



Women Employee Work-life and Challenges to Industrial Relations: Evidence from North Kerala

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ABSTRACT

According to the International Labor Organization global employment trends report of 2013, the rate of women participation as India's labor force has dropped from 37 percent in 2004-05 to 29 percent in 2009-10. Needless to say that woman in India faces enormous challenges when they participate in the fluctuations of the country's economy. The challenges faced by women, whether the economy gets boosted or gets depressed is a reflection of the amount of injustice they suffer in the society at large, particularly at the middle class level or the grassroots level. There is always protective labor legislation, made compatible to the rising productivity and economic growth. Study reveals that a big proportion of female workers have struggled to achieve minimal standards at the work place level. This however should not prompt one to conclude that labor legislation is a means to protect the female workers from gender discrimination at workplace. Today's social standards make it necessary for the women to work, support her family financially. This moves the women, especially the Indian women out of her home causing lot of imbalances in their work, family and personal ego. The nature of imbalances range from physical to psychological. This naturally tells upon her work efficiency as well as domestic management. Besides, in the Indian society working women faces lot of problems just by virtue of being a woman. The workplace atmosphere introduces a sedentary life style which aggravates things like anxiety, depression, faulty eating habits and lack of sleep. Awkward working hours, job related pressures, increase the problem of balancing home and office responsibility. Such problem desist a woman from staying in the job. The present article here aims to project problems of women employees in industrial sector of the northern regions of Kerala state and show how their predicament can pose challenges to the concept of cordial industrial relationship, so essential for the overall boosting of economic in the industrial sector.

Key Words: Job satisfaction, Social Security, Legal Protection, Harassment

1. INTRODUCTION

Kapur (1979) shown that the twin roles of women (family functioning and work life) cause tension and conflict due to her social structure which is still more dominant. Locke (1979) in his study stated that a cause-effect relationship is available between family functioning and work life, this cause-effect relationship could work in both directions, that is, work attitudes could affect family attitudes and vice versa. Julia (1980) in her study that by focusing on women's careers the short-term objectives has been to correct the gender imbalance, but long-term objective must be to develop theoretical concepts and explanation which the gender neutral and inclusive of both men and women. Hikka Pietila and Jeanne Vickers (1981) in their book stated that violence against women exists in various forms in everyday life in all societies as women are beaten, mutilated, burned, sexually abused and raped. Such violence is a major obstacle to the achievement of peace. Chandrika (1982) in her study stated that in the last decade of the 20th century the spotlight fell on various specific issues of women, these include multiple feminine identity, gender and sexuality, feminization of poverty environment and sustainable development, planning and power globalization, sexual harassment at work place, women's rights as human rights. Desai (1984) conducted a study on economic opportunities in women which had been managed the dual roles of homemaker and worker, poses serious problems without working women in large cities. Gilmer (1984) found that working conditions were more important for female than for male workers, especially for married ones. Jaya Arunachalam (1984) in her report on empowering women for a positive revolution revealed attitude of families towards women's domestic responsibilities, the unsympathetic attitude of employers, lack of training, limiting employment opportunities and above all, women's low perception in the labour market. L.Krishnaveni (1984) in her report on status of Indian women mentioned that now-a-days most of the women had been coming forward to work in order to create a meaning for them or out of economic necessity. Generally the women work equally along with men in informal sector. They were facing so many problems especially household responsibilities like cooking,



cleaning, washing; child care, etc. were causes for low female work participation in informal sector had no job security and maternity benefits like women engaged in the organized sector.

Madula Sherwani (1984) in her study "Why more women entering work force" observed that Indian women still operate under creation limitation and hardship. One common problem faced by her was the dual role; she had to play on the domestic front and the shop floor. The married working women with small children found the dual responsibility a source of great mental and physical strain. Rohila (1984) found that for the sanitary workers, the physical environment in which they worked was unhealthy and might contribute to a sense of uneasiness and that work done in poor physical condition over a long period of time might result in dissatisfaction with the job. Rudd and Wiseman (1984) found that source of low morale and dissatisfaction was due to inadequate equipment and supplies as well as lack of other facilities. Modula Sherwani (1990) pointed in her study as to why more women entering to work force under certain limitations and hardships. Alva Myrdar et. al. (1992) observed "Women's two roles home and work would enable women for combine their traditional family obligations with paid work in the employment market". There are more closely related sources of information that point to the likelihood of false allegations of sexual harassment. For example, there is evidence that false allegations of rape occur (Feldman-Schorrig, 1995, 1996; Feldman-Schorrig & McDonald, 1992; Porter & Yuille, 1995; Streseman, 1995; Zepezauer, 1994). A study on physical health and neuroticism among chikankari workers indicated that due to lack of personal resources such as education and awareness, non-availability of employment opportunities and normative practices, women were drawn towards low paid and high risk jobs in unorganized sector (Klitzman et al., 1994). Work-family conflict has been associated with diminished satisfaction and lower levels of psychological well-being (Thomas and Ganster, 1995). In some industries, women workers are not allowed to acquire skills. Hence women begin their lives at the lower rung of the job hierarchy and remain there till the end (John and Sharma, 1997). Allegations of sexual harassment must be taken into account of both societal norms and individual perceptions of harassment (see Gruber, 1992; Gruber, Smith, Kauppinen-Toropainen, & Stockdale, 1996; Fitzgerald, Swan & Magley, 1997). The function of women begins within multiple roles simultaneously, operating in the work and family domains as a mother, spouse and housekeeper, as well as maintaining full-time employment outside the home (McLaughlin, Melber, Billy, Zimmerle, Wintges & Johnson, 1988). In most studies, researchers have found that carrying out these dual roles often leads to work-family conflict for both men and women. Stanton William J. (1999) says that in low income families both spouses often work to make financial ends meet. Women complained that they faced harassment but were scared of admitting what type of harassment they suffered that was worse than verbal abuse. This is consistent with Haripriya's (2000) study in Kerala (India) which reported that women construction workers are exposed to various types of violence from co-workers and contractors. The working conditions of the IT jobs became very stressful (Vowler, 1995; Sethi et al., 1999; Thong and Yap, 2000). Factors like lack of career advancement, work overload, risk taking and decision making, employee morale and organization climate also causes stress (Viven and Thompson, 2001). Rajeshwari and Anantharam (2003) identified ten key factors that caused stress in software professionals using exploratory factor analysis. Halford V, Cohen H.H (2003) identified the importance of psychosocial and organizational factors and employee welfare in the women call center-working environment as musculo-skeletal disorders, ocular disorders and psycho-social problems were some of the key health problems among women IT professionals. Karuna (2003) noted that women of lower income families worked to get necessary family income while those of upper income families worked to help augment family income. Sergioanni (2003) observed that for females from lower socio-economic stratum, economic need was the most important reason for participating in market work and non-economic motives were predominant for upper class women. The difficulties faced by women who were both paid workers and family careers was the subject of some extensive research (Bardoel, Thoreau and Ristov, 2000; Campbell and Charlesworth, 2004) that indicated that Indian family members were finding it difficult to juggle their respective dual roles as employees, parents and other forms of careers. Some effective say over working time and predictable hours were critical issues for many women given their caring responsibilities (Campbell and Charlesworth, 2004; Pocock, 2003). It was noted that women working in cities and towns constituted only a small proportion to total workers, and that out of the total women workers majority was engaged in low status jobs (Vinita, 2004). In a study on labor activism and women in the unorganized sector, it was noted wages and working conditions were fully unregulated (Chaudhary, 2005). Suchitra and Rajasekhar (2006) too noted that women construction workers were, in general, unskilled workers and paid wages lesser than male unskilled workers. IT sector jobs were very volatile and workers faced the problem of lack of job security. Besides, they had to constantly upgrade their skills remain competitive. Job security played significant role in employment relationship. A fundamental aspect of job security was protection against unfair dismissal. Indeed, it was the precondition for many other aspects of the employment relationships and provided a vital platform for securing minimum working conditions (Chapman, 2006). Parekh et al (2006) found that visual strain is related to musculo-skeletal complaints and work stress. Pocock (et al., 2008) argued that changes introduced through legislation had significant impact on low paid women, especially in relation to unfair dismissal and job security and to receiving fair and correct pay. Concerns in the Australian labor market having direct impact on working women were pay equity, working hours' flexibility, paid



maternity leave, childcare, discrimination and gender segregation at work. Regarding the impact of work and environment on women, a strong relationship between women’s work life and health was found (Kotwal et al., 2008).

2.RELEVANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Survey of the literature reveals that the topic issues and challenges of women employee work-life exist from various countries and India as well. It is identified key variables like low wages, job insecurity, work life balance, harassment, shift duty, job stress, family commitment, poor working conditions and lack of legislative protection which are the cause of job dissatisfaction of women employees and how this symptom (job dissatisfaction) crate impact on industrial relations. In India, particularly in the northern part of Kerala state, women comprise majority of workforce in the sectors like textile, healthcare etc. and facing many issues and challenges in the work place. It is hoped that the findings of this study will add new knowledge to the existing literature in this field and will benefit the industrial relation system in India.

3.OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- (i) To study of the women employees in North Kerala and identify the reason for employment;
- (ii) To study the satisfaction level of women employees in North Kerala;
- (iii) To study factors challenging to cordial industrial relations and to identify relations between job satisfaction and factors adversely affecting cordial industrial relations.
- (iv) To suggest the measures to improve satisfaction level of women employees by mitigating factors adversely affecting cordial industrial relations as identified by this study.

4. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

4.1Period of the study

The study was conducted for a period of 6 months from January 2014 to June 2014. The respondents were contacted and interviewed in the factory premises during their off-duty hours.

4.2Research Instrument

A structured interview schedule was prepared for the purpose of collecting the data. The factors of the study were drawn out from the related studies and the statements of the schedule were framed representing the factors. These were given shape in consultation with the field experts. The survey was preceded by a pilot study, conducted by interviewing a sample of 30 respondents. After computing the score of each respondent for the first test and retest, Cronbach Alpha Score was calculated. As the score of the test for the tool was above 0.50, the tools were found to be reliable.

4.3Research Methodology

The study was confined to northern (Malabar) region of Kerala State. This area was selected, keeping in mind that it is well endowed with women employees approximately 15000 in various industrial sectors which include textile and other industries. It was decided to collect the necessary information from 300 workers in the unorganized sectors (20 medium and small sized textile manufacturing organizations, 5 ITES organizations and 5 healthcare industries, 30 employers / management authority / industrial experts and 10 trade union leaders / representative affiliated to various political parties. Non-probability, proportionate quota sampling was used for the study. A questionnaire was prepared in the light of the objectives of the study. In addition to this, different research findings on unorganized sector were used as secondary sources. Moreover, various published materials have been taken into consideration for developing the theoretical framework of the study.

4.4Collection of Data

For collecting the data the respondents were contacted individually and given a brief description about the nature and purpose of the study. For the convenience of the respondents the statements were translated into vernacular language (Malayalam) so that the respondents could give their response with ease.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1Reason for employment by women employees

From Table 1, it is noted that all respondents (340) agree the reason for women employment but contradicting rank of their preference of reasonable variables. 40% (137 among 340) respondents were suggested that financial requirement make to take job assignment which takes 1st rank preference as far as employee and trader union leaders are concerned.

Table I: Reason for Employment by Women Workers

Reason for employment	Employee (300)	Employee (30)	TU Leader (10)	Total (340)	%	Rank Preference		
						Employee	Employ	TU

						e	er	Leader
Financial requirement	109	22	6	137	40%	1	1	1
Educated	98	6	2	106	31%	2	2	2
Interested	54	2	2	58	17%	3	3	2
Time pass	29	0	0	29	9%	4	0	0
Don't know the reason	10	0	0	10	3%	5	0	0
Total	300	30	10	340				

Source: Field Survey

5.2 Satisfaction level of Women employees

It is observed that out of 300 workers, 70 percent (210 out of 340) are not satisfied.(Table II)

Table II: Satisfaction level of women workers at workplace

Variable question	Satisfied	Not satisfied	Don't know	Total
Satisfaction level of women employees regarding functions and role of management & trade unions	90	210	0	300
Percentage	30%	70%	0%	1

Source: Field Survey

5.3 Effectiveness of cordial industrial relation due to job dissatisfaction.

Among the 210 job dissatisfied employees, 90 percent (190 employees) of them have the opinion of dissatisfaction regarding the function and role of management and trade union will affect cordial industrial relation system. (Table III).

Table III: Effect of Dissatisfaction on Cordial IR

Variable question	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
Dissatisfaction regarding function and role of management & trade union will affect cordial industrial relations	190	10	10	210
Percentage	90%	5%	5%	1

Source: Field Survey

5.4 Reason for job dissatisfaction

It is pertinent that majority of the respondents (women employee's & trade union leaders) have the opinion that they are not much satisfied with their job and majority of the managers or employers are opposing this situation. So for further analysis, job dissatisfaction of women employee is kept as dependent variable (X) and various challenging variables of unorganized sector as independent variables (Y1, Y2, Y3, Y4, Y5, Y6 and Y7). In the second stage of analysis, the primary data collected are analyzed using SPSS 11.0 package. Accordingly, relevant tests of hypotheses are done, as given in following paragraphs.

Table IV: What reason makes you to be not satisfied at workplace?

Variable question : X	Challenging variables of women employment : Y
Reason for job dissatisfaction	Y1 : Low wages & job insecurity Y2 : Harassment Y3 : Shift work Y4 : Job stress Y5 : Work-life balance Y6 : Lack of legal protection Y7 : Poor working conditions

Source: Research Design

5.5 Low wages and job insecurity

Discrimination against women in the payment of wages is wide spread in India. Women workers are in general classified as those belonging to the organized and unorganized sectors. The economic conditions of women are quite obvious from the fact that 94 percent of them are found in unorganized sector leaving only 6 percent in the organized sector. A meaningful wage policy has to include besides a minimum wage fixed at a reasonable level, provision for



assured employment for a minimum number of days (employment guarantee scheme). While the existing legal provision enables the government to protect organized sector wages with periodic revisions, the unorganized workers remain largely neglected. The following hypothesis is framed to find the association between job dissatisfaction and low wages / job insecurity of women employees.

H₀ = There is no significant association between job dissatisfaction and low wages / job insecurity.

H₁ = There is significant association between job dissatisfaction and low wages / job insecurity.

The result shows that there is a significant association between job dissatisfaction and low wages / job insecurity of women employees at 2 d.f. and 0.05 significance level. Among the 340 respondents, 68 percent of them have the opinion that job dissatisfaction moderately depends upon low wages / job insecurity in the northern regions of Kerala. This includes 210 selected women workers out of 300, 12 employers / management personnel out of 30 and 10 trade union leaders out of 10.32 percent of them have opinion that low wages / job insecurity not depends upon job dissatisfaction in this region. It is concluded that job dissatisfaction and low wages / job insecurity of women workers are highly associated which directly affects conflicting situations and cordial industrial relation system.

5.6 Harassment

There are a variety of types of harassment that can occur in the workplace. Workplace harassment, whether it is verbal or physical based on sex, religion, or race, is unlawful and also a form of discrimination. Sexual harassment in the workplace is a form of discrimination, and includes any uninvited comments, conduct, or behavior regarding sex, gender, or sexual orientation. Whether the offense is made by a manager, co-worker, or even a non-employee like a client, contractor, or vendor, if the conduct creates a hostile work environment or interrupts an employee's success, it is considered unlawful sexual harassment. The following hypothesis is framed to find the association between job dissatisfaction and harassment of women employees.

H₀ = There is no significant relation between job dissatisfaction and harassment of women employees.

H₁ = There is significant relation between job dissatisfaction and harassment of women employees.

The result shows that there is a significant association between job dissatisfaction and harassment of women employees at 2 d.f. and 0.05 significance level. Among the 340 respondents, 76 percent of them have the opinion that job dissatisfaction moderately depends upon harassment of women employees in the northern regions of Kerala. This includes 220 selected women employees out of 300, 20 employers / management personnel out of 30 and 9 trade union leaders out of 10.24 percent of them have opinion that harassment of women employees not depends upon job dissatisfaction in this region. It is concluded that job dissatisfaction and poor working conditions of unorganized workers are highly associated which directly affects conflicting situations and cordial industrial relation system.

5.7 Shift Work

Many countries have banned the employment of women on shift work. It is difficult to substantiate Sleepiness on the basis of physiology of human being is concerned. Some of the difficulties of shift work by women are related to their domestic obligations. Work involving abnormal night-day schedules has been in existence for centuries. The main physiological consequence of such shift schedules is disruption of circadian rhythm which can have a deleterious effect on performance, sleep patterns, accident rates, mental health, and cardiovascular mortality. Reproductive outcome effects may be linked to disruption of menstrual cycles. The following hypothesis is framed to find the association between job dissatisfaction and shift work of women employees.

H₀ = There is no significant relation between job dissatisfaction and shift work of women employees.

H₁ = There is significant relation between job dissatisfaction and shift work of women employees.

The result shows that there is a significant association between job dissatisfaction and shift work of women employees at 2 d.f. and 0.05 significance level. Among the 340 respondents, 68 percent of them have the opinion that job dissatisfaction moderately depends upon shift work of women employees in the northern regions of Kerala. This includes 210 selected workers out of a sample of 300 workers, 15 employers / management out of 30 and 5 trade union leaders out of 10.32 percent of them have opinion that shift work of women employees not depends upon job dissatisfaction in this region. It is concluded that job dissatisfaction and shift work of women employees are highly associated which directly affects conflicting situations and cordial industrial relation system.

5.8 Job Stress

Occupational stress of the women workers involved in three types of work which measures in terms of their physical, physiological and biomechanical stress. Health related problems and occupational related problems provide an insight to comprehend the issues related to job stress by women employees. The following hypothesis is framed to find the association between job dissatisfaction and Job stress of women employees.

H₀ = There is no significant relation between job dissatisfaction and Job stress of women employees.

H₁ = There is significant relation between job dissatisfaction and Job stress of women employees.



The result shows that there is a significant association between job dissatisfaction and Job stress of women employees at 2 d.f. and 0.05 significance level. Among the 340 respondents, 68 percent of them have the opinion that job dissatisfaction moderately depends upon Job stress of women employees in the northern regions of Kerala. This includes 210 selected women employees out of 300, 14 employers / management personnel out of 30 and 8 trade union leaders out of 10. 32 percent of them have opinion that Job stress of women employees not depends upon job dissatisfaction in this region. It is concluded that job dissatisfaction and Job stress of women employees are highly associated which directly affects conflicting situations and cordial industrial relation system.

5.9 Work-life Balance:

Work-life balance is the maintenance of a balance between responsibilities at work and at home. Work and family have increasingly become antagonist spheres, equally greedy of energy and time and responsible for work-family conflict. These conflicts are intensified by the cultural contradictions of motherhood, as women are increasingly encouraged to seek self-fulfillment in demanding careers; they also face intensified pressures to sacrifice themselves for their children by providing intensive parenting, highly involved childrearing and development. The following hypothesis is framed to find the association between job dissatisfaction and work-life balance of women employees.

H₀ = There is no significant relation between job dissatisfaction and work-life balance of women employees.

H₁ = There is significant relation between job dissatisfaction and work-life balance of women employees.

The result shows that there is a significant association between job dissatisfaction and work-life balance of women employees at 2 d.f. and 0.05 significance level. Among the 340 respondents, 67 percent of them have the opinion that job dissatisfaction moderately depends upon work-life balance of women employees in the northern regions of Kerala. This includes 210 selected women employees out of 300, 11 employers / management personnel out of 30 and 6 trade union leaders out of 10. 33 percent of them have opinion that work-life balance of women employees not depends upon job dissatisfaction in this region. It is concluded that job dissatisfaction and work-life balance of women employees are highly associated which directly affects conflicting situations and cordial industrial relation system.

5.10 Lack of Legal Protection:

All laws since Independence are formulated for the organized sector, which is hardly 6 per cent in this country. Even if there is a contract, it's not legally enforceable unless there is a law. The struggle for legal equality for women has been one of the major concerns of the Women's movements all over the world. Any attempt to change the position of women in any aspect involves the question of legislative and judicial reforms. However, these attempts achieve little success without a simultaneous movement to change the social and economic systems and cultural values of the society. The following hypothesis is framed to find the association between job dissatisfaction and lack of legal protection of women employees.

H₀ = There is no significant relation between job dissatisfaction and lack of legal protection of women employees.

H₁ = There is significant relation between job dissatisfaction and lack of legal protection of women employees.

The result shows that there is a significant association between job dissatisfaction and lack of legal protection of women employees at 2 d.f. and 0.05 significance level. Among the 340 respondents, 66 percent of them have the opinion that job dissatisfaction moderately depends upon lack of legal protection of women employees in the northern regions of Kerala. This includes 210 selected workers out of 300, 8 employers / management personnel out of 30 and 7 trade union leaders out of 10. 34 percent of them have opinion that lack of legal protection of women employees not depends upon job dissatisfaction in this region. It is concluded that job dissatisfaction and lack of legal protection of women employees are highly associated which directly affects conflicting situations and cordial industrial relation system.

5.11 Poor working conditions:

Working conditions pertains to the worker's job environment like hours of work, safety, paid holidays, rest periods, possibilities of advancement. The working conditions of an organization shall be such that employees are encouraged and motivated to work with pleasure and are able to contribute their best efforts and bring about quality output so that they should feel safe and comfortable while working. The following hypothesis is framed to find the association between job dissatisfaction and poor working condition of women employees.

H₀ = There is no significant relation between job dissatisfaction and poor working condition of women employees.

H₁ = There is significant relation between job dissatisfaction and poor working condition of women employees.

The result shows that there is a significant association between job dissatisfaction and poor working condition of women employees at 2 d.f. and 0.05 significance level. Among the 340 respondents, 69 percent of them have the opinion that job dissatisfaction moderately depends upon poor working condition of women employees in the northern regions of Kerala. This includes 210 selected workers out of 300 workers, 13 employers / management out of 30 and 10 trade union leaders out of 10.31 percent of them have opinion that poor working condition of women employees not depends upon job dissatisfaction in this region. It is concluded that job dissatisfaction and poor working condition of



women employees are highly associated which directly affects conflicting situations and cordial industrial relation system.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The above analysis establishes with surety the deep relationship between job satisfaction and other salient factors like low wages, job insecurity, harassment at workplace, shift work, job related stress, office-family balance, lack of legal protection poor working conditions. All these features have to be simultaneously catered to induce job satisfaction and an inspired workforce. In spite of so many negatives with women employees, they are utilized by employers as a major workforce. The reasons for this could be located in the general belief that women workforce especially in the Indian social setup is easier for the employer to manage. Generally by the Indian workforce and that too, particularly in Kerala and specifically in north Kerala is prone to labor problems. Unlike the government establishments, the private employer finds it difficult to strike a deal with the labor force. The private employer has lot of capital at stake and he can't afford to exhaust his income wholly in labor problems. All these problems get minimized when women employees are recruited that is why, women workers are preferred by employers, particularly in the Kerala belt. This gives an added advantage in the modern circumstances because modern women are comparatively more educated and help acquire the employer a better grade of efficiency. For all these reasons employing women acquires the added significance of maximizing human resource potential. Therefore their welfare in terms of job satisfaction becomes all the more important. The employer therefore has to realize that compensation, benefits and protection are the major factors to retain the female workforce. The management needs to be supportive and empathetic towards them. They should be offered protection, due to them, by virtue of their gender. Being women is in itself a vulnerable portion in the social contexts. It becomes the duty of the management to take away from their minds this fear of anxiety. Trust in your women employees is a must. The employer must encourage them by showing confidence in their abilities in different roles. They should be offered multiple roles and responsibilities. The management should encourage the formation of a women grievance cell, controlled by women to study and deal with all issues including harassment. The management could also arrange special workshops and fests to create awareness in them. Programs could be organized to create awareness in the women workforce about the options of creating flexibility between family life and workplace environment. These programmes should inculcate a sense of belongingness to such an extent that the workplace itself should become a family to them. This will help her eliminate the tensions due to imbalance. It will enhance the work efficiency both at home and at the office, so essential for the upliftment of social as well as commercial economy.

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