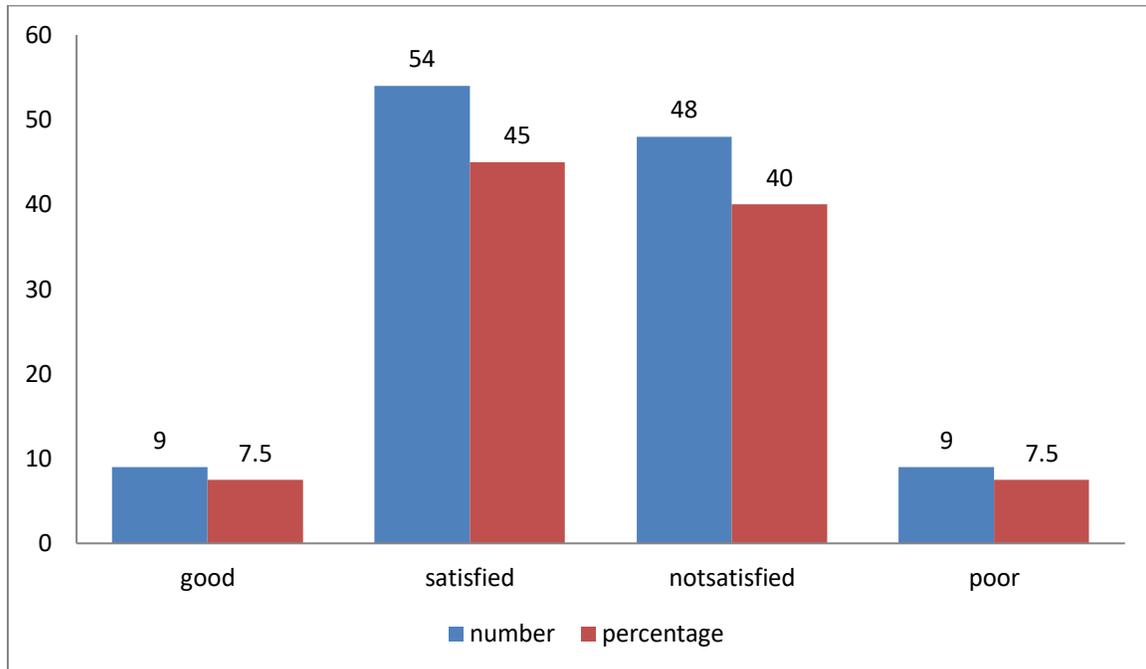
### **WORKING HOURS**

Sl. No.	Working Hours	no. of workers	% of women workers
1	8-10 hours	48	40
2	10-12 hours	72	60
	TOTAL	120	100

Source: survey data

Majority workers have to work long hours without any shift to obtain a subsistence wage. As per the minimum wages act, working hours should not exceed 8 hour per day. But majority of them are working more than this. In this study 60% of them are working more than 10 hour per day. It is disheartening fact that they work for 12hours and are not allowed to sit during working hours. Most of them are suffering from knee pain and other bone disease.

### **SANITATION FACILITIES**



Source: survey data

The sanitation facilities in the work place do not sufficiently address the health needs of women workers. Only 7.5% are of the opinion that they are having adequate sanitation facilities in their work place. Majority that is 45% are satisfied, while 40% revealed their dissatisfaction. It is found that some big shops in the city do not provide toilets in each floor. Women working in shopping complexes are bit lucky in this regard. The shopping complexes are provided with toilet facility in each floor.

**RELAXATION IN WORK ARRANGEMENTS**

Sl. No.	Getting relaxation in work arrangement.	No. of Workers	% of Women Workers
1	Yes	45	45
2	No	55	55
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: survey data

Majority women workers are not enjoying any sort of relaxation in work arrangements. Their work schedule is strict and rigid even during difficult days. In most of shops employer provides 3 to 4 days off including medical leaves. In this study around 55% worker opined that they do not have any relaxation in work schedule.

**MENTAL/PHYSICAL HARASSMENT**

Sl. No.	Mental or physical harassment	No. of Workers	% of Women Workers
1	Yes	0	0
2	No	120	100
	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: survey data

The survey shows us that out of 120 samples, no one is of the opinion that there is mental or physical harassment. This may be because of their fear of losing jobs. In reality mental harassment is common. For eg: if some customers go without buying from the shop that blame falls upon the women in-charge. In many places women is not considered as potential worker. If anyone files complaints, they fear that any of their colleagues or family members will not support them.

**JOB SATISFACTION**

Sl. No.	Job satisfaction	No. of Workers	% of Women workers
1	Highly satisfied	6	5
2	Satisfied	42	35
3	Dissatisfied	54	45
4	Highly dissatisfied	18	15

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	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>
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Source: survey data

The data shows that most of the worker are not at all satisfied with their jobs. They experience difficulties and inadequacies in many forms like low wage, heavy work, health issues, poor working condition etc. Around 15% are highly dissatisfied and 45% are dissatisfied with their job. Majority of the workers are staying in rented houses. So they have to allocate a huge amount as rent every month from their income. This again make their life miserable by reducing their disposable income.

### **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

We have observed that majority of the female workers in the unorganized textile retail sector are paid very low wages so they are quite vulnerable to certain contingencies of life They are not able to meet their minimal necessities even after working for long hours in their irregular and insecure jobs. The study on the issues of female workers in textile retail sector has shown that there is uncertainty, irregularity to secure even minimum wages. The big employers arbitrarily fix the wage without considering the Minimum Wage Act resulting in a large proportion of workers remains outside the protection of the act. The major findings of the study are given below.

- The profile of saleswomen reveals the fact that saleswomen generally come from poor and middle income families. The majority belongs to lower class, though women from middle class also now adays join the sector. As regards the educational background, most of them completed SSLC only. Because this particular job need not any skilled labour.
- They receive a very low wage packet. Their average wage is around 10000 per month. In addition to this there is inequality in wages as male worker receives more wages than the female worker of the same position. The employers argue that male workers do manual work like loading and unloading.
- The working conditions of female workers are very poor. They are subject to long working hours-normally ten to twelve hours per day, with a short break for lunch and other purposes. Comparative low wage and poor working condition in private shops pull down their status to a low level. Though saleswomen in public shops are lucky in terms of fixed working hours, they face the problems of seasonal nature of work.
- There exists discrimination in the labour market. Both occupational and wage discrimination are found to exist. The wage discrimination is reflected in the form of male-female wage gap.

- Majority of the worker's family is large in size. So if the female worker is the only earning member, she has to shoulder the responsibility of the entire family.
- In this study most of the workers are homeless people, depending upon rented houses and paying a huge amount as rent from their income.
- Women workers are not satisfied with their job. This may be because of low income, lack of social security and protection from the part of Government and society.
- Prolonged working hours, lack of sanitation facilities and rigid work arrangement especially during festive season make this job more difficult for them. This ultimately leads to severe health issues.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

- In order to address the problem of wage gap, equal pay for equal work should be implemented.
- Most of the workers are unskilled or semiskilled with minimum education and they are unaware of their rights. So proper awareness should be created among them.
- Government should initiate some policies and programmes for the welfare of the workers. Since majority come from lower income families and they don't even have proper housing.
- Social security schemes including ESI and pension scheme should be implemented properly.
- Facilities like drinking water, rest rooms and bathrooms should be avail on work sites. Government can initiate health insurance programme for them.
- Creation of an independent authority to regulate and control the norms and prevent unlawful activities in this sector.
- Introduce policies for the workers healthcare and education for their children.

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