**Socio-Economic Characteristics of Women Beedi Workers in Murshidabad District of West Bengal, India**

**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the socio-economic status of beedi workers in the Suti-II Block of Murshidabad District, West Bengal. A traditional agro-forest-based and unorganized industry in India is the beedi industry, where predominantly women laborers are engaged in beedi rolling. Through a primary survey involving 100 respondents, the study examines factors such as age distribution, educational qualification, income levels, housing conditions, work experience, and employment nature. The results indicate that most respondents are between 30 and 40 years old, and a considerable proportion are illiterate. The majority earn between Rs 3001 and Rs 4000 monthly, live in concrete houses, and have 9 to 12 years of beedi rolling experience, primarily as a secondary income source. All respondents are rolling beedi at home and working approximately 3 to 6 hours daily. The study highlights the challenging conditions faced by beedi workers, including low wages, limited educational opportunities, and arduous working conditions. The study suggests improved health education, minimum wages, enhanced legal protections, and increased awareness regarding the rights and welfare of beedi workers to better their socio-economic status.

KEYWORDS: Socio-economic, Beedi Workers, Working condition, Education and Wage

 **INTRODUCTION**

The informal sector plays a vital role in economic development in developing countries, providing employment and livelihoods, especially for women. It accounts for two-thirds of non-agricultural employment and is a significant source of income for women, who often face poor working conditions and low pay. Education is key to women's participation in the labour market, but in countries like India, low literacy and restrictions on women's economic activities hinder their potential. Despite these challenges, women in the informal sector use their skills to create goods and support their families, highlighting their importance as a human resource. (Roy, 2021).

Beedi manufacturing is a traditional agroforest industry in India, representing over half of the country's tobacco consumption. It is a major employer in the unorganized household sector, with around 300 large manufacturers and many small-scale producers. Beedis are hand-rolled, unfiltered cigarettes made from sun-dried tobacco flakes and wrapped in a tender or temburni leaf, held together by a cotton thread. They are smaller than regular cigarettes and require more frequent puffs due to low combustibility. Beedis are available in both branded and unbranded varieties (Darling *et al*.,2015)

The Labour Welfare Scheme is carried out across the nation through Labour Welfare Organizations located in 18 regions to ensure the welfare of Beedi Workers and their families. According to the latest data, there are 49.82 lakh registered Beedi workers in the country, of which 36.25 lakh are women. No child has been documented to be employed in the Beedi making sector (Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2024**).**

**OBJECTIVES**

* To determine the socio-economic characteristics of women beedi workers.
* To give suggestions to enhance their living conditions.

**METHODOLOGY**

Murshidabad district, divided into five sub-divisions, is governed by the District Magistrate. Jangipur, a sub-division with a high beedi industry concentration, was selected for a study. The Suti-II Community Development block, comprising fourteen census towns, was chosen for the primary survey-based study. Khidirpur and Khanpur census towns were selected for the primary survey-based study to focus on the beedi sector, where the majority of workers are women and children. 100 sample respondents were randomly selected using the Simple Random Sampling Without Replacement Method.

The data was collected from the beedi roller as per the scheduled questionnaires.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Socio-economic characteristics of the Women Beedi Workers**

The objective of this study was to examine the profile characteristics of women beedi workers. On the basis of review of literature some of the important characteristics of the Women beedi workers were selected and studied. The findings were tabulated, analyzed and presented.

**Age**

The age distribution of 100 respondents is shown inTable1. None of the respondents were below the age of 20, accounting for 0 per cent of the total. The majority of respondents, 56 per cent, fell in the 30-40 age range. In the 20-30 age group, there were 14 respondents, making up 14 per cent of the total. The 40-50 age group comprised 24 respondents (24 per cent), while the 50-60 age group had 6 respondents, constituting 6 per cent of the total.

This finding is in conformity with the finding of Ramakrishnappa *et al*.,(2014), Mishra and Mishra (2015), Mercy and Smiley (2020), Mallick and Satpathy (2021) and Nafess *et al.,* (2021).

**Table.1 Socio-economic characteristics of the Women Beedi Workers**

 (n=100)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Components** | **Category** | **Frequency** | **Percent** |
| **Age** | Below 20yr | 0 | 00 |
| 20yr-30yr | 14 | 14 |
| 30yr -40yr | 56 | 56 |
| 40 yr -50 yr | 24 | 24 |
| >50 yr | 6 | 6 |
| **Education Qualification** | Illiterate | 50 | 50 |
| Primary | 38 | 38 |
| Secondary | 8 | 8 |
| HS | 4 | 4 |
| **Earnings per month** | Below Rs 2500 | 14 | 14 |
| Rs.2500-Rs.3000 | 20 | 20 |
| Rs.3001-Rs.4000 | 60 | 60 |
| Above Rs.4000 | 6 | 6 |
| **Type of house** | Kuccha | 0 | 0 |
| Mixed | 36 | 36 |
| Pucca (concrete) | 64 | 64 |
| **Experience of work** | 1-4yr | 0 | 0 |
| 5-8yr | 32 | 32 |
| 9-12yr | 56 | 56 |
| Above 13yr | 12 | 12 |
| **Mode of work** | Industry | 0 | 0 |
| House | 100 | 100 |
| **Nature of work** | primary | 14 | 14 |
| Secondary | 86 | 86 |
| Casual | 0 | 0 |
| **Working Hours** | Below 3 hours | 18 | 18 |
| 3-6 hours | 82 | 82 |
| 7-9 hours | 0 | 0 |

**Educational Qualification**

The study reveals that 50 per cent of the respondents were illiterate, 38 per cent had a primary education, 8 percent had completed Secondary school and 4 per cent had a high school (HS) education. Similar findings were reported Ramakrishnappa *et al*., (2014), Mishra and Mishra (2015 ), Mallick and Satpathy (2021) and Nafess *et al.,*(2021) .

**Monthly income from Beedi rolling**

The result shows that the majority, 60 per cent, earn between Rs 3001 and Rs 4000 monthly, while 20 per cent earn between Rs 2500 and Rs 3000. Only 6 per cent of respondents earn above Rs 4000 and 14 per cent earn below Rs 2500 per month. This result was in line with Finding of Ramakrishnappa *et al*.,(2014), Ansari and Raj (2015), Mishra and Mishra (2015), Amutha and Chellaih (2018) and Nafess *et al.,*(2021).

**Type of House**

The results of study depict that 64 per cent of the respondents have been living in Pucca (concrete) houses.36 per cent of respondents have been living in mixed houses, while none of them live in Kuccha houses. This finding was in line with finding of Mishra and Mishra (2015), Mercy and Smiley (2020) and Nafess *et al.,*(2021).

**Experience of Work**

Work experience relates to the number of years that respondents have been engaged in beedi rolling. The respondents' work experience in the beedi-making sector is exhibited in Table1. It shows that none have 1-4 years of experience, 32 per cent have 5-8 years, 56 per cent have 9-12 years, and 12 per cent have over 13 years of experience. This finding is supported by the result of Ramakrishnappa *et al*., (2014) and Mercy and Smiley (2020).

**Mode of Work**

The respondents' work modes are shown in Table1. It shows that none of the respondents work at an industry location, and all of the respondents roll beedi at home. The finding is in agreement with the findings reported by Amutha and Chellaih (2018) and Mercy and Smiley (2020).

**Nature of Work**

Beedi rolling is a process that women do and it varies individually. For some, it serves as their primary occupation, while others engage in it as a secondary activity. The study shows that 86 per cent of the respondents consider beedi rolling as their secondary work, 14 per cent regard it as primary work and No respondents engage in beedi rolling on a casual basis. This finding is in concurrence with the findings reported by Mercy and Smiley (2020).

**Working Hours**

The beedi production has inconsistent working hours. The distribution of working hours among respondents in the beedi-making industry is displayed in Table1. It reveals that 18 per cent of respondents work for less than 3 hours, 82 per cent work between 3 to 6 hours, and none work for 7 to 9 hours. This finding was in line with finding of Ansari and Raj (2020) and Mercy and Smiley (2020).

**CONCLUSION**

The majority of beedi rolling employment consists of individuals between the ages of 30 and 40 who possess years of experience and have varied earnings. Individuals' educational status is often low, so the majority work from home with flexible hours, primarily considering beedi rolling as an additional occupation to earn money to support their families.

**SUGGESTIONS**

Beedi workers, who engage in the manual process of rolling beedis (hand-rolled cigarettes), sometimes encounter difficult working conditions that include low remuneration, long work hours, and occupational hazards. Here are some recommendations to enhance their conditions:
1. Implementing health education initiatives and organizing complimentary medical check-up camps for beedi workers/rollers at the local level to enhance healthcare awareness.

2. The remuneration provided to beedi rollers is significantly lower in comparison to the minimum wage. They roll the beedi all day long, a laborious and time-consuming task for which they receive very little payment; the state government need to maintain surveillance on this.

3. Most of the time, companies or subcontractors take advantage of workers in the beedi business. Therefore, rules should be made that make them responsible for the workers, and they should face harsh punishments if they don't follow the rules. Also, any problems with payments should be closely monitored. The implementation of a beedi workers cooperative to reduce the influence of intermediary the beedi business.

4. The State government should implement effective efforts to deal with the prevalent issue of child labour in this industry.

5. Workers, most of whom are poor, belong to backward castes and illiterate don't know much about the Beedi Acts. Education and training programs are needed.

5. Organize awareness programs to emphasize the health hazards linked to use of tobacco and the need of advocating for the rights and welfare of beedi workers.

6. Both government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have a responsibility to actively promote the rights and well-being of beedi workers. They should promote and fight for their interests, as well as ensure the effective implementation of welfare programs designed for their benefit. In addition, they are required to execute numerous projects aimed at improving the conditions of workers in the beedi industry.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors of the paper declare no conflict of interest.

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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