
Women And Child Labour in Beedi Industry

Most of the women are employed in the informal industry like beedi rolling sector due to societal and cultural bias towards them that they have to be in home based works. In some regions of India, beedi making is largely regarded as “women’s work”, with the exception of young boys. There are varying estimates of female involvement in beedi rolling. One source estimated that Women constitute 76% of the total employment in beedi manufacture. In other areas, men roll beedis if and when other work is not available or they are unable to engage in manual labor. The beedi industry is male-dominated, where the manufacturer, the contractor and the consumers are male and only the beedi rollers are female. This often makes women subject to economic exploitation. The beedi industry reflects a similar feature of exploitation of female workers. It was found that generally, the net earnings of female workers were less than those of male workers, even if wage rates were the same.

In the study area, women are belonging to Muslim, scheduled caste, backward and other communities involved in beedi making predominantly. The association of these groups with beedi making is different. Women belonging to Muslim have been traditionally engaged in making of beedi. When compared to other community women they may be more experienced in the beedi rolling work. On the other hand, belonging to other caste women are not experienced as the Muslim women. The availability of other employment options also makes them to be less experienced or dependent on beedi making. Due to some reasons such as the practice of burkha and inability to get alternative employment Muslim women has allegiance to beedi making. Some women engage in beedi rolling as a full-time occupation and are able to roll 800–1200 beedis during an 8-12 hour day. Other women Work part-time while caring for children and attending to household duties and roll 300–500 beedis a day. Further, the men from same religion took up job of contractor and middlemen. Hence, they may favour their community women in so far as distribution of raw material and decisions of rejected beedis. It builds a positive relation between them and weekly beedi income. In many cases, several women from the same household will pool their efforts to fill quotas. Some middlemen reportedly supply low quality leaf, and reject bundles of beedis on grounds of poor standards, but then eventually take them without paying. Female beedi rollers also report verbal and physical abuse based on gender and caste differences.