
Health conditions of construction workers in Bangalore

Workers represent half the world's population and are major contributors to economic and social development. India is a union of 28 states and seven union territories with a multi-party parliamentary system of government (Pravin, 2004). In India, nearly two-thirds of the contribution to the net domestic product is by the unorganized sector. The most important criteria in fixing the minimum wage should be (i) the cost of living, (ii) the capacity of the undertaking/industry to pay. (Thakurta, 1972). Construction is one of the important industries employing a large number of people on its workforce. A wide range of activities are involved in it. Due to the advent of industrialization and recent developments, this industry is taking a pivotal role for the construction of buildings, roads, bridges and so forth.

Social security for the unorganized sector workers is very insufficient. The workers are victims of headache, backache, joint pains, other muscular skeletal disorders, skin diseases, lung disorders and so on. The workers might go through different occupational diseases due to exposure to work. They are less educated and are not cautious about the different preventive measures.

Construction industry has been broadly classified into:

1. Building works: involving projects like houses, schools, colleges, offices, factories, shops, hospitals, flats and apartments.
2. Civil engineering works: involving projects like roads, tunnels, bridges, dams, canals, docks, etc. Hence, construction workers of both organized and unorganized sectors are more prone to physical, mental, economic and psychosocial problems in their daily routine life.

A Construction worker is someone whose job is to work on a construction site such as house, bridge, road, railways, tunnel, dock, schools etc, that are being built (Mehta et al., 2007). Construction industry plays an important role in the modernization and industrialization of the city, and construction labourers form 7.5 percent of the world labor force (Tiwarly et al., 2012). Now a days, small towns and cities have become more urbanized and, the construction sector too has got a boost (Kumar, 2013). Construction work is an important source of employment for the poorest of the poor and unskilled workers in Indian cities (Gautam & Singh, 2010). They come under the informal sector where there is no security of jobs, education, health, and other basic facilities (Dhas & Helen, 2008). Several factors make them vulnerable like temporary nature of employment, fragile relationship between employer-employee and risk of life and limb due to lack of facilities related to safety, health, and welfare(Kulkarni, 2007).

Construction workers construct houses but they don't have their own houses because of the nature of their work. They are one of such migratory groups who move from one construction site to another construction site as per direction of the contractor and they live in the temporary settlement along the construction site. They usually belong to the deprived section of the population and most of them are illiterate. Being migrants, they do not get registered and hence are devoid of basic government facilities (Parham, 2009).

Construction workers work under the hazardous conditions and open environment. They had to work on an average for about 10 hours per day(Lakhani, 2004). Most of the companies do not even provide safety belts, protective eye wears, hand gloves, shoe or hamlet to their workers. About 165 of every 1000 construction workers are injured during their jobs and India stands at first position in this regard with world's highest accident rate at construction sites(Post, 2010).

They are exposed to a variety of health hazards, namely, back pain due to uplift of bricks and other loads; skin diseases from close contact with irritant or sensitizing materials; respiratory irritation from dust, fumes and gases; as well as several serious lung diseases related to exposure to asbestos and other fibrogenic materials, noise induces hearing loss(Smallwood & Ehrlich, 2001). These people suffer from unhygienic living conditions. They live in the places where there are no suitable facilities of drainage, toilet, potable water, electricity, recreation etc. These workers construct medical centres, hospitals and education institutes etc. but during their work period they are the persons who do not get the benefits from any of these facilities.

Construction workers are deprived and exploited sections which are not recognized in policy document by the government and very little attention has been paid in humanizing the livelihood of the construction workers because majority of construction workers come under informal sector. It is, therefore, necessary to collect the relevant information regarding their demographic characteristics, socio-economic traits, causes of their engagement in the construction work, problems and implications of such occupation on health and overall life of the construction workers and the policies framed to solve their problems.

The health of working men, women and children who carry the burden of this development on their shoulders is closely dependent upon the dual environment in which they work and live. Work hazards are also responsible for occupational diseases. (Imrana Qadeer and Dunu Roy, 1989)

Migrant labour deprive the local labour offering services at lower wages; further, they lower the general wage levels to the detriment of local labourers. Since most of the labourers are indebted to the contractors before their appointment, they cannot leave the work-place without clearing the entire loan. A few instances of labourers escaping from the work-place were reported but the agents or musclemen of the contractors brought them back to the work. In such cases they were kept under strict surveillance. The contractor took steps to prevent the workers from leaving the work-sites and rarely allowed them their entire earnings until his debt was cleared. Although they are required to work for eight hours a day, many said that they were asked to work for longer hours without any additional payment. Those who refuse such over-time are not treated properly. (K. Murali Manohar, V. Shobha, 1981)

The Construction industry place very important role in the socio-economic of the country. It is closely associated with nation's economy. India is the one of the fastest growing economies in of the world. Construction sector is providing employment to seven percent of total world employment. Today Indian construction industries employ about 30 million people and create assets worth over Rs 200,000 million annually. In India, it is the largest employer of unorganized labor next to Agriculture sector. The construction industry provides job opportunity to large number of skilled as well as un-skilled work force.

Construction workers are the back bone of the economy as they create the infrastructure necessary for industrial growth. In a globalization economy, it is they who are constructing the

new economy. India's three crore construction workers are initially the builders of modern India. They contribute in infrastructural development of India by building the roads and highways, the railway tracks and airports and ports. The IT cities, the call centers and mega malls that are creating new forms wealth today.

It is they who are laying the cables for a rapidly expanding country-wide telecommunications network that connect the sub-continent make India one country. To shorting the distance and supporting the business actively in order to upgrade the economic development. Yet these workers, who are creating the base of the new economy.

Industrialization and urbanization has paved a good way to the construction industry. Small towns and cities become more urbanized and the construction sector too has got a boost. Expanding and fast growing construction sector and in general, shortage of greater employment opportunity elsewhere has attracted large number of workers in this sector. Construction labours are labours who are migrated from different regions and states leaving their native villages in search of daily job. They have maximum mobility because of the nature of work.

These laborers are engaged in huge industrial constructions, residential and commercial apartments, road constructions, hotel constructions, pool and bridges and infrastructure facility works. These construction workers are from poor families and are illiterates. Their lack of education and skill make their choice very limited. They have to face number of problems because of their inexperience and lack of skill. They become easy victim of exploitation and gender discrimination for work allocation and wage distribution. Sexual harassment is a serious problem for women construction workers. They faced different health hazards, physical problems and adverse out comes.

Construction workers are one of the poorest section of the society, living in terrible poverty. Most of the construction workers belong to the productive working age group of 19 to 40 years and three fourth of them are male. 3/4th percent construction workers are married. Literacy rate among them is very low. More than half of them are the residents of the district itself and most of the workers are migrants from different districts. The major causes which compelled them to engage themselves in construction activity are extreme poverty, unemployment, large family size, family disintegration, illiteracy and ignorance, small size of land holding, inheritances, indebtedness, desire of work etc. They suffer from the various diseases like respiratory problems, lungs cancer, back pain, dental problems, T.B, asthma which lead to their ultimate death.

For the betterment of construction workers they should be added in government sector. Construction work is hazardous nature of job, so safety items like gloves, helmet, boots etc. should be provided to the construction workers for the purpose of protection. However, public health camps should be established along the construction sites at cheaper rate. There should be provision of basic facilities and easy premium facilities for the families of construction workers.

The labour laws have to be implemented to provide better health, safety and welfare facilities to the construction workers and to create awareness about the governmental schemes and workers' rights. It is need of the hour to frame such policies and programmes that the widening gap between the haves and haves not can be reduced and extending regional imbalance in the level of development may be minimized.