

Unorganized Workers in Beedi Industry: A Study on Women Beedi Rollers of Karnataka, India

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Abstract

Beedi rolling is one of the major unorganized sector activities in India, which employs a large number of women. The beedi industry is the fourth largest employers of workers in India, after agriculture, handloom and construction. The India's Ministry of Labour estimates about 50 lakh workers in the beedi rolling industry, majority of them are home based women workers. On the other hand, the trade unions claim that there are over 70 lakh beedi workers. Women constitute a very high percentage of labour force in the beedi manufacturing. In this backdrop, the study has been conducted in Dakshina Kannada district with a selection of 120 women beedi roller households for an in-depth analysis. In this paper, we analyse the income and employment generation in beedi rolling and explore the nature of health hazards experienced by the members of the beedi roller families in the study area.

Beedi rolling activity has become an instrumental in generating supplementary income among the poor families in the Dakshina Kannada district. As a whole, it has been found that the beedi rollers household earned an average total income of Rs. 15,870.46 in a year from the rolling of 2,37,543 beedis. The beedi dust that is in the air therefore affects not only the beedi roller but also her entire family too leading to respiratory problems. The study found that the health hazards such as body ache, fever, breathing problems, headaches and eyestrain are commonly faced by the beedi rollers and their family members in the study area.

Keywords: Unorganized Workers, Beedi industry, Beedi rolling activity, Women workers.

Introduction

Unorganised or informal sector constitutes a pivotal part of the Indian economy and its contribution to national product is accounted about 50 per cent (GoI, 2012). Unorganized workers in India have increased many folds post independence. India's workforce comprises nearly 93 per cent in the unorganised

segment and 91 per cent if its women workers. As per the survey carried out by the National Sample Survey Organization (2009-10), the total employment in the country was of the order of 46.5 crore comprising of around 2.8 crore (6 per cent) in the organized sector and the remaining 43.7 crore (94 per cent) workers in the unorganized sector. Majority of the unorganized workers engaged in farm activities, construction work and manufacturing sectors. The Committee of National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector-NCEUS (2009) tried to define unorganized sector's workforce as "*unorganized workers consist of those working in the unorganized sector or households, excluding regular workers with social security benefits provided by the employers and the workers in the formal sector without any employment and social security benefits provided by the employers*". In the unorganised sector, beedi manufacturing industry is among the major one. The industry has been classified as unorganized, falling under the small scale and cottage industries sector. Beedi rolling activity is largely carried out at home, which employs a large number of women.

Beedi Industry in India

In India, the beedi rolling is a traditional activity with highly labour intensive and predominantly unorganized. The beedi industry is one of the largest employers of workers in India, after agriculture, handloom and construction (GoI, 1995). However, the estimates of the numbers of beedi workers engaged in this industry vary depending on who is making the estimates. The India's Ministry of Labour estimates about 45 lakh workers in the beedi rolling industry, majority of who are home based women workers (GoI, 2005). As per Standing Committee on Labour (2010-11), 49.90 lakh beedi workers in India (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2011). The trade unions claim that there are over 70 to 80 lakh beedi workers. Women make the largest proportion of labor in the beedi industry. Published literature estimate women make up 76 per cent of total beedi employment (Sudarshan and Kaur, 1999). The All India Beedi, Cigar, and Tobacco Workers Federation during 2001 estimates women comprise around 90 per cent of total employment in beedi manufacture. Srinivasulu (1997) reported that 90 per cent of beedi workers are women. Women constitute a very high percentage of labour force in the industry. The reason for this is, firstly, the work is done generally from home and women can do it while at the same time attending to their children and other household responsibilities; secondly, their deft fingers are more suited to the work of beedi rolling.

The Indian market for smoking tobacco is dominated by beedis. A beedi consists of shredded tobacco which is hand rolled in a *tendu leaf* (a forest product which is the principal raw material used as beedi wrappers) secured with a colorful string at one end. They are smoked primarily by men and are rolled primarily by women, often in their homes. As per estimation of International Labour Organisation (2005), there are about 300 manufacturers of beedi brands and thousands of small scale contractors and manufacturers involved in beedi production in India.

The Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Kerala and Karnataka are the major Beedi manufacturing States in India. The beedi rolling is generally done by poor households in backward areas where the workers have usually no other means of sustainable employment. Although beedi rolling began in the factory sector (in early 20th century), over the last three decades, the beedi manufacturers have increasingly shifted the work from factories into the households. Currently, about 10 per cent of the beedi manufacturing takes place in the organized factory sector.

Beedi Industry in Dakshina Kannada

Dakshina Kannada district is the major beedi producing center in the State of Karnataka representing a space with the highest concentration of beedi production. The Dakshina Kannada, a coastal district in Karnataka state, was formed in 1997. The district is small in terms of geographical area, but densely populated and predominantly rural in nature. With an average annual rainfall of 4,030 mm, the district has never experienced drought. The Human Development Report indicates that the district ranks first in the state in many aspects of human development. The district is the second most industrialised district in the state. Beedi industry has strong roots in this district with 36 beedi companies and over 2,500 beedi contractors. The importance of beedi rolling is reflected in the fact that about 100 types of beedis manufactured under 12 major brands provide employment to about 6 lakh persons, mostly women and, about 27 crore beedi sticks are manufactured every day in the district (Rajasekhar and Sreedhar, 2002). The beedi industry provided gainful employment to about four lakh people in Dakshina Kannada district (about seven lakh in the State and according to the government estimates quoted by ILO). But these people, who mainly hailed from middle, lower middle and poor strata of society (Deccan Herald, 2004).

Review of Literature

Beedi rolling activities have provided employment for millions of Indians, most of them women over the centuries. Now, the anti-tobacco movement is cutting demand and the process threatening their economic health. Once a livelihood for some 4.5 million rollers—90 percent of them women the little cigarette's decline is posing big problems for them. Most are illiterate, in poor health and socially marginalized. They have no assets of any kind and alternative avenues. Most of the works on the beedi industry deals with the socio-economic conditions of the beedi rollers.

Existing studies on the socio-economic conditions of beedi workers in various parts of the country show their continuing struggle for survival even while sustaining in this occupation despite low wages, irregular employment, health hazards and the neglect in government policies. There are several studies on the socio-economic conditions of beedi workers and their problems in the Indian

subcontinent. These studies have brought out the problems in availing the benefits of social security measures – weekly holidays, provision for annual leave, maternity leave for women workers, sick leave and medical benefits. Further, they have highlighted the status of living conditions, poverty, indebtedness and sexual exploitation (Avachat 1978, Mohandas 1980, Mohandas and Kumar 1992). More specifically, the studies on income and employment generation in beedi rolling are scanty. On the other hand, few studies on the welfare of the beedi rollers, conducted at the all-India level by the Government of India, have concluded that the welfare measures have failed to produce the expected results. Beedi rollers are constantly exposed to tobacco dust and hazardous chemicals. They experience exacerbation of tuberculosis, asthma, anaemia, giddiness, postural and eye problems, and gynecological difficulties (Kumar, 2003).

According to trade unions, the majority of beedi workers do not have ID cards, while the government estimates that only about 15 per cent of beedi workers do not have ID cards. For families engage in beedi production, the standard practice is to issue an ID card to only one member of the family even when other members of the family also roll beedis (ILO, 2003). Nearly 2.25 lakh children are engaged in beedi making. Children help their mothers, fathers and siblings with beedi rolling. They work all day with no breaks or holidays. On school days they roll beedis before reaching school and again continue after returning back, without any wages (Sudarshan and Kaur, 1999). Very few studies have been attempted in this direction at the all India level, while, not many detailed research work is conducted on these issues in Karnataka State. Against this background, an attempt has been made in this study to analyse the women in beedi rolling activity.

Objectives of the Study

The present study focuses mainly on the following objectives:

- (i) To study the socio-economic conditions of the beedi-rollers.
- (ii) To analyse the income and employment generation from the beedi rolling activity.
- (iii) To find out the health problems faced by the beedi rollers in the study area.

Data and Methodology

The present study was undertaken in Mangalore City of Dakshina Kannada district for an in-depth analysis. The selection of the district was purposive and for the following reasons: Firstly, the predominant occupation coming under household manufacturing in Dakshina Kannada district is beedi rolling. Secondly, the district is the major beedi producing center in the State representing a space with the highest concentration of beedi production with more than 40 beedi companies in this region. Thirdly, beedi rolling is a major cottage industry in the district employing over five lakh people. Dakshina Kannada district has five taluks, namely Bantwal,

Belthangadi, Mangalore, Puttur and Sullya. Of the five taluks, one taluk namely Mangalore has been selected from the district due to its suitability for study. Mangalore is the headquarters of the district and ranks first in number of beedi rollers and also beedi manufacturing companies.

Sample Size

A complete census or a comprehensive nationwide database capturing important statistics of registered and unregistered beedi rollers is not available. The only available database is partial and fragmented, which makes it difficult to construct a time series on production and employment in this industry encompassing all types of enterprises (ILO, 2003 and Bhattacharya and Bhattacharya 2000). This observation is applicable to Dakshina Kannada district also. The beedi rollers were considered as sample informants of the study to understand the income and employment generation in the beedi rolling. Some preliminary information on who are the beedi rollers in Mangalore city have been collected with the help of trade unions of the beedi workers, manufacturing companies and beedi contactors. Accordingly, a total of 120 sample beedi roller households have been chosen randomly for an in-depth analysis.

Sources of Data

This paper is based on both primary and secondary data sources. The secondary data were collected from various published sources like ILO, Ministry of Labour and Employment, NSSO, District Statistical reports, Census reports etc. The primary data were collected from the sample households of beedi rollers by using well-designed and pre-tested schedule, canvassed through personal visits. The data collected during the period of enquiry, were scrutinized and crosschecked in order to ascertain the socio-economic profile of sample households. Results are presented in a tabular form, using simple statistical techniques of frequencies and weighted averages.

Results

Socio-Economic Characteristics Beedi Rollers

Beedi rolling is a major occupation for the women in Dakshina Kannada district and it creates alternative **income and employment** opportunities for them. In our study, all the respondents are women beedi rollers. Important socio-economic features of the sample respondents are presented in the Table-1. The analysis showed that majority of the respondents (65 per cent) belonged to the age group of 26-45 years, while 20 per cent of the respondents were 46-55 years old. A total of 8.33 per cent of the respondents belong to the age group of above 25 years. The distribution of respondent by educational status is also to be seen in the same table that the overall illiteracy rate of respondents was just five per cent only. As a whole 50.9 per cent of the respondents are completed their middle school education and those who studied

8th to 10th standard were found at 32.5 per cent. Around 6 per cent of the total respondents have completed their pre-university education.

Around 77 per cent of the total 120 as a whole belonged to nuclear family and the remaining belongs to joint family. Ration card is important for proof of identity of the family members and to get government benefits. There are two types of ration cards; (i) Above Poverty Line (APL), and (ii) Below Poverty line (BPL), which have been classified based on the poverty line criteria. Within the BPL cards, in the name of *Annapoorna* and *Anthodaya* ration cards have been categorized and considered as very poor families within BPL category. Of the total sample, around 30 per cent of the families had APL cards, BPL (48.3 per cent), Anthodaya (17.5 per cent) and just 4.2 per cent of families have owned Annapoorna cards. Beedi rolling is a main occupation for few households and others have taken up as a subsidiary occupation in the study area. Occupation of the sample households showed that beedi rolling and wage labourer (coolie) was the primary occupation of majority (34.2 & 30.8 per cent) of the households, followed by business (14.2 per cent), service (6.7 per cent), fish vendor (6.7 per cent), vegetable vendor (5 per cent) and dependency on agriculture was just 2.5 per cent of the households.

Table 1: Socio-economic status of the Respondents

Sl. No.	Particulars	No. of Respondents	%
I	Age group of the respondents		
	< 25	10	8.3
	26 – 35	38	31.7
	36 – 45	40	33.3
	46 – 55	24	20.0
	56 and above	8	6.7
	Total	120	100
II	Education of the respondents		
	Illiterate	6	5.0
	Primary Education (1 to 4th)	7	5.8
	Middle School (5th to 7th)	61	50.9
	High School (8th to 10th)	39	32.5
	College (PUC)	7	5.8
	Total	120	100
III	Living in type of household		
	Nuclear family	28	23.3
	Joint family	92	76.7
	Total	120	100
IV	Type of ration cards possessed		
	Annapoorna	5	4.2
	Anthodaya	21	17.5
	BPL	58	48.3
	APL	36	30.0
	Total	120	100
V	Major occupation of the family		

Contd.

Sl. No.	Particulars	No. of Respondents	%
	Beedi rolling	41	34.1
	Wage labour	37	30.8
	Service (Govt)	8	6.7
	Business	17	14.2
	Agriculture	3	2.5
	Fish vendor	8	6.7
	Vegetable vendor	6	5.0
	Total	120	100

Source: Primary data

Sample Households and years of Experience in Beedi Rolling

Beedi rolling is the means of livelihood of a vast number of families in the total sample. The Table-2 provides the information about the sample households how they rich in experience of beedi rolling. As a whole, about 20 per cent of the respondents reports that they are rolling beedies since 21 years. The households who are rolling beedies since 16 to 20 years accounted 14.1 per cent. Further, 26.7 per cent of the respondents said that they are experienced of 11-15 years in beedi rolling. Around 29 per cent of the households are rolling beedies since 6-10 years and who are practicing beedi rolling activity since five years accounted 10 per cent of the households. The selected sample families are working as beedi rollers for contractors, who were provided raw materials to roll the beedies. The contractor provides raw materials required to roll 1000 *beedies* to the beedi Rollers, and pays for every 1000 finished beedies.

Table 2: Distribution of Sample Households according to their experience in Beedi Rolling

No. of Years	Households	%
Since 5 years	12	10.0
6 - 10 years	35	29.2
11 - 15 years	32	26.7
16 - 20 years	17	14.1
21 years and above	24	20.0
Total	120	100

Source: Primary data

Income and Employment Generation in Beedi Rolling

Beedi rolling activity has become an instrumental in generating supplementary income among the poor families in the Dakshina Kannada district. Income generated from the beedi rolling would help the poor to overcome the problems of poverty and thus brings a cumulative effect on the process of income and employment

generation. In order to understand the economics of beedi rolling among sample households in the study area, the data on income earned by sample households in a year have been collected and analysed. The Table-3 provides the information about annual income, employment generation and number of beedies rolled by sample households in a year. On an average, a beedi rolling household has engaged 282.5 days in beedi rolling. As a whole, the beedi rollers household earned an average total income of Rs. 15,870.46 in a year from the rolling of 2,37,543 (237.54 bundles) beedies. The average wage paid to beedi rollers in the study area worked out to Rs. 66.81 per 1000 beedies. The beedi rollers are getting lower wages than the government prescribed minimum wages (Rs. 72.94 per 1000 beedies rolled). Majority of the beedi rollers were not aware of the prescribed wages for their work. Few households have been reported that they may lose some amount due to rejection of beedies, due to un-proper folding of beedies at the time of rolling. And also beedies which are rejected by the checker being supposedly of lower quality of the wrong size or made with damaged leaves.

Table 3: Income and Employment Generation in Beedi Rolling (Avg/per household)

Total Number of days employment generated in a year per household	240 to 280
Total number of beedies rolled (year/household)	237542.88
Total number of beedi bundles rolled(one bundle = 1000 beedies)	237.54
Wage paid per bundle (Rs)	66.81
Average total amount earned in a year (Rs)	15870.46
Total number of beedis rejected	425-500

Source: Primary data

Problems faced by the Beedi rollers

The qualitative information regarding health hazards faced by the beedi rollers and household members have been discussed and presented in this section. The health hazards connected with tobacco use are well known. A significant part of beedi manufacture takes place at home or through a system of contractors which results in a high incidence of women and children employed in poor working conditions in beedi manufacturing. Women who work at home in small huts with very little ventilation the tobacco dust remains in the home where women and their families eat, sleep and spend their entire time. The major health hazards faced by the beedi rollers in the study area are shown in the Table-4.

Table 4: Major health hazards faced by the Beedi rollers in the study area

Type of Health hazards	Faced the family members of beedi rollers		
	Men	Women	Children
Headache/ Stomach Ache <i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	
Backache/ Body Ache Neck Aches	<i>No</i>	<i>Common</i>	<i>No</i>
Leg Pains/ Waist Pain/ Finger Pains	<i>No</i>	<i>Common</i>	<i>No</i>
Ear Aches	<i>No</i>	<i>Some time</i>	<i>No</i>
Eye pains	<i>Common</i>	<i>Common</i>	<i>Common</i>
Breathing Problems	<i>Common</i>	<i>Common</i>	<i>Common</i>
Fever/ Cough	<i>Common</i>	<i>Common</i>	<i>Common</i>
Hand Burns	<i>No</i>	<i>Some time</i>	<i>No</i>
Skin allergy	<i>Common</i>	<i>Common</i>	<i>Common</i>

Source: Primary data

The beedi dust that is in the air therefore affects not only the beedi roller but also her entire family too leading to respiratory problems. The other problems associated with beedi rolling are body ache, headaches and eyestrain. These ailments most commonly found in the study area are fever/ cough, eye pains, breathing problems, headache and other problems.

Conclusions

Informal sector accounts for a sizeable number of workers in India across different sectors. The available statistics on beedi rollers at India or State level is based on the estimation. Therefore, the government should identify the beedi rollers and carry out the socio-economic census quinquennially. Majority of the beedi rollers do not have identity cards in the study area. Lack of identity card prohibits beedi worker to get an identity card. For this, workers have to be made aware of the value of the identity card and its benefits through building their capacities. Further, beedi rollers do not even know which company they are rolling beedies for and they deal only with the contractor. The beedi industries have provided employment opportunity for women. But they are working longer hours for meager wages (Rs. 66.81 for rolling of 1000 beedies) with facing health hazards. Beedi rollers are suffering with frequent headache problem, fever/ cough, eye pains, breathing problems, headache etc. In addition to the economic exploitation of the beedi workers, they are also exposed to health hazards. Therefore, beedi workers should be given minimum of Rs. 150 for rolling 1,000 beedies, dearness allowance and take safety measures to avoid health hazards.

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