

## **AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF WOMEN LABOURERS AT WORKPLACE AND AT HOME IN RURAL PUNJAB**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study attempts to analyse the problems faced by the women labourers at the workplace and on the domestic front along with their social status and living conditions in the rural areas of Punjab. Data were collected from 498 households of three districts, namely, Sangrur, Ludhiana and Hoshiarpur, selected on the basis of work participation rate of rural women in Punjab by using multi-stage systematic random sampling technique. The study reveals that the social status and living conditions of the sampled women labourers are very miserable in the rural areas of Punjab. Further, almost all the sampled women labourers do not find work in agriculture and non-agriculture sectors for more than 180 days in a year. A large majority of them do not enjoy any facility at their workplace. About one-third of the respondents are not being paid equal wages for equal work with men. Further, about 93 per cent of the respondents are not aware about the standard working hours fixed by the government for such labour. This is mainly because of their illiteracy and ignorance towards their rights. On the domestic front, there are some encouraging responses which reflect an element of their importance at home and their empowerment too to some extent.*

### **Introduction**

The situation of women labourers in rural India is quite deplorable. They are one among the worst sufferers of socio-cultural, political and economic exploitation, injustice, oppression and violence. Their woes and miseries are boundless. They are mainly employed in unorganised sector of the Indian economy as daily wagers and marginal workers. Lack of adequate employment opportunities, limited skills and illiteracy made their mobility extremely limited and prevented them from achieving an independent status. They do not enjoy any social security, maternity benefits, pension schemes or any other kind of economic

protection. With the adoption of policies of globalisation in India, their employment opportunities are likely to be further reduced as they will have to suffer stiff competition from foreign technology and modern methods of agriculture (Jaiswal, 2009).

The plight of the sampled women labourers is very miserable. This is because of the fact that they have to face many problems at the workplace and on the domestic front. Many studies (Gol, 2008; Rajasekhar et al., 2007; Sandhu, 2002; Tuteja, 2000; Padma, 1999; Rani et al., 1990) reveal that majority of the women labourers are illiterate, unskilled, socially backward and economically weak which force them to work in the unorganised

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sector without fair wages and occupational amenities. They have few opportunities to seek employment in the non-agriculture sector. They find employment only in occupations which need low level skill. The main objective of the study is to discuss the problems faced by the women labourers at the workplace and on the domestic front in the rural areas of Punjab. But to find out these problems, it is quite significant to examine their social status and living conditions. Therefore, an attempt has been made to analyse these.

### **Methodology**

The present study, based on multi-stage systematic random sampling technique, relates to the year 2010-11. For the purpose of this study, the whole State has been divided into three zones of districts on the basis of work participation rate of rural women in Punjab. One district from each zone was selected on an average basis. Sangrur district represents the high work participation zone, while Ludhiana and Hoshiarpur districts represent the medium and low work participation zones, respectively. From the list of villages in each development block in each of the selected districts, one village was selected randomly.

From these villages, a comprehensive list of the women labour

households was prepared. From this list, 10 per cent of the households were selected randomly. In all, 498 households were selected for the survey. These households were visited personally to collect information on the various socio-economic aspects of their families. The information was recorded by personal interview method through a pre-tested structured questionnaire designed for the purpose. The results were analysed by using the mean values and percentages.

### **Results and Discussion**

The analysis of the social status of women labourers (Table 1) reveals that majority of the respondents are young as about two-thirds (64.86 per cent) of the respondents have been found to be less than 45 years of age in the rural areas of Punjab. A break-up of this percentage shows that 47.59 per cent women labourers are between the age of 30 to 44 years, 16.27 per cent are between the age of 15 to 29 years while just one per cent are below the age of 15 years. Slightly more than one-fourth (26.51 per cent) of the women labourers are in the age group of 45 to 59 years. Only 8.63 per cent women labourers fall under the age category of 60 and above. The field survey reveals that most of the women labourers representing this category get employment under MGNREGS.

**Table 1: Social Status of Sampled Women Labourers**

Age (in years)						
Below 15	15 to 29	30 to 44	45 to 59	60 and above	Total	
5	81	237	132	43	498	
(1.00)	(16.27)	(47.59)	(26.51)	(8.63)	(100.00)	
Educational status						
Illiterate	Primary	Middle	Matric	Higher	Graduation secondary	Total
363	14	94	22	4	1	498
(72.89)	(2.81)	(18.88)	(4.42)	(0.80)	(0.20)	(100.00)
Caste						
Scheduled castes	Backward class	General	Total			
398	94	6	498			
(79.92)	(18.88)	(1.20)	(100.00)			
Marital status						
Married	Unmarried	Widow or Divorced	Total			
441	8	49	498			
(88.55)	(1.61)	(9.84)	(100.00)			
Number of children						
Up to 2	2 to 4	4 to 6	6 and above	Total		
158	193	121	18	490		
(32.25)	(39.39)	(24.69)	(3.67)	(100.00)		
Family type						
Nuclear	Joint	Total				
398	100	498				
(79.92)	(20.08)	(100.00)				

Note: The figures given in parentheses indicate percentages.

Education creates awareness among women about their rights and prepares them for diverse occupation jobs (Bhatia and Dhindsa, 2009). The analysis of data showing the level of education of the respondents (Table 1) indicates that almost three-fourths (72.89 per cent) of the sampled women labourers are illiterate. There are only 27.11 per cent women labourers who have acquired some formal school education. The analysis further provides that 18.88 per cent of the women labourers under study are educated

up to the middle level, 4.42 per cent up to the matric level and 2.81 per cent up to the primary level. Merely a negligible proportion of just 0.80 per cent of the respondents are educated up to the higher secondary level. There is just a single woman labourer (0.20 per cent) in the sample who has education up to the graduation level. For male workers, higher levels of education are indeed associated with higher WPR (work participation rate), both in rural and urban areas. But for women, WPR is higher for

illiterate women than for women with higher levels of school education – a trend which reverses itself only for women with technical/vocational education or graduates (Srivastava and Srivastava, 2009).

Caste has always been a dominant factor in the social set-up of the Indian society. The present analysis also provides that maximum workforce in the agriculture and non-agriculture sectors come from the so-called lower castes of the society. Caste-wise distribution of women labourers shows that most of the sampled women labourers, i.e., 98.80 per cent either belong to the scheduled caste or the backward class categories. The percentage of the scheduled castes, i.e., 79.92 is the highest among all the categories. The WPR is the highest for scheduled tribe (ST) and scheduled caste (SC) women and the lowest for women from the other castes. The SCs and STs are the most marginalised sections in the economy and the most impoverished. Women from these groups have higher WPRs because extreme poverty leaves them with little choice but to work, and because they do not face social taboos that disapprove of work. The converse is true for women from other castes (Srivastava and Srivastava, 2009).

The data further reveal that 88.55 per cent of the total sampled women labourers are married, 1.61 per cent unmarried, whereas 9.84 per cent of them are either widows or divorced. The data showing the number of children in each family of the respondent women labourers highlights that slightly more than two-thirds (67.75 per cent) of the respondents have more than two children in

their families. The fact matches the empirical finding of another research study (Rani, 2011) which shows that most of the women labourers have large families. Most of the families (79.92 per cent) of the sampled women labourers are nuclear comprising mainly husband and their children. Further, one-fifth (20.08 per cent) of the respondents have joint family system. It was observed during the field survey that all the adult members in the sampled households are contributing to enhance the family income.

The living conditions of the women labourers were observed to be quite pathetic in the rural areas of Punjab. The houses where they live in are in bad condition; and there has not been a proper arrangement of even potable water which exposes them to many health hazards. Table 2 reveals that more than eight out of ten respondents (401 out of 498) live in semi-*pucca* houses, whereas more than one out of ten (54 out of 498) live in *katcha* houses. Only 8.64 per cent of them (43 out of 498) have *pucca* houses. The Table further reveals that slightly more than two-thirds of the total respondents (67.27 per cent) are living in dilapidated houses, while in the case of more than one-fourth respondents (27.91 per cent), their houses are in a moderate condition. Only a meagre proportion of the respondents, i.e., 4.82 per cent have relatively good houses to live in. It clearly reflects that the women labourers under study have to live under pitiable conditions due to their economic compulsions. They find it hard to even get their houses repaired.

**Table 2 : Housing Conditions of Women Labourers**

Type of house				
<i>Katcha</i>	Semi- pucca	Pucca	Total	
54	401	43	498	
(10.84)	(80.52)	(8.64)	(100.00)	
Conditions				
Good	Moderate	Dilapidated	Total	
24	139	335	498	
(4.82)	(27.91)	(67.27)	(100.00)	
Source of drinking water				
Handpump	Tap	Submersible pump	No.	Total
98	259	10	131	498
(19.68)	(52.01)	(2.01)	(26.30)	(100.00)
Average number of rooms available	Families having access to bathroom\toilet		Houses electrified	
1.90	464 (93.17)		491 (98.59)	

Note: The figures given in parentheses are percentages.

As far as the source of potable water is concerned, the Table indicates that more than half of the respondents (52.01 per cent) are using tap water followed by those who get water from handpumps (19.68 per cent) and submersible pumps (2.01 per cent). It is pertinent to note that more than one-fourth respondents (26.30 per cent) have no source of potable water. They depend upon the neighbours or other sources for potable water. The Table further depicts that the average number of rooms available per household is 1.90. As many as 464 respondents (93.17 per cent) are having access to bathroom/toilet. However, it has been observed during the field survey that the bathrooms/toilets used by

them are not proper in any respect. Though Punjab is regarded as one of the prosperous States, there is no arrangement of bathrooms/toilets for about 7 per cent of the respondents. It has also been observed that there is no arrangement of electricity in the case of 1.41 per cent sampled households.

The analysis of sectoral employment of the sampled women labourers (Table 3) indicates that majority of the respondents, i.e., 77.51 per cent get employment in both the agriculture and non-agriculture sectors, 14.26 per cent of the respondents get employment only in the agriculture sector, and the remaining 8.23 per cent get employment only in the non-agriculture sector.

**Table 3 : Sectoral Distribution of Sampled Women Labourers**

Sector	Workplace		Sampled women labourers
	In native village	Outside native village	
Agriculture	65 (18.37) [91.55]	6 (4.17) [8.45]	71 (14.26) [100.00]
Non-agriculture	18 (5.08) [43.90]	23 (15.97) [56.10]	41 (8.23) [100.00]
Both agriculture and non-agriculture	271 (76.55) [70.21]	115 (79.86) [29.79]	386 (77.51) [100.00]
Total	354 (100.00) [71.08]	144 (100.00) [28.92]	498 (100.00) [100.00]

Note: The figures given in upper and lower brackets indicate column-wise and row-wise percentages, respectively.

It is evident from the Table that majority of the respondents are not able to find sufficient amount of work in the agriculture sector alone in the rural areas of Punjab. So, they have to find it in both agriculture and non-agriculture sectors. The labour absorption capacity of the agriculture sector reached the upper limit and it is not able to keep the rural workers engaged throughout the year. The rural households also seek employment outside the agriculture sector to tide over the inter-year and intra-year variations in agricultural income (Bhakar et al., 2007). The Table further reveals that 71.08 per cent respondents work in their native villages and the remaining 28.92 per cent go out of their native villages in search of work. Out of total 354 respondents working in their native villages, majority of them, i.e., 76.55 per cent earn their livelihood from both agriculture and non-agriculture sectors. Only 18.37 per cent of the respondents work in the agriculture sector alone and the remaining work only in the non-agriculture sector. As regards the sectoral composition of the sampled women

labourers working outside the native village, 79.86 per cent respondents work in both agriculture and non-agriculture sectors, while 15.97 per cent work only in the non-agriculture sector and the remaining work in the agriculture sector alone.

One of the main problems faced by sampled women labourers is of irregularity in their work. About one-third of the respondents (32.93 per cent) work for a period of 90 to 120 days in a year. Almost equal proportion of the respondents (32.13 per cent) get employment for a period of 60 to 90 days. A very small proportion, i.e., 3.42 per cent of the respondents find work for more than 180 days in a year. The data highlight the fact that availability of work for the sampled women labourers is quite low in the rural areas of Punjab.

Usually, casual labourers have to work at the place wherever they get employment. Data show the willingness of the sampled women labourers to work according to the distance of workplace. There is an inverse

relationship between the distance of workplace and the willingness of the respondents to work, i.e., as the distance of workplace increases, lesser respondents are interested to work. The fact responsible for this phenomenon is that the domestic chores force them to work nearby. About one-third of the respondents (32.33 per cent) are willing to work up to a distance of 4 kilometers and more. Whereas slightly more than half of the respondents (50.60 per cent) stated that they are willing to work around an area of 3 to 4 kilometers. However, the strength of the respondents willing to work around an area of 2 to 3 kilometers increased to 82.13 per cent. It further increased to 97.19 per cent for an area of 1 to 2 kilometers, whereas all the respondents prefer to work in an area less than 1 kilometer.

Table 4 provides details about the mode of transport used by the respondents to reach their workplace in the rural areas of Punjab. It is evident from the Table that the respondents

do not use any particular mode of transport. They usually go on foot to work locally; they also use bicycles, public transport facilities and sometimes, the employers' transport facilities. Up to a distance of 2 kilometers, most of the respondents (98.35 per cent) go on foot to their workplace. For an area of 2 to 3 kilometers, 76.53 per cent of the respondents go on foot, 40.10 per cent use employers' transport facilities, and 18.58 per cent use their own bicycles. As many as 78.17 per cent of the respondents reach their workplace using employers' means of transport, 36.51 per cent on foot, 30.16 per cent on bicycles and 16.27 per cent through public transport facilities for a distance of 3 to 4 kilometers. Further, for a distance of 4 kilometers and more, 18.63 per cent respondents reach their workplace on foot, and 44.72 per cent use their own bicycles. The employers' mode of transport is used usually for a distance of 2 kilometers and more, whereas the public transport is viable for a distance exceeding 3 kilometers.

**Table 4 : Mode of Transport Used to Reach the Workplace by Women Labourers**

Distance (in kms.)	On foot	Bicycle	Employer transport	Public transport	Total
Less than 1	498(100.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	498(100.00)
1 to 2	476(98.35)	21(4.34)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	484(100.00)
2 to 3	313(76.53)	76(18.58)	164(40.10)	0(0.00)	409(100.00)
3 to 4	92(36.51)	76(30.16)	197(78.17)	41(16.27)	252(100.00)
4 and more	30(18.63)	72(44.72)	146(90.68)	52(32.30)	161(100.00)

Note: The figures given in parentheses indicate row-wise percentages (Multiple responses).

There is no doubt about the fact that basic facilities such as arrangement of toilet, canteen, creche, etc., made available to the labourers at their workplace contribute highly towards their involvement in the work. Out of the 498 sampled women labourers, only 5.22 per cent enjoy some of these facilities, while the remaining majority of them, i.e., 94.78 per cent are not provided such facilities. Only 4.42

per cent respondents were provided the toilet facility at their workplace, while canteen facility is available to only 3.41 per cent of them. A negligible proportion of the respondents, i.e., just 0.60 per cent have the facility of first aid. Not even a single woman labourer in the sample has the facility of creche at their workplace.

In India, despite the existence of Equal Remuneration Act 1976, the wage discrimination among men and women labourers for a similar type of work still prevails, particularly in the case of labourers working in the unorganised sector. Table 5 carries data showing wage discrimination among men and women labourers in the rural areas of Punjab. The Table shows that 30.32

per cent respondents feel that wages are not paid equally to both men and women labourers for the same type of work. It implies that 69.68 per cent respondents find no discrimination in this regard. The Table also reveals the reasons and areas of work in which wage discrimination prevails among men and women labourers in the rural areas of Punjab.

**Table 5 : Wage Discrimination Among Men and Women Labourers**

	Particulars	Sampled women labourers
Wage discrimination	Yes	151 (30.32)
	No	347 (69.68)
	Total	498 (100.00)
Area of work in which wage discrimination prevails (multiple responses)	Growing vegetables	101 (20.28)
	Threshing	13 (2.61)
	Construction work	63 (12.73)
	White-washing	28 (5.62)
	Local industry	43 (8.63)
	Reasons for wage discrimination (multiple responses)	Male able to do all kinds of work
	Lack of mobility	43 (8.63)
	Traditional way followed	47 (9.44)
	Less output	74 (14.86)
	Hard labour involved in work	65 (13.05)
	No response	30 (6.02)

Note: The figures given in parentheses denote percentages.



About various types of exploitation faced by the sampled women labourers in getting their wages, it is evident from data that 70.08 per cent respondents do not face any problem in getting their wages, while the remaining respondents reported that they have to face problems in this regard. The main problems expressed by them include delay in the payment of wages (23.49 per cent), demand for commission by the contractors/agents (11.04 per cent) and overtime work without any additional wages (7.23 per cent).

During the field survey, it was observed that there is no direct link between

the employers and women labourers. Figure 1 reflects the position of women labourers at the workplace in a hierarchical manner in the rural areas of Punjab. The employers usually deal either with the contractors or the male members. The women labourers fall at the bottom of the hierarchy. On the top are the employers, followed by the contractors, male labourers or husbands and at the lowest level are the women labourers. It is quite rare that women labourers have a direct dealing with the employers and contractors. As a result of this, some of the women labourers have to face exploitation in getting their wages.

**Figure 1 : Position of Women Labourers at Workplace**

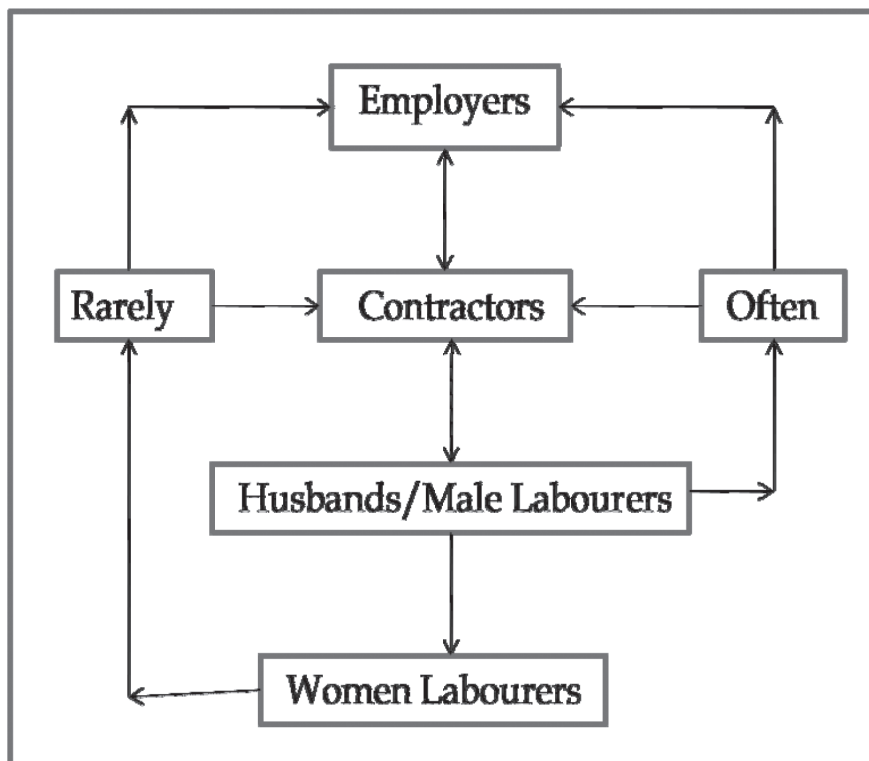


Table 6 reveals that majority of the respondents, i.e., 92.77 per cent are not aware about the standard working hours fixed by the government for such labour. This is mainly because of their illiteracy and ignorance towards their rights. As far as putting in maximum hours of work is concerned, majority

of the respondents (83.33 per cent) have to work for 8 to 9 hours in a day, if the work is on daily basis. However, where the work is on contract basis, majority of the respondents (81.33 per cent) are required to work for more than 10 hours a day.

**Table 6 : Awareness Among Sampled Women Labourers About Standard Working Hours**

Particulars		Sampled women labourers		
Awareness	Yes	36	(7.23)	
	No	462	(92.77)	
	Total	498	(100.00)	
Working hours	If work is on daily basis	Below 8	34	(6.83)
		8 to 9	415	(83.33)
		9 to 10	38	(7.63)
		10 and above	11	(2.21)
			0	(0.00)
	If work is on contract basis	Below 8	28	(5.62)
		8 to 9	65	(13.05)
		9 to 10	405	(81.33)
		10 and above		

Note : The figures given in parentheses indicate percentages.

As the respondents selected for the study were women labourers, it was quite difficult to ask them direct questions about their sexual exploitation at the workplace. So, it was considered appropriate to seek answers to such questions from their husbands, employers and male co-workers. The questions were put to them in a different way and then

inferences were drawn. It was found that 6.83 per cent of the respondents faced sexual exploitation. Another 15.06 per cent respondents faced no harassment at their workplace. However, majority of the respondents, i.e., 78.11 per cent refused to respond on this issue. It is a fact widely acknowledged that sexual harassment

hampers women's constitutional rights to equality and dignity. It sabotages work performance, affects working environment, and diminishes women's progress (Kapur, 2013).

In addition to the problems faced at the workplace, the women labourers have to face many problems on their domestic front also, which are discussed as below:

The marital status is an important determinant of women's employment. In the rural areas, women labourers are allowed to work only on the willingness and acceptance of their husbands. Table 7 reveals whether the

husbands of the sampled women labourers approve that their wives should hire out their labour or not. The reasons for their approval or disapproval were also highlighted. Of the total 498 sampled women labourers, 441 (88.55 per cent) were living with their husbands and the remaining were either unmarried or widowed/divorced. Thus, the response data pertain to 441 respondents only. The Table reveals that in 92.29 per cent cases, the husbands of sampled women labourers have no objection if their wives hire out their labour, while the remaining 7.71 per cent hold an altogether different view in this regard.

**Table 7 : Attitude of Husbands Towards Working of Their Wives as Labourers**

	Particulars	Sampled women labourers
Acceptance	Yes	407 (92.29)
	No	34(7.71)
	Total	441 (100.00)
Reasons for acceptance (multiple responses)	Additional income	171 (38.78)
	To run family	215 (48.75)
	To pay-off debt	59 (13.38)
	Employment within the village	94 (21.32)
Reasons for non-acceptance (multiple responses)	Longer working hours	17 (3.85)
	No proper care of children	30 (6.80)
	Very low wages	8 (1.81)

Note: The figures given in parentheses denote percentages.

The Table further reveals that most of the women labourers, i.e., 48.75 per cent hire out their labour to run their families; 38.78 per cent generate additional income for their families; 21.32 per cent for the reason that employment is available within the village; and

13.38 per cent hire out their labour to pay-off their debts. In cases, where the husbands objected to the working of their wives, the reasons given by them included no proper care of children (6.80 per cent), longer working hours (3.85 per cent), and very low wages (1.81 per cent).

Generally, men hold most or all of the power in the rural households, which leads to fierce gender discrimination. Ignorance, low social status and illiteracy among the women are the main reasons that can be attributed to their problem. Males, especially those who are in the low strata, are in the habit of incurring unnecessary and unwanted expenditure and this aggravates their economic problems further (Balakrishnan, 2005). Here, an attempt has been made to know from the respondent women labourers whether they have any sort of problems against their husbands. The data reveal that 65.99 per cent respondents have no problem against their husbands, while the remaining raised some problems faced by them. With regard to the nature of problems faced by the women labourers, 27.44 per cent respondents related their problems to the drinking and smoking habits of their husbands, while 16.10 per cent respondents complained that they have been the victims of domestic violence. However, another 13.38 per cent respondents related their problems to the ill-treatment made by their husbands.

It is also quite important to understand the behaviour of the husbands of the sampled women labourers during the illness of their wives. It is a moral duty of a husband to take care of his wife and assist her in domestic chores, whenever she falls ill. The responses of all the 441 respondent women labourers, living with their husbands, were sought in this regard. The data reveal that about three-fourths of the respondents, i.e., 73.47 per cent are found to be getting such assistance from their husbands, while the remaining think it otherwise.

The women labourers were further enquired about the type of help and assistance received from their husbands at the time of their illness. As many as 67.35 per cent respondents revealed that their husbands take them to a nearby medical practitioner/dispensary/hospital for treatment. However,

45.12 per cent respondents revealed that their husbands take care of the children at such a critical time, while in 52.83 per cent cases the required medicine is provided to them by their husbands. It was also found that in only 9.75 per cent cases, the husbands share the domestic responsibilities at such a difficult time. With regard to the behaviour of the husbands towards their wives during their illness, 18.59 per cent respondents stated that their husbands generally neglect them at such time. Another 10.67 per cent reported that they are ill-treated by their husbands.

In most of the rural labour class families, women are encouraged by their in-laws to do work as a labourer along with their husbands in order to enhance the family income, while there are others who discourage them not to do such menial jobs for their own reasons. It is pertinent to note that only 165 respondents are living with their in-laws. Data reveal that a large majority of the respondents, i.e., 89.70 per cent are encouraged by their in-laws to do work as labourers, and the remaining 10.30 per cent are discouraged in this regard. Child rearing (77.58 per cent), kitchen work (63.64 per cent), house maintenance (62.42 per cent) and washing (56.97 per cent) are the supporting activities undertaken by the in-laws of sampled women labourers to hire out their labour.

In the absence of any creche facility at the workplace, women labourers while on work need the help of their family members to look after their children. The sample includes 176 such respondents in all. The data clearly show that 61.36 per cent respondents engage their own son/daughter to take care of the younger child during their stay at work. Another 32.95 per cent reported that their husbands look after their children. When probed further, they stated that due to non-availability of work, their husbands take the responsibility to look after their children. Some of the women labourers (31.25 per cent) leave

their children in the *Anganwadi*. The joint family system plays a great role in this respect. It was noticed that in 25.57, 23.30 and 22.16 per cent cases, the children belonging to women labourers are looked after by their mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law and sisters-in-law, respectively.

The decision-making role of women in the family is as important as that of men. In fact, the degree of involvement in decision-making process related to family matters can serve as a good indicator of the status of women in households which in turn, determines their status in the society (Balakrishnan, 2005). The women labourers were asked to respond whether their family members consulted them on important family matters or not. To this, slightly more than one-third of the total respondents, i.e., 33.53 per cent answered negatively, while the remaining two-thirds of them, i.e., 66.47 per cent confirmed their involvement in all important family matters. The fact matches with the empirical finding of another research study (Sethi, 1989) which concludes that all the major decisions are taken by men in the rural women households either individually or sometimes jointly with women. The field survey revealed that their recognition and involvement in the family decision-making is mainly due to their contribution towards the family income. The women labourers contributing more towards the income of their families had greater participation in the decision-making process of their families.

With regard to the reasons for non-involvement in the family decision-making process, 22.29 per cent of the respondents held the opinion that it was a customary practice not to involve women in all important family matters; whereas 15.46 per cent respondents regretted that their family members did not involve them in decision-making process just for being females. However, 7.43 per cent respondents gave no response in this regard.

## Conclusion

The foregoing analysis clearly reveals that the social status and living conditions of the sampled women labourers in the rural areas of Punjab are very miserable. About three-fourths of the women labourers are illiterate and almost all the respondents either belong to the scheduled caste or the backward class categories. Slightly more than two-thirds of the respondents have more than two children in their families. Further, majority of the respondents are living in semi-pucca houses and most of their houses are in dilapidated condition. It clearly reflects that the women labourers have to live under pitiable conditions due to their economic compulsions.

Apart from this, the women labourers have to face many problems at their workplace. The study reveals that a large majority of the sampled women labourers, i.e., 96.58 per cent do not find work in the agriculture and non-agriculture sectors for more than 180 days in a year. This depicts that the availability of work for the sampled women labourers is quite low in the rural areas of Punjab. As many as 94.78 per cent of the total sampled women labourers do not enjoy any facility at their workplace. About one-third of the respondents are not being paid equal wages for equal work with men. Further, a large majority of the respondents, i.e., 92.77 per cent are not aware about the standard working hours fixed by the government for such labour. This is mainly because of their illiteracy and ignorance towards their rights.

On the domestic front, there are some encouraging responses which reflect an element of their importance at home and their empowerment too to some extent. Like about 67 per cent of respondents reported that they are involved in the family decision making; about 74 per cent of men assist the women and help them at least when they are unwell;

about 71 per cent men give their income at home; and about 90 per cent are encouraged by their in-laws to work outside home and when needed their children are also taken care of by them.

### Policy Implications

The results of the study and field survey have the following important implications:

- The government should effectively implement MGNREGS and ensure that poor families get 100 days of work in a year under it.
- The programmes for establishment of agro-based small-scale industries in the rural areas should be effectively implemented.
- The poor people should make aware of the various government programmes which provide loans at very low rate of interest for the establishment of various income generating ventures.
- Adult education programmes should be effectively implemented for the labourers to curtail the illiteracy level among them.
- The poor people should make aware of the rural housing programmes chalked out by the government. These programmes should also bring more and more needy and poor people in its ambit.
- Both the government and non-government organisations need to take the necessary steps to organise skill development programmes for the economic upliftment of women labourers.
- The provisions of the Minimum Wages Act and Equal Remuneration Act which protect the rights of women and provide them equality with men in relation to wages need to be implemented more stringently.
- The women labourers remain deprived of their rights due to non-existence of any representative bodies. Thus, efforts need to be made in this regard.

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