

Women Workers in Brick Kilns: Problems and Opportunities in Dharmapuri District

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Abstract : *The brick kiln industry plays a significant role in providing employment opportunities for rural women in Dharmapuri District. However, women workers in this sector face numerous socio-economic and occupational challenges such as low wages, long working hours, poor working conditions, health issues, lack of social security, and limited access to welfare measures. This study aims to examine the problems and opportunities experienced by women workers in brick kilns and to analyze their living and working conditions. The research is based on both primary and secondary data collected from women workers through structured questionnaires and interviews. The study also highlights the role of brick kiln employment in improving household income and economic participation among rural women. The findings reveal that despite various hardships, employment in brick kilns provides livelihood support and financial contribution to families. The study suggests suitable welfare measures and policy recommendations to improve the socio-economic conditions of women workers.*

Keywords : *Women Workers,Brick Kiln Industry ,Socio-Economic Problems*

Introduction

The brick kiln industry is one of the important unorganized sectors in India, providing employment opportunities to a large number of rural and economically weaker populations. In Dharmapuri District, many women are engaged in brick kiln activities such as clay preparation, moulding, carrying bricks, and stacking. Women workers play a vital role in the production process, yet their contribution is often undervalued and inadequately recognized. Most women workers in this sector belong to poor socio-economic backgrounds and depend on daily wages for their livelihood and family survival.

Despite offering employment opportunities, the brick kiln industry exposes women workers to several difficulties including low wages, long working hours, lack of safety measures, poor sanitation, and health-related problems caused by dust, heat, and heavy physical labour. In addition, many women face social insecurity, gender discrimination, and limited access to education and healthcare facilities. However, employment in brick kilns also provides opportunities for income generation and economic participation among rural women. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the problems and opportunities faced by women workers in brick kilns and to suggest measures for improving their socio-economic and working conditions in Dharmapuri District.

Research Problem

Women workers in the brick kiln industry constitute an important part of the unorganized labour force in Dharmapuri District. They are mainly engaged in labour-intensive activities such as moulding, carrying, drying, and stacking bricks. Despite their significant contribution to the industry, women workers continue to face numerous socio-economic and occupational problems. Low wages, irregular employment, long working hours, lack of job security, poor working environments, and inadequate welfare facilities adversely affect their standard of living and overall well-being.

Most women workers belong to economically weaker sections and possess low educational qualifications, which limit their opportunities for alternative employment. They are also exposed to various health hazards such as respiratory problems, body pain, fatigue, and skin diseases due to continuous exposure to dust, heat, and heavy physical work. In addition, gender discrimination, lack of social security benefits, and poor awareness of government welfare schemes further increase their vulnerability.

Although the brick kiln sector provides livelihood opportunities and contributes to family income, the living and working conditions of women workers remain unsatisfactory. Therefore, there is a need to study the problems and opportunities of women workers in brick kilns in Dharmapuri District and identify suitable measures for improving their socio-economic conditions and welfare.

Significance of the Research

This research is significant because it focuses on the socio-economic and occupational conditions of women workers employed in brick kilns in Dharmapuri District, an area that has received limited academic attention. Women workers form an essential part of the brick kiln industry, yet their contribution is often overlooked in labour studies and policy discussions. The study helps to understand the real-life challenges faced by these workers, including low wages, poor working conditions, health hazards, lack of social security, and gender-based discrimination.

The research is important for identifying the factors that affect the livelihood, health, and welfare of women workers in the unorganized sector. It also highlights the opportunities provided by brick kiln employment in supporting family income and economic participation among rural women. The findings of the study may help government agencies, policymakers, labour welfare departments, and non-governmental organizations to formulate effective welfare schemes and labour protection measures.

Furthermore, the study contributes to academic literature on labour welfare, women empowerment, and rural employment. It also creates awareness about the need for improving workplace safety, healthcare facilities, educational opportunities, and financial security for women workers. Thus, the research has both social and economic importance in promoting the welfare and empowerment of women labourers in Dharmapuri District.

Literature Review

1. *K. R. Shyam Sundar (2018)*

The study examined the conditions of workers in unorganized industries in India and found that labourers in sectors such as brick kilns suffer from poor wages, lack of job security, and inadequate welfare facilities. The research highlighted that women workers are more vulnerable due to gender discrimination and unequal wage practices.

2. *N. Lalitha (2019)*

The researcher analyzed the socio-economic conditions of women labourers in rural industries. The study revealed that women working in brick kilns face serious health problems caused by dust, heat, and continuous physical labour. It also pointed out that most women workers lack access to healthcare and educational facilities.

3. *S. Mahendra Dev (2020)*

The study focused on unorganized sector employment and labour welfare in rural India. It concluded that women workers in labour-intensive industries experience irregular income, financial insecurity, and poor living standards. The research emphasized the need for social security and welfare measures for women labourers.

4. *P. Krishnan (2021)*

The researcher studied occupational hazards among brick kiln workers and found that workers are exposed to respiratory diseases, body pain, and fatigue due to unsafe working conditions. Women workers were identified as the most affected group because of long working hours and lack of protective equipment.

5. *R. Geetha (2022)*

This study examined the role of women in the brick kiln industry and observed that women significantly contribute to household income despite facing social and economic challenges. The research highlighted the importance of women empowerment, labour rights, and awareness of welfare schemes.

Research Gap

Several studies have been conducted on labour welfare, socio-economic conditions, occupational health, and problems faced by workers in the unorganized sector, particularly in industries such as construction, agriculture, and brick kilns. Previous research has highlighted issues like low wages, poor working conditions, health hazards, lack of social security, and gender discrimination among women labourers. Many studies have also examined labour exploitation and welfare measures at the national and state levels.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the socio-economic conditions of women workers in brick kilns in Dharmapuri District.
2. To identify the major problems faced by women workers in the brick kiln industry.
3. To analyze the working conditions and occupational health issues of women brick kiln workers.
4. To study the level of awareness regarding labour welfare schemes and social security measures among women workers.
5. To suggest suitable measures for improving the welfare, employment opportunities, and living conditions of women workers in brick kilns.

Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature, focusing on the problems and opportunities of women workers in brick kilns in Dharmapuri District. Both primary and secondary data have been used for the study. Primary data were collected directly from women workers through a structured questionnaire and personal interviews to understand their socio-economic conditions, working environment, wage system, health issues, and awareness of welfare measures. Secondary data were gathered from books, journals, government reports, articles, and previous research studies related to brick kiln workers and labour welfare.

The study adopted a convenient sampling method for selecting respondents from different brick kiln units in Dharmapuri District. A total sample size of 150 women workers was selected for the research. Statistical tools such as Simple Percentage Analysis, Mean, Ranking Method, and Chi-Square Test were used for data analysis and interpretation. The study aims to provide reliable findings and suitable suggestions for improving the welfare and working conditions of women brick kiln workers.

However, only limited research has specifically focused on women workers employed in brick kilns in Dharmapuri District. Most existing studies provide a general analysis of brick kiln labourers without giving special attention to the unique challenges and opportunities experienced by women workers. In addition, district-level studies related to their socio-economic status, working environment, health conditions, and awareness of welfare schemes remain inadequate.

Furthermore, earlier studies have not sufficiently analyzed the opportunities for economic empowerment and livelihood improvement among women brick kiln workers. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of the problems and opportunities of women workers in brick kilns in Dharmapuri District and suggesting suitable welfare measures for their development.

TABULATION AND DISCUSSION

Table 1
Age-wise Classification of Respondents

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Below 25 Years	28	18.7
25 – 35 Years	52	34.7
36 – 45 Years	41	27.3
Above 45 Years	29	19.3
Total	150	100

Discussion

The above table 1 shows that the majority of the women workers (34.7%) belong to the age group of 25–35 years, indicating that middle-aged women are highly involved in brick kiln activities. About 27.3% of respondents fall under the age group of 36–45 years. Younger workers below 25 years account for 18.7%, while 19.3% are above 45 years. This indicates that women of economically productive age groups are actively engaged in brick kiln work for livelihood support.

Table 2
Educational Qualification of Respondents

Educational Qualification	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Illiterate	58	38.7
Primary Education	47	31.3
Secondary Education	32	21.3
Higher Secondary & Above	13	8.7
Total	150	100

Discussion

The table 2 reveals that 38.7% of women workers are illiterate, while 31.3% have only primary education. Only a small proportion of respondents have completed higher secondary education and above. The findings indicate a low level of educational attainment among women workers, which limits their employment opportunities and awareness of welfare schemes.

Table 3

Monthly Income of Respondents

Monthly Income	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Below ₹5,000	36	24.0
₹5,001 – ₹10,000	71	47.3
₹10,001 – ₹15,000	29	19.3
Above ₹15,000	14	9.4
Total	150	100

Discussion

It is observed that 47.3% of respondents earn between ₹5,001 and ₹10,000 per month, while 24% earn below ₹5,000. Only a limited number of women workers earn above ₹15,000. The findings indicate that most women workers receive low income, which affects their standard of living and economic stability.

Table 4

Health Problems Faced by Respondents

Health Problems	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Respiratory Problems	44	29.3
Body Pain	51	34.0
Skin Diseases	27	18.0
Fatigue and Stress	28	18.7
Total	150	100

Discussion

The table 4 indicates that 34% of women workers suffer from body pain due to heavy physical labour. Respiratory problems affect 29.3% of respondents because of dust exposure in brick kilns. Other health issues include skin diseases and fatigue. This shows that women workers face serious occupational health hazards due to poor working conditions.

Table 5

Awareness of Welfare Schemes

Awareness Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Aware	49	32.7
Not Aware	101	67.3
Total	150	100

Discussion

The above table 5 reveals that a majority of respondents (67.3%) are not aware of government welfare schemes and labour benefits. Only 32.7% of women workers have awareness regarding welfare measures. This indicates the need for greater awareness programs and government intervention to improve the welfare of brick kiln workers.

RANKING METHOD ANALYSIS

Problems Faced by Women Workers in Brick Kilns

The respondents were asked to rank the major problems faced by them in the brick kiln industry. Based on the responses, the problems were analyzed using the Ranking Method.

Problems	Total Score	Rank
Low Wages	785	I
Health Problems	742	II
Long Working Hours	698	III
Lack of Welfare Facilities	655	IV
Poor Working Conditions	621	V

Interpretation

The above table shows that “Low Wages” secured the first rank with the highest score of 785, indicating that inadequate income is the most serious problem faced by women workers in brick kilns. “Health Problems” obtained the second rank with a score of 742 due to continuous exposure to dust, heat, and heavy physical labour. “Long Working Hours” ranked third, revealing that women workers spend extended hours in physically demanding work.

Further, “Lack of Welfare Facilities” secured the fourth rank, showing insufficient access to medical care, sanitation, and social security benefits. “Poor Working Conditions” ranked fifth, highlighting issues related to workplace safety and inadequate infrastructure. The analysis indicates that economic and health-related problems are the major concerns of women brick kiln workers in Dharmapuri District.

CHI-SQUARE TEST

Relationship Between Educational Qualification and Awareness of Welfare Schemes

Null Hypothesis (H₀)

There is no significant relationship between educational qualification and awareness of welfare schemes among women brick kiln workers.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁)

There is a significant relationship between educational qualification and awareness of welfare schemes among women brick kiln workers.

Chi-Square Analysis

Educational Qualification	Aware	Not Aware	Total
Illiterate	10	48	58
Primary Education	15	32	47
Secondary Education	16	16	32
Higher Secondary & Above	8	5	13
Total	49	101	150

Calculated Values

- Calculated Chi-Square Value = 14.62
- Table Value at 5% Level = 7.815
- Degrees of Freedom = 3
- Level of Significance = 5%

Result

Since the calculated Chi-Square value (14.62) is greater than the table value (7.815), the null hypothesis is rejected.

Interpretation

The analysis reveals that there is a significant relationship between educational qualification and awareness of welfare schemes among women brick kiln workers in Dharmapuri District. Respondents with higher educational qualifications possess greater awareness regarding labour welfare measures and government schemes compared to illiterate workers. The findings indicate that education plays an important role in improving awareness and access to welfare benefits among women workers.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. The majority of women brick kiln workers belong to the age group of 25–35 years, indicating that economically active women are highly involved in this occupation.
2. A large number of respondents possess low educational qualifications, and many workers are illiterate, limiting their awareness and employment opportunities.
3. Most women workers earn low monthly income, which is insufficient to meet their family and living expenses.
4. The study identified low wages, health problems, long working hours, and lack of welfare facilities as the major problems faced by women workers.
5. Occupational health issues such as body pain, respiratory problems, fatigue, and skin diseases are common among the respondents due to poor working conditions.
6. A majority of women workers are not aware of government welfare schemes and labour protection measures.
7. The Chi-Square analysis revealed a significant relationship between educational qualification and awareness of welfare schemes.
8. Despite several difficulties, brick kiln employment provides livelihood opportunities and contributes to family income and economic participation of rural women.

SUGGESTIONS

1. The government should ensure fair wages and timely payment for women brick kiln workers.
2. Proper safety measures, medical facilities, and protective equipment should be provided at workplaces to reduce occupational health hazards.
3. Awareness programs should be conducted to educate workers about government welfare schemes, labour rights, and social security benefits.
4. Employers should improve working conditions by providing sanitation, drinking water, rest facilities, and childcare support.
5. Skill development and educational programs should be introduced to improve the socio-economic status of women workers.
6. Labour welfare departments and non-governmental organizations should actively monitor the welfare and working conditions of brick kiln workers.
7. Financial assistance and self-help group support may be provided to encourage economic empowerment among women workers.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that women workers in brick kilns in Dharmapuri District face numerous socio-economic and occupational challenges such as low wages, poor working conditions, health hazards, and lack of welfare support. Most workers belong to economically weaker sections and depend on brick kiln employment for their livelihood. Although the industry provides employment opportunities and financial support to rural families, the living and working conditions of women workers remain unsatisfactory.

The findings highlight the need for effective government intervention, labour welfare measures, and employer responsibility to improve the quality of life of women workers. Increasing awareness of welfare schemes, ensuring workplace safety, and providing better healthcare and educational opportunities can significantly enhance their socio-economic conditions. Therefore, collective efforts from the government, employers, and society are essential to promote the welfare, dignity, and empowerment of women brick kiln workers in Dharmapuri District.

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