

Women Workers in the Unorganised Sector: A Study of Working Conditions and Challenges in Virudhunagar District

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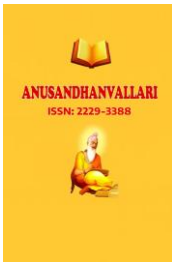
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Abstract: The study investigates the working conditions and challenges faced by women employed in the unorganised sector in Virudhunagar District, Tamil Nadu, with a focus on industries such as Printing, Match works, Fireworks, Textile etc. A total of 233 women from various informal sector occupations were surveyed to explore the impact of socio-economic factors such as marital status, family structure, and perceptions of working conditions on their work experiences. The unorganised sector of the region often exposes women to precarious employment with limited benefits, hazardous working conditions, and low wages. Using descriptive statistics and an Independent Sample t-test, the study analyzes the differences in perceptions and experiences of working conditions based on socio-demographic variables. The findings indicate that women face significant challenges, such as low wages, long working hours, unsafe working environments, and a lack of job security, especially in industries like fireworks and match works, which involve hazardous materials. Gender plays a crucial role, with female workers reporting worse working conditions than their male counterparts. Marital status and family structure also influence job satisfaction, as married women, particularly those from nuclear families, struggle to balance both work and domestic duties, leading to increased stress and fatigue. The t-test results show significant differences in the working conditions and perceptions of women based on marital status and family structure. The study underscores the need for targeted interventions to improve job security, wages, and work-life balance for women in the unorganised sector. The findings advocate for gender-sensitive policies and support systems that address the unique challenges faced by women workers in these industries.

Keywords: Women Workers, Informal Sector, Low Wages, Long Working Hours, Job Security, Perceptions of Working Conditions.

Introduction

The study primarily focuses on the working conditions and challenges faced by women employed in the unorganised sector in Virudhunagar District, Tamil Nadu. It includes industries such as printing, match works, fireworks, textiles, and others, where women often face precarious employment, limited benefits, and low wages. These women, who are employed in small businesses, micro-enterprises, and informal industries, contribute significantly to the region's economy but remain largely underserved in terms of social security, labor rights, and financial services. The purpose of the study is to better understand the socio-economic factors that influence the work experiences of these women, with a particular focus on marital status, family structure, and the perceptions



of workplace conditions. By analyzing these variables, the study seeks to highlight the unique challenges faced by women workers in these industries, including issues such as long working hours, unsafe working environments, and a lack of job security. Additionally, the research investigates how these challenges are compounded by the informal nature of their employment.

As the Indian economy continues to undergo significant transformation, women in the unorganised sector are increasingly recognised as a vital part of the workforce, despite facing numerous obstacles. These industries, which are central to the livelihood of many families in Virudhunagar, remain largely untapped in terms of formal labour rights, financial inclusion, and adequate welfare programs. Therefore, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the specific needs of these women, which can inform future interventions to improve their working conditions and overall quality of life. The findings of the research also seek to contribute to the broader conversation on women's economic empowerment, with an emphasis on bridging the gap between institutional policies and the lived realities of women in the unorganised sector. Through a detailed analysis of the socio-demographic factors influencing their work experiences, the study hopes to offer practical recommendations for policy reforms and support systems that can help improve the livelihoods of women in these sectors.

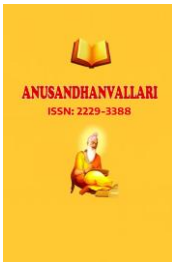
By examining the challenges and opportunities for women in the unorganised sector, the study aspires to assist local government bodies, non-governmental organisations, and advocacy groups in developing targeted programs that address these workers' needs. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of gender-sensitive policies that recognise the role of women in driving economic growth, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.

Review Of Literature

A literature review offers a summary of prior research and investigations on a particular topic. The following section outlines the key studies and findings that have contributed to the foundation of the present research.

Benerjee (2016) examines the challenges faced by women in the unorganised sector, focusing on their lack of job security, low wages, and unsafe working conditions. The study advocates for policy changes to improve their livelihoods, particularly in textiles and agriculture. Vasundhara (2017) highlights the socio-economic factors affecting women's participation in informal employment, emphasizing the role of cultural norms and limited access to education in further marginalizing women. The study calls for educational programs and skill development to improve their economic empowerment. Krishna and Rani (2018) explore the impact of family structure and marital status on women's work-life balance in rural sectors. They find that married women, especially in nuclear families, face significant stress in balancing household duties with work, calling for community support and flexible work arrangements. Patel and Iyer (2020) investigate the occupational health risks women face in hazardous industries, like fireworks and match works, highlighting respiratory and eye problems. Their study stresses the need for better health regulations and labour law enforcement.

Desai and Raghavan (2021) focus on the economic implications of informal employment, revealing that women earn significantly less than men and lack access to formal credit or savings options. The study advocates for financial literacy programs to empower women workers. Sundari and Krishnan (2022) examine the psychological toll of informal work, finding high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among women in sectors like textiles. They suggest mental health support and counseling to improve well-being. Rani and Shankar (2023) study the role of government policies in improving working conditions for women, emphasizing weak enforcement of labour laws, especially in rural areas. They call for stronger policy implementation and greater awareness programs. Natarajan and Shankar (2024) focus on women workers in Tamil Nadu's unorganised



sectors, particularly textiles and agriculture. They find exploitation, long hours, and harassment, and argue for gender-sensitive policies to improve working conditions.

Sundaram and Tiwari (2018) explore the lack of social security for women in informal employment, suggesting that extending social security benefits should be a key focus of government reforms. Nivedita and Kumari (2019) examine the impact of skill development programs on women's economic outcomes, finding that such programs help women secure better-paying jobs, but their availability is limited in rural areas. They recommend expanding these programs and raising awareness. Vasundhara and Pillai (2020) compare women in the unorganised and formal sectors, finding that women in informal employment face greater barriers in accessing financial services, healthcare, and education. They recommend tailored financial products and policy reforms. Chandrika and Thomas (2021) study gender dynamics in the informal sector, showing that women face more discrimination than men, particularly in agriculture and textiles. They stress the importance of gender-sensitive workplace policies. Rani and Somasundaram (2022) examine the role of community support systems in improving working conditions, finding that women with access to community groups can better address grievances and negotiate better wages. They recommend strengthening these networks. Kumar and Siva (2023) explore the impact of family structure on women's employment outcomes, finding that married women, especially in nuclear families, face difficulties in balancing work and family responsibilities. They suggest flexible work hours and childcare facilities as potential solutions.

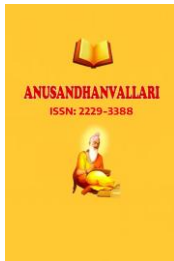
Statement Of The Problem

The working conditions and socio-economic challenges faced by women in the unorganised sector in Virudhunagar District present a critical, yet largely overlooked, area for investigation. Despite contributing significantly to the district's economy, women working in sectors such as printing, fireworks, textiles, and small-scale industries often encounter poor working conditions, low wages, and limited access to social security, healthcare, and legal protections. The lack of policy enforcement and the absence of adequate labour laws further intensify these issues. Additionally, gendered social norms, lack of education, and cultural barriers hinder these women's ability to improve their work-life balance and economic status. While there are various government schemes and initiatives aimed at supporting women in these sectors, their implementation and effectiveness in addressing these challenges remain unclear. The study seeks to explore the specific challenges faced by women in Virudhunagar's unorganised sector, particularly in terms of job security, workplace conditions, financial autonomy, and access to social benefits. By gathering insights from women workers and analyzing the gaps in existing support mechanisms, the research aims to identify practical solutions for improving their working conditions, socio-economic opportunities, and overall well-being.

Objectives Of The Study

The following are the objectives of the study,

1. To study the socio-economic background of women working in the unorganised sector Virudhunagar District.
2. To assess women's perceptions of their working conditions, focusing on aspects like workplace safety, job security, fair pay, working hours, safety equipment and so on.



Methodology

The sample required for the study is selected using a sampling error calculator. For the present study, a total of 233 women workers from the unorganised sector in Virudhunagar District are selected. These women are distributed across rural, semi-urban, and urban areas, with 70 women from rural areas, 80 from semi-urban areas, and 83 from urban areas. The stratified random sampling method is used to ensure that each sub-group (rural, semi-urban, urban) is proportionally represented in the sample. Enumerators are employed for data collection, and a pre-tested interview schedule is utilized to ensure consistency and reliability. A pilot study was conducted with 30 women workers to refine the interview schedule. A normal distribution test is conducted before applying statistical tools. For the purpose of analysis, the researcher has identified key variables concerning the working conditions and challenges faced by women in the unorganised sector. These include working hours, job security, pay and benefits, health and safety conditions, and job satisfaction. Additionally, to examine the support systems available, four key variables are considered: community support, government assistance, family support, and availability of training programs. These variables are framed and treated as dependent variables for analysis. To determine whether the views of women workers differ across these variables, an independent sample 't' test is applied. The results of the analysis and interpretation are presented in the following sections. The socio-economic profile of the women workers is shown in Table 1.

Table: 1

Socio-Economic Details of Women Workers

Category	Frequency	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Marital Status of the Respondents	Married	118	50.6
	Unmarried	115	49.4
Nature of the Family	Joint Family	113	48.5
	Nuclear Family	120	51.5
Employment Type	Permanent	103	44.2
	Temporary	130	55.8

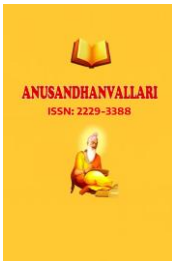
Source: Primary Data

Marital Status of the Respondents

Marital status plays a significant role in an individual's financial situation. After marriage, people often focus more on saving or investing in their family or business. It can influence how they manage their finances. According to the data, out of 233 respondents, 50.6% are married and 49.4% are unmarried. It indicates that the marital status of the respondents is almost evenly split, with a slight majority of married individuals.

Nature of the Family of the Respondents

The type of family structure can impact an individual's financial decisions. In joint families, expenses are shared, making the financial burden lighter on each member. On the other hand, nuclear families often mean that each individual has more responsibility for their finances. Based on the collected data, it was found that 48.5%



of respondents belong to joint families, while 51.5% belong to nuclear families. It suggests that most of the respondents are part of nuclear families.

Employment Type of the Respondents

Employment type is an important factor in determining a person’s financial stability. Permanent employees generally have job security and a steady income, while temporary employees may face greater financial uncertainty. The data indicates that 44.2% of respondents are permanent employees, and 55.8% are temporary employees. It shows that a slightly higher proportion of the respondents have temporary jobs.

Women’s Perceptions of Working Conditions in the Unorganised Sector

Women in the unorganised sector often encounter specific challenges related to their working conditions. To assess their perceptions, the researcher employed Likert’s five-point scaling method. The data collected from the survey is presented in the following Table 2.

Table 2

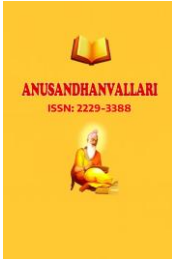
Women’s Perceptions of Working Conditions in the Unorganised Sector

S.No.	Perceptions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1.	Workplace Safety	39 (16.7%)	44 (18.9%)	60 (25.8%)	48 (20.6%)	42 (18.0%)	233 (100%)
2.	Job Security	51 (21.9%)	54 (23.2%)	43 (18.5%)	35 (15.0%)	50 (21.5%)	233 (100%)
3.	Fair Pay	47 (20.2%)	40 (17.2%)	51 (21.9%)	49 (21.0%)	46 (19.7%)	233 (100%)
4.	Working Hours	50 (21.5%)	49 (21.0%)	46 (19.7%)	50 (21.5%)	38 (16.3%)	233 (100%)
5.	Health Benefits	42 (18.0%)	48 (20.6%)	39 (16.7%)	49 (21.0%)	55 (23.6%)	233 (100%)
6.	Harassment-Free	50 (21.5%)	47 (20.2%)	44 (18.9%)	47 (20.2%)	45 (19.3%)	233 (100%)

Source: Primary Data

Perception towards the Workplace Safety

Regarding Workplace Safety, out of 233 respondents, 16.7% strongly agree that their workplace is safe, 18.9% agree, and 25.8% have a neutral opinion. 20.6% disagree, and 18.0% strongly disagree with the perception of workplace safety. It is noted that the majority of workers (25.8%) hold a neutral opinion about workplace safety.



Perception towards the Job Security

For Job Security, out of 233 respondents, 21.9% strongly agree, 23.2% agree, and 18.5% remain neutral about their job security. 15.0% disagree, and 21.5% strongly disagree with their job security. It is observed that the majority of workers (21.9%) strongly agree with their job security.

Perception towards the Fair Pay

Regarding Fair Pay, 20.2% of the respondents strongly agree that they receive fair pay, 17.2% agree, and 21.9% remain neutral. 21.0% disagree, and 19.7% strongly disagree. It is observed that the majority of workers (21.9%) remain neutral regarding fair pay.

Perception towards the Working Hours

Concerning Working Hours, 21.5% of the respondents strongly agree that the working hours are reasonable, 21.0% agree, and 19.7% have a neutral opinion. 21.5% disagree, and 16.3% strongly disagree. It is noted that the majority of workers (21.5%) strongly agree with the working hours.

Perception towards the Health Benefits

Regarding Health Benefits, 18.0% of the workers strongly agree, 20.6% agree, and 16.7% remain neutral. 21.0% disagree, and 23.6% strongly disagree. It is observed that the majority of workers (23.6%) strongly disagree with the availability of health benefits.

Perception towards the Harassment-Free Working Conditions

Concerning Harassment-Free working conditions, 21.5% of the respondents strongly agree that their workplace is free from harassment, 20.2% agree, and 18.9% are neutral. 20.2% disagree, and 19.3% strongly disagree. It is noted that the majority of workers (21.5%) strongly agree that their workplace is harassment-free.

The perception of women in the unorganised sector regarding their working conditions does not significantly vary when categorized based on marital status

The researcher has classified the women workers in the unorganised sector into two groups based on their marital status. The classification is based on marital status may affect the perceptions of the women regarding their working conditions. To determine whether these two groups of women workers in the unorganised sector differ in their views about their working conditions, the researcher has formulated a null hypothesis and tested it using the Independent Sample 't' Test.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the perceptions of women in the unorganised sector regarding their working conditions based on marital status.

The null hypothesis formulated for the analysis has been tested using the Independent Sample 't' Test, and the results are presented in the following table.

Table 3

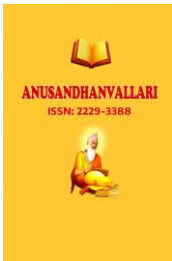
**Marital Status of Women and Perceptions Towards Working Conditions in the Unorganised Sector:
Independent sample 't' test**

S.No.	Perception	Marital Status	N	Mean	S. D	t	Sig.2 tailed	Relationship
1.	Workplace Safety	Married	118	2.9661	1.34566	-.887	0.376	Not Significant
		Unmarried	115	3.1217	1.33211			
2.	Job Security	Married	118	2.9492	1.49556	.417	.677	Not Significant
		Unmarried	115	2.8696	1.41745			
3.	Fair Pay	Married	118	2.9661	1.44371	-.701	.484	Not Significant
		Unmarried	115	3.0957	1.37633			
4.	Working Hours	Married	118	2.7966	1.42960	-1.165	.245	Not Significant
		Unmarried	115	3.0087	1.34748			
5.	Health Benefits	Married	118	3.0508	1.49556	-.697	.231	Not Significant
		Unmarried	115	3.1826	1.38654			
6.	Harassment Free	Married	118	2.9407	1.32234	-.177	.860	Not Significant
		Unmarried	115	2.9739	1.53589			

Source: Computed Data

The t-test results reveal that there are no significant differences in the perceptions of married and unmarried respondents regarding various working conditions. For all the aspects—Workplace Safety, Job Security, Fair Pay, Working Hours, Health Benefits, and Harassment-Free conditions—the p-values were all greater than 0.05, indicating no statistically significant differences between the two groups. Specifically, the mean scores for both groups were similar, suggesting that marital status does not significantly influence their views on these working conditions. Overall, both married and unmarried respondents express similar opinions on these aspects of their work environment.

The perception of workers in the unorganised sector regarding their working conditions does not significantly vary when categorized based on the nature of the family (Joint Family vs. Nuclear Family).



The researcher classified the workers into two groups based on their family structure, and the classification may potentially influence their perceptions of workplace conditions. To determine whether these two groups differ in their views on various working conditions, the researcher formulated a null hypothesis and tested it using the Independent Sample 't' Test.

Hypothesis:

There is no significant difference in the perceptions of workers in the unorganised sector regarding their working conditions based on the nature of the family (Joint vs. Nuclear).

The null hypothesis was tested using the Independent Sample 't' Test, and the results are presented in the table 4 below.

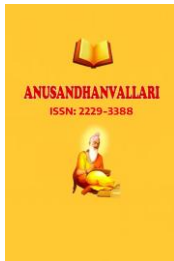
Table 4

Nature of the Family of Women and Perceptions Towards Working Conditions in the Unorganised Sector: Independent sample 't' test

S.No.	Perception	Nature of the Family	N	Mean	S. D	t	Sig.2 tailed	Relationship
1.	Workplace Safety	Joint Family	113	2.9646	1.35574	-.866	.387	Not Significant
		Nuclear Family	120	3.1167	1.32325			
2.	Job Security	Joint Family	113	2.9646	1.48762	.556	.578	Not Significant
		Nuclear Family	120	2.8583	1.42779			
3.	Fair Pay	Joint Family	113	3.0000	1.35620	-.315	.753	Not Significant
		Nuclear Family	120	3.0583	1.46268			
4.	Working Hours	Joint Family	113	2.8584	1.38143	-.456	.649	Not Significant
		Nuclear Family	120	2.9417	1.40405			
5.	Health Benefits	Joint Family	113	3.3982	1.41762	2.950	.004	Significant
		Nuclear Family	120	2.8500	1.41807			
6.	Harassment Free	Joint Family	113	2.9469	1.43826	-.105	.916	Not Significant
		Nuclear Family	120	2.9667	1.42566			

Source: Computed Data

The above t-test results indicate that there are no significant differences in the perceptions of respondents from Joint and Nuclear families regarding most working conditions. Specifically, for Workplace



Safety, Job Security, Fair Pay, Working Hours, and Harassment-Free conditions, the p-values are all greater than 0.05, suggesting no statistically significant differences between the family types. However, a significant difference is observed in the perception of Health Benefits, with a -value of 0.004, indicating that respondents from Joint families perceive health benefits more favourably than those from nuclear families. Overall, while most working conditions are perceived similarly across family types, the perception of health benefits stands out as a significant difference between the two groups.

The perception of workers in the unorganised sector regarding their working conditions does not significantly vary based on their employment type (Permanent vs. Temporary).

The researcher classified the workers into two groups based on their employment type, and the classification may influence their perceptions of working conditions. To determine whether these two groups differ in their views about various working conditions, the researcher formulated a null hypothesis and tested it using the Independent Sample 't' Test.

Hypothesis:

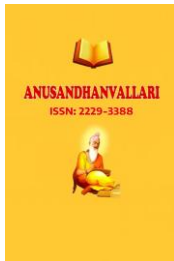
There is no significant difference in the perceptions of workers in the unorganised sector regarding their working conditions based on employment type (Permanent vs. Temporary).

The null hypothesis was tested using the Independent Sample 't' Test, and the results are presented in the table below.

Table 5

Employment Type of Women Workers and Perceptions Towards Working Conditions in the Unorganised Sector: Independent sample 't' test

S.No.	Perception	Employment Type	N	Mean	S. D	t	Sig. 2 tailed	Relationship
1.	Workplace Safety	Permanent	103	3.1068	1.29791	.648	.518	Not Significant
		Temporary	130	2.9923	1.37247			
2.	Job Security	Permanent	103	2.8835	1.43692	-.246	.806	Not Significant
		Temporary	130	2.9308	1.47427			
3.	Fair Pay	Permanent	103	2.9417	1.38497	-.851	.396	Not Significant
		Temporary	130	3.1000	1.42975			
4.	Working Hours	Permanent	103	2.9709	1.38236	.679	.498	Not Significant
		Temporary	130	2.8462	1.40023			
5.	Health Benefits	Permanent	103	3.1165	1.50360	.006	.995	Not Significant
		Temporary	130	3.1154	1.39564			



6.	Harassment Free	Permanent	103	2.8544	1.41010	-.977	.330	Not Significant
		Temporary	130	3.0385	1.44353			

Source: Computed Data

The t-test results indicate that there are no significant differences in the perceptions of respondents with Permanent and Temporary employment regarding various working conditions. Specifically, for Workplace Safety, Job Security, Fair Pay, Working Hours, Health Benefits, and Harassment-Free conditions, the p-values for all aspects are greater than 0.05, indicating no statistically significant differences between the two employment types. The mean scores for both groups are similar, suggesting that employment type does not significantly influence their views on these working conditions. Overall, respondents with Permanent and Temporary employment express similar opinions on all these aspects of their work environment.

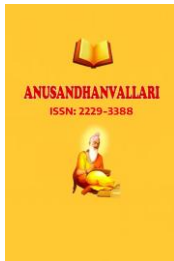
Findings And Suggestions

From the study, it is evident that the perceptions of women workers in the unorganised sector regarding their working conditions do not significantly vary when classified based on marital status, family type, or employment type. Despite the varying socio-economic backgrounds of the workers, their views on critical aspects such as workplace safety, job security, fair pay, working hours, health benefits, and harassment-free conditions remain largely similar. Given these findings, it is recommended that policymakers, employers, and relevant authorities in the unorganised sector focus on improving the overall working conditions for women, regardless of their marital status, family structure, or employment type. It includes enhancing safety measures, job security, fair compensation, reasonable working hours, and providing health benefits that cater to all women workers.

It is also suggested that employers in the unorganised sector pay special attention to the type of family structure when designing policies related to health benefits and job security. Although the study reveals no major differences in overall perceptions based on family type, a nuanced approach can still be helpful in addressing specific needs of women workers from joint or nuclear families. In order to foster more inclusive and supportive working environments, it is essential that both government agencies and employers prioritize the concerns of women workers in the unorganised sector. By doing so, they can enhance their satisfaction levels, increase their productivity, and ultimately contribute to a more robust and inclusive economy.

Furthermore, employers should take proactive measures to build trust and credibility with women workers in the sector. It includes ensuring a fair, transparent, and harassment-free work environment while offering practical solutions such as flexible working hours or childcare support for women in family centered roles. As move towards achieving greater financial inclusion and better working conditions for women in the unorganised sector, the role of small-scale employers, NGOs, and government bodies becomes even more critical. By implementing the recommended measures, they can create a more sustainable and supportive ecosystem for women workers, which will lead to stronger economic growth and more equitable opportunities for women across the country.

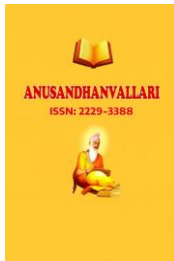
Conclusion



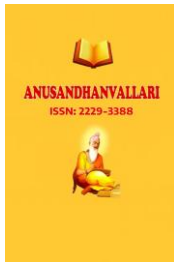
The study on women workers in the unorganised sector reveals significant disparities in working conditions, particularly when it comes to health benefits. While perceptions of workplace safety, job security, fair pay, and harassment-free environments are relatively consistent across different socio-economic groups, the issue of health benefits stands out as a major area of concern. Notably, women from joint families tend to have a more positive view of their health benefits compared to those from nuclear families, highlighting the influence of family structure on their overall work experience. The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions that consider the diverse backgrounds and circumstances of women workers. To truly improve working conditions in the unorganised sector, it's essential to take a holistic approach that goes beyond just the basic requirements of workplace safety and pay. It means that focusing on improving health benefits, ensuring job security, and fostering an environment free from harassment. Policymakers and employers must work together to create inclusive policies and practices that cater to the unique needs of the workforce. By doing so, they can contribute to a more equitable and supportive work environment, ultimately promoting greater social and economic well-being for women in the unorganised sector.

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