

A Study of Invisible Women Worker in Home Based Work and Absence of Their Social Security

HIRAL AGRAWAL¹, DR. DIPAK MAKWANA², DR. M.N. PARMAR³

¹Student, Master of Social Work-Parul University, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.

²Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Work – Parul University, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.

³Dean of Faculty of Social Work, Faculty of Social Work – Parul University, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.

Abstract- Home-based work forms a significant yet invisible part of India's informal economy, employing a large number of women. This study examines the socio-economic conditions, occupational health issues, and access to social security among 50 female home-based workers engaged in activities like beedi rolling, embroidery, and stitching. The findings reveal low income levels, limited education, and poor bargaining power among workers. A majority earn between ₹3,001–₹6,000 per month, which is insufficient for basic needs. Occupational health issues are common, with many workers suffering from back pain and eye strain due to poor working conditions. The study also identifies a major gap in social security access, with most workers not registered under government schemes due to lack of awareness and complex procedures. It concludes that despite policy efforts, home-based workers remain marginalized and highlights the need for improved awareness, easier registration processes, and better health support.

Index Terms- Home-based Workers, Informal Economy, Social Security, Occupational Health, Women's Labour

I. INTRODUCTION

Women constitute a significant yet overlooked part of India's informal workforce, with many engaged in home-based activities like stitching, handicrafts, and food processing. While this work allows them to balance household responsibilities, it remains invisible in labour statistics, denying them recognition and protection. Globally and in India, a large number of women are involved in such work, yet their contribution is undervalued due to social norms and lack of formal acknowledgment.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed their vulnerability, as many lost their livelihoods without access to social security or support. These highlights

the urgent need for recognition and inclusion of women home-based workers in formal systems of protection and welfare.

Historical legal reforms:

Women's participation in home-based work in India has a long history, especially in traditional industries like weaving and handicrafts. Despite constitutional provisions ensuring gender equality and labour rights, most women in such work remain excluded due to its informal and invisible nature. Although policies like the Maternity Benefit Act (1961) and the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act (2008) aimed to support informal workers, their impact has been limited due to low awareness, poor implementation, and weak enforcement, leaving most women without social security benefits.

More recently, the Code on Social Security (2020) has consolidated nine central labour laws relating to social security, with the promise of broader coverage for informal sector workers. While the Code is progressive in theory, questions remain about its practical applicability to home-based women workers, given that identification, registration, and delivery mechanisms are still weak. Without strong implementation, these women remain excluded, invisible, and unprotected.

Overview of the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008

The Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 was the first central law in India that formally recognized the need to provide social security to workers in the informal sector, which accounts for more than 90% of the country's workforce. It sought to cover a wide range of vulnerable groups such as agricultural laborers, street vendors, domestic

workers, bidi workers, construction laborers, and women home-based workers engaged in activities like stitching, weaving, and food processing.

The Act aimed to provide social security to informal workers through schemes like health insurance, life insurance, pensions, and maternity benefits, requiring registration and identity cards. However, its implementation was weak, with low registration, limited coverage mainly for BPL families, and reliance on existing fragmented schemes. It also lacked gender-sensitive provisions, excluding many women home-based workers.

In practice, the Act remained more symbolic than effective, but it paved the way for later reforms, especially the Code on Social Security, 2020, which attempted to expand and unify protections for informal and gig economy workers.

Overview of the Code on Social Security, 2020

The Code on Social Security, 2020 is a major labor reform that consolidates nine existing laws relating to provident fund, insurance, gratuity, maternity benefits, and welfare of unorganised workers, including the earlier Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008.

It seeks to provide a comprehensive social security system for all categories of workers—formal, informal, unorganised, gig, and platform workers. A key feature is the creation of a national database for unorganised workers through self-registration, with a Universal Account Number (UAN) to access benefits.

The Code allows central and state governments to frame schemes for healthcare, pensions, maternity support, old-age protection, and disability benefits, aiming to cover groups traditionally left out, such as home-based women workers.

While progressive in intent, the Code faces criticism for its implementation challenges, reliance on government notifications, digital barriers in registration, and limited gender-sensitive measures. Thus, while it marks an important step towards inclusive social protection, its effectiveness will

depend on practical enforcement and outreach to the most vulnerable.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

“Recognizing Informal Workers in the Global Economy” Chen 2001, published by Harvard University’s Radcliffe Institute, emphasized that home-based workers are often excluded from labor statistics, leading to invisibility in policy. She argued that women’s contribution remains undervalued despite being central to household and national economies.

“Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector” the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS, 2007) in its report revealed that more than 93% of India’s workforce is informal. The commission noted that women are concentrated in home-based and piece-rate work, and recommended extending social security, though implementation has been minimal.

“We Are Poor but So Many: The Story of Self-Employed Women in India”, Bhatt (2010), argued that women’s home-based labor must be recognized as legitimate work. She stressed that exclusion from legal frameworks and lack of bargaining power keep women trapped in cycles of poverty and vulnerability.

The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2015) in its report “Home-based Workers in the Global Economy: Invisible and Exploited”, and the ILO (2020) in “World Social Protection Report”, underscored the global neglect of home-based workers. Both reports called for universal social protection, emphasizing that women’s unpaid and home-based work indirectly subsidizes the formal economy while remaining unrecognized.

“Invisible Women: Home-based Workers in Urban India” Kumar and Jha (2021), in their article published in the Indian Journal of Labour Economics, found that invisibility in statistical data prevents policymakers from addressing women workers’ needs. They concluded that recognition, social

protection, and collective organization are key to improving women's conditions.

“Asian Informal Workers: Global Risks, Local Protection” Mehrotra and Biggeri (2007), published by Routledge, argued that informal workers, especially women, face structural disadvantages due to lack of access to credit, training, and welfare schemes. They stressed that without intervention, poverty cycles among women home-based workers will persist.

“Gender Wage Discrimination and Informal Employment in India” Sankaran, Madheswaran, and Vani (2011), published in the Indian Journal of Labour Economics, found that women are consistently paid less than men even for the same home-based tasks, attributing the disparity to gender norms and undervaluation of women's labor.

“Women Bidi Workers in India: Labouring under Health Hazards” Singh and Sapra (2013), published by the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), highlighted how bidi workers face occupational health issues while being excluded from social security benefits. They argued for extending legal protection and health schemes to such workers.

“Home-based Garment Workers in India: Exploitation and Resistance” Banerjee and Rani (2018), published in the Economic and Political Weekly (EPW), observed that subcontracting chains exploit women through depressed wages and informal contracts. They advocated for collective bargaining and policy recognition of such workers.

“Impact of COVID-19 on Informal Women Workers in India” Das and Kundu (2022), published by the Indian Journal of Gender Studies, found that supply chain disruptions left women home-based workers without income. They concluded that absence of social security intensified poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to healthcare during the pandemic.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Philosophy and Design

The study is based on Interpretivism and Feminist Standpoint Theory, emphasizing the subjective

experiences of marginalized women workers. A dual research design is used:

- Exploratory: To identify under-researched aspects such as the overlap of domestic and paid work.
- Descriptive: To profile respondents' socio-economic and occupational conditions.

B. Universe and Sampling

The study focuses on women home-based workers in selected areas of Vadodara, Gujarat.

- Sample Size: 50 respondents
- Sampling Techniques: Purposive and Snowball sampling were used due to the hidden nature of the population.

C. Data Collection and Tools

Primary data was collected using a structured interview schedule (Google Forms) divided into four sections:

1. Socio-demographic details
2. Occupational profile
3. Social security access
4. Qualitative experiences

D. Methods of Data Collection

Primary data was collected from 50 female home-based workers using a structured interview schedule designed through Google Forms. A hybrid approach was adopted to address the digital divide:

- Some respondents completed the form independently through a shared link.
- The majority participated in face-to-face interviews, where the researcher explained the questions in the local language and recorded responses digitally.

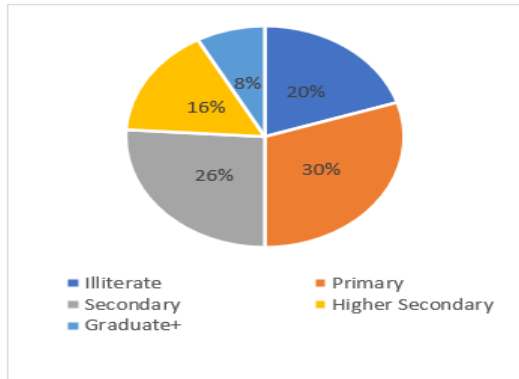
E. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- Inclusion: Women (18+) engaged in home-based production work.
- Exclusion: Domestic workers and self-employed entrepreneurs

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT

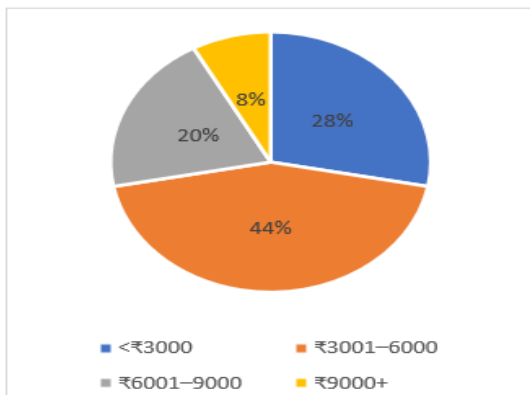
The demographic profile and subsequent data analysis of the 50 respondents from Gorwa, Subhanpura, Samta, Gotri at Vadodara, Gujarat, reveal the critical trend in social security issue for home-based women worker. The sample provide multi-dimension view on the social security issue.

A. Educational Qualification



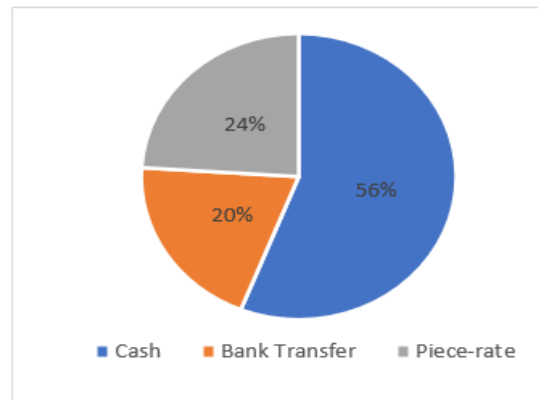
The findings indicate that most respondents have low levels of education, with a significant number being illiterate or having only primary education. This restricts their access to formal sector employment opportunities. Women with limited education are more likely to engage in informal home-based work. The smaller number of graduates suggests limited upward mobility. Education plays a crucial role in determining job opportunities. Thus, low educational attainment contributes to their economic vulnerability.

B. Monthly Income



The majority of respondents earn between ₹3000–6000, indicating low income levels. A significant portion earns below ₹3000, highlighting economic vulnerability. Only a small number earn above ₹9000, showing limited earning potential. These income levels are insufficient for sustaining households. Women’s contribution, though essential, remains undervalued. Overall, the data reflects financial insecurity among home-based workers.

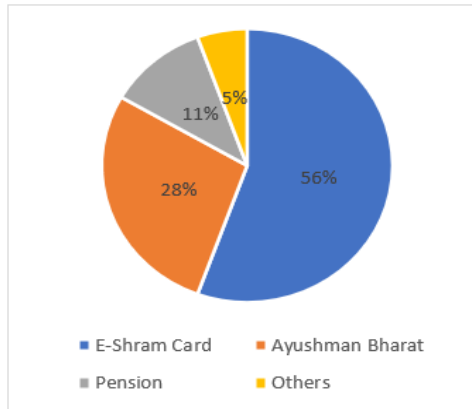
C. Mode of Payment



Most respondents receive payments in cash, indicating a lack of formal financial inclusion. Piece-rate payment is also common, linking wages directly to output rather than effort. Bank transfers are less common, showing limited access to formal banking systems. Cash transactions lack transparency and documentation. This increases the risk of underpayment and exploitation. Overall, the payment system reflects informality and weak financial security.

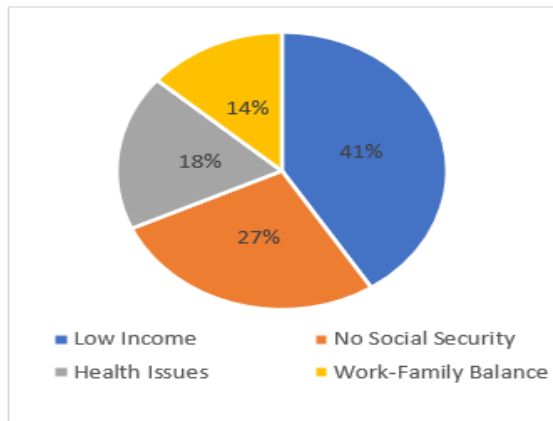
D. Knowledge of Schemes

Among those aware, most know about the E-Shram card scheme. Awareness of other schemes like health insurance and pensions is very limited. This shows uneven dissemination of information. Workers have partial knowledge and lack complete understanding.



Limited awareness reduces the likelihood of accessing benefits. Hence, outreach efforts need improvement.

E. Major Challenges



Low income is identified as the biggest challenge faced by respondents. Lack of social security and health issues further worsen their condition. Women also struggle with balancing work and family responsibilities. Lack of recognition affects their social and economic status. These challenges are interconnected and multidimensional. Overall, women face significant hardship in this sector.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals that women engaged in home-based work face low income, poor working conditions, and limited access to social security due to lack of awareness and systemic barriers. Their work remains largely invisible and unrecognized, restricting their access to labour rights and protections. Despite these challenges, they continue to contribute significantly to household income. The study highlights the need for policy interventions,

improved awareness, simplified processes, and formal recognition to ensure their inclusion, protection, and overall well-being.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the data analysis and respondents view here are the synthesis suggestion for the implementation of policy.

1. **Enhancing Awareness:** There is a need to increase awareness about social security schemes through community campaigns, simple language communication, and support from NGOs and SHGs.
2. **Simplifying Procedures:** Registration processes should be made simple and accessible by reducing documentation, setting up local help centers, and organizing community-based registration drives.
3. **Fair Wages and Financial Security:** Minimum wages, timely payments, and transparent systems like bank transfers should be ensured to reduce exploitation and improve financial stability.
4. **Improving Working Conditions:** Better working conditions, health awareness, regular check-ups, and access to healthcare and insurance should be promoted to improve workers' well-being.
5. **Recognition and Policy Support:** Home-based work should be formally recognized, with proper policies, identity cards, and inclusion in labour laws to ensure rights and protection.

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