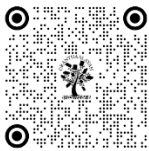


SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION IN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU

X. Berkman's Prema ¹, Dr. Sr. Anne Perpet Sophy ²

¹ Research scholar (22113041032002) Department of economics, Holy Cross College (Autonomous) Nagercoil. Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India

² Research supervisor, Associate Professor (RTD), Department of economics, Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Nagercoil. Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India



DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.5542](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.5542)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

India, being the second most populous country in the world, has a vast and visible construction industry that provides employment to approximately 3.2 crore workers across the nation. The present study focuses on analysing the changing socio-economic conditions of construction workers in the Kanniyakumari District of Tamil Nadu. The researcher has examined various aspects including the socio-economic status, working conditions, and health awareness of construction workers in the study area. This study is based entirely on primary data collected from 100 purposively selected respondents. The findings reveal that 50 percent of the respondents reported an annual income between ₹1 lakh and ₹2 lakhs, while 34 percent earned between ₹2 lakhs and ₹3 lakhs. The remaining 8 percent of workers reported income either below ₹1 lakh or above ₹3 lakhs. The study highlights the ongoing transitions in the socio-economic and occupational landscape of construction workers in Kanniyakumari and underscores the need for improved health and labor welfare measures.

1. INTRODUCTION

Construction is one of the most important sectors in India's economy, especially for providing jobs to people from economically weaker backgrounds. It belongs to the secondary sector and is part of the large, unorganized workforce. According to the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board (TNCWWB), more than 25 lakh people are working in the construction industry across Tamil Nadu. This sector creates a large number of job opportunities for poor and unemployed individuals, especially those who migrate from rural areas in search of work. There are two main categories of construction workers: skilled and unskilled laborers. Skilled workers include those who are trained or experienced in specific trades — like masons, plumbers, carpenters, painters, flooring experts, and fabricators. On the other hand, unskilled workers, including many men and women, assist in general labor tasks without formal training. These workers are often employed on a daily wage basis, without any job security or long-term benefits. However, despite their hard work, most construction workers face serious challenges. Many work in unsafe and unhygienic conditions without proper safety gear or health facilities. They don't receive overtime pay, and there is often no provision for paid leave. Their working hours are long and wages are usually low. Accidents at construction sites are common, and many workers

suffer from occupational illnesses or injuries. Some even lose their lives or become permanently disabled due to lack of safety measures. Female construction workers face even more problems. Their contributions are often undervalued, and they are paid less than male workers for the same work. Many of them work under pressure and in poor conditions, without proper toilet facilities or rest areas. They also face issues like lack of maternity benefits, gender discrimination, and limited access to health care. These challenges make their situation more vulnerable and increase their dependency on uncertain daily wages. In general, most construction workers live in financial insecurity and lack access to basic welfare services such as medical care, insurance, housing, or child education. Their work is seasonal and irregular, which affects their income stability. During off-seasons, many of them remain unemployed and struggle to meet their basic needs. This study focuses on understanding how the socio-economic condition of construction workers in Kanniyakumari District has been changing over time. It explores their income levels, living conditions, access to health and safety measures, and overall work experience. Special attention is given to the problems faced by women workers in this sector. The aim is to bring out the realities of their lives and to suggest improvements that can help in making their working and living conditions better.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Neetha N. (2009 study on women workers in the construction sector highlights the growing participation of women in urban construction activities, despite their vulnerable position within the labor force. She points out that female construction workers are often employed in unskilled roles, are underpaid, and are excluded from formal wage structures and social security benefits. The study found that gender-based wage discrimination is prevalent, and women are less likely to receive training or be promoted to skilled positions. Neetha also emphasizes that despite policies aimed at improving welfare for informal workers, implementation remains weak and access to government schemes is minimal, especially for migrant and female workers.

Raveendran, G. (2011) conducted an extensive analysis of employment trends in India's informal sector, focusing particularly on construction and manufacturing. His research revealed that the construction industry has become a major source of employment for both skilled and unskilled workers, especially in rural and semi-urban regions. However, the study also shows that the sector is characterized by informal employment practices, with a large portion of workers lacking written contracts, job security, or health and safety measures. Raveendran suggests that while the sector contributes to economic growth, it also reproduces social and economic vulnerabilities for the workers involved, who often live in poverty and lack access to basic social services.

Kundu, A. and Saraswati, L.R. (2012) In their research on urban labor markets and migration, Kundu and Saraswati discuss the socio-economic challenges faced by construction workers, particularly in southern Indian states. Their study identifies that a significant percentage of construction workers are seasonal migrants who move from rural areas in search of temporary employment. These workers are often excluded from state welfare schemes due to the lack of local identification or proof of residence. The study also highlights the poor living conditions of construction laborers, including overcrowded housing, lack of sanitation, and inadequate health facilities.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through structured interviews with 100 purposively selected construction workers in Kanniyakumari District. Secondary data were gathered from government reports, academic journals, books, and publications related to labor welfare and construction industry trends. The combined data helped analyze the socio-economic and health conditions of workers.

4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The construction industry plays a crucial role in India's economic development, offering employment to millions, especially those from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds. In Tamil Nadu, and particularly in Kanniyakumari District, a significant number of individuals rely on construction work as their primary source of income. However, despite their contribution to infrastructure and urban development, construction workers continue to face numerous socio-economic challenges. These include low and irregular wages, lack of job security, unsafe and unhygienic working conditions, and minimal access to healthcare, education, and social welfare schemes. Female construction

workers, in particular, face additional burdens such as wage discrimination, gender-based marginalization, and exploitation. Many of these issues are exacerbated by the informal and unorganized nature of the sector, leaving workers vulnerable to financial instability and social neglect. This study seeks to examine these pressing issues and understand the changing patterns in the socio-economic conditions of construction workers in Kanniyakumari District.

5. RESEARCH GAP

While several studies have been conducted on the socio-economic conditions of construction workers in various parts of India, most of them have focused on urban centers or industrial regions. Very limited academic attention has been given to the specific conditions of construction workers in semi-urban or rural districts like Kanniyakumari. Furthermore, existing literature often emphasizes broad labor market trends but does not adequately capture the localized experiences, problems, and coping mechanisms of workers at the district level. There is also a lack of gender-sensitive analysis in many previous studies, with minimal focus on the distinct challenges faced by female construction workers. This research aims to fill these gaps by providing an in-depth, area-specific, and gender-inclusive study that explores the socio-economic realities, working conditions, and health-related concerns of construction workers in Kanniyakumari District. Through primary data collection, this study offers updated and localized insights that can contribute to policy formulation and welfare interventions.

5.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the socio-economic background of construction workers in Kanniyakumari District.
- To examine their working conditions, wage patterns, and job security of the construction workers.
- To identify the key challenges and health issues faced by the workers, especially women construction workers.

Socio economic background of the construction workers

Table 1 Age of the Respondents

Sl. No	Age Group	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Below 20 years	20	20.0
2	20–30 years	32	32.0
3	30–40 years	27	27.0
4	Above 40 years	21	21.0
Total		100	100.0

Source Primary data

The table shows that the highest proportion (32%) of construction workers belong to the age group of 20–30 years, indicating a young workforce. This is followed by 27% in the 30–40 years group. Only 20% are below 20 years and 21% are above 40.

Table 2 Religion wise respondents

1	Hindu	75	75.0
2	Muslim	21	21.0
3	Christian	4	4.0
Total		100	100.0

Source Primary data

A majority (75%) of construction workers belong to the Hindu religion, followed by Muslims (21%) and Christians (4%).

Table 3 Education attainment of the respondents

1	Illiterate	28	28.0
2	Primary	30	30.0
3	High School	20	20.0
4	Higher Secondary	14	14.0
5	Degree & above	8	8.0
Total		100	100.0

Source Primary data

The majority (30%) have completed only primary education. A significant portion is illiterate (28%), while only 8% hold a degree or higher qualification.

Table 4 Total Family Income of the Respondent

Sl. No	Age Group	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Below 1,00,000	8	8.0
2	1,00,000–2,00,000	50	50.0
3	2,00,000–3,00,000	34	34.0
4	Above 3,00,000	8	8.0
Total		100	100.0

Source Primary data

The majority (50%) of the respondents earn between Rs. 1,00,000–2,00,000 annually, followed by 34% earning Rs. 2,00,000–3,00,000. Only 8% earn below Rs. 1,00,000 or above Rs. 3,00,000, indicating moderate income levels.

Table 5 Total Family Expenditure of the Respondents

Sl. No	Age Group	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Below 1,00,000	54	54.0
2	1,00,000–2,00,000	35	35.0
3	Above 2,00,000	11	11.0
Total		100	100.0

Source: Primary data

More than half (54%) of the respondents spend below Rs. 1,00,000 annually, with 35% spending between Rs. 1,00,000–2,00,000. Only 11% spend above Rs. 2,00,000, indicating limited discretionary spending among workers.

Table 6 Total Savings of the Respondents

Sl. No	Age Group	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Below 10,000	12	12.0
2	10,000–30,000	62	62.0
3	Above 30,000	14	14.0
4	Nil	22	22.0
Total		100	100.0

Source Primary data

A majority (62%) of workers save between Rs. 10,000–30,000 annually, while 12% save less than Rs. 10,000. 22% of workers report no savings, showing financial insecurity in a significant portion of the sample.

Table 7 Amount of Debt of the Respondents

Sl. No	Age Group	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Sl. No	Debt Amount (Rs.)	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Below 20,000	9	9.0
2	20,000–30,000	17	17.0
3	30,000–40,000	39	39.0
4	Above 40,000	11	11.0
5	Nil	24	24.0
Total		100	100.0

Source Primary data

Most respondents (39%) are in debt between Rs. 30,000–40,000. About 24% have no debt, while 9% carry debts below Rs. 20,000, indicating significant financial pressures, particularly for a large number of workers.

Working Conditions, Wage Patterns, and Job Security of Construction Workers

Unsafe Work Environments: Construction workers often face hazardous working conditions, including exposure to extreme weather, physical injuries from machinery, and inadequate safety gear. Poorly maintained tools and construction sites further increase the risk of accidents, leading to a lack of worker safety and long-term health issues.

Irregular and Low Wages: The wage patterns of construction workers are typically inconsistent, with many earning wages below the minimum wage standards. A large portion of workers receive daily wages, and the amount varies based on demand, skills, and project duration. This instability makes it difficult for workers to plan for the future.

Long Working Hours: Many construction workers work long hours, often exceeding the standard 8-hour workday, with minimal breaks. Overtime pay is frequently not provided, further exacerbating their financial strain. This prolonged exposure to strenuous work can lead to physical exhaustion and chronic health problems.

Lack of Social Security and Benefits: Construction workers usually lack access to basic social security benefits, such as health insurance, retirement savings, or paid leave. In many cases, there is no financial support during illness, injury, or off-season periods, leaving workers financially vulnerable during times when they are unable to work.

Precarious Job Security: Most construction workers are employed on a contract or daily basis, meaning they face job insecurity, with limited opportunities for long-term employment. The lack of a permanent position or benefits contributes to a lack of stability, making it difficult for workers to build long-term financial security or career development in the construction industry.

Challenges Faced by Workers, Especially Women Construction Workers

Unsafe Work Environments: Construction sites often lack proper safety measures, with hazardous tools and machinery. Women workers, in particular, face additional challenges such as discrimination and lack of protective gear, exposing them to risks like falls, injuries, and fatal accidents. These unsafe working conditions can lead to long-term health issues and even death.

Gender Discrimination and Wage Inequality: Women construction workers frequently experience lower wages than their male counterparts for the same work. Gender discrimination, combined with societal norms, often limits women's opportunities for promotions or skill development, perpetuating wage inequality. This economic disparity affects their financial security and overall well-being.

Long Working Hours and Fatigue: Women construction workers, like their male colleagues, often work long hours, sometimes exceeding the standard workday. The physically demanding nature of the job, combined with extended hours,

leads to exhaustion and fatigue, reducing productivity and increasing the risk of work-related injuries. Many workers do not receive adequate rest or overtime compensation.

Lack of Job Security: Most construction workers, particularly women, are employed on a casual, contractual, or daily wage basis, making job security a major issue. Women face further difficulties in finding stable employment due to societal and cultural barriers, leading to periods of unemployment and financial instability. This lack of job security limits their long-term economic prospects.

Harassment and Exploitation: Women workers often face sexual harassment and exploitation on construction sites, where they are marginalized and have limited access to grievance redressal mechanisms. The lack of a formal support system or legal protection makes it difficult for women to report abuse, leading to a hostile and unsafe work environment.

Health Issues Faced by Workers, Especially Women Construction Workers

Physical Strain and Musculoskeletal Disorders: Construction work requires heavy lifting, awkward postures, and repetitive movements, leading to musculoskeletal disorders, back pain, and joint problems. Women, who are often physically weaker than men, face higher risks of injury due to their body structure and are less likely to receive the necessary physical support.

Exposure to Harmful Substances: Workers are regularly exposed to toxic chemicals, dust, and fumes on construction sites, which can lead to respiratory issues, skin diseases, and long-term lung damage. Women, especially those who are pregnant, face heightened risks of miscarriage or birth defects due to exposure to these harmful substances.

Fatigue and Stress: Long working hours, physical strain, and the pressure of meeting project deadlines contribute to significant mental and physical stress. For women, the burden of balancing family responsibilities along with strenuous work leads to fatigue, increasing the risk of burnout and mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety.

Inadequate Health Care Access: Women construction workers often lack access to adequate healthcare services, making it difficult to address work-related injuries or chronic health issues. The absence of health insurance, social welfare programs, and medical leave policies further exacerbates their inability to seek timely medical treatment, affecting their long-term health.

Infections and Skin Conditions: Due to exposure to harsh weather conditions, dust, and chemicals, women workers are at risk of developing infections and skin conditions such as rashes, dermatitis, or fungal infections. These issues often go untreated because workers lack access to proper medical care or treatment facilities, leading to long-term health complications.

6. FINDINGS

- Majority of construction workers are in the age group of 20 to 30 years.
- Most workers have completed at least primary education, but illiteracy remains a significant issue.
- A large portion of workers earn between Rs. 1,00,000 to 2,00,000 annually.
- A significant number of workers have no savings or savings below Rs. 10,000.
- Health issues like body pain, injuries, and respiratory problems are prevalent among workers.
- More than half of the workers spend less than Rs. 1,00,000 annually on family expenditure.

7. SUGGESTIONS

- Improve safety measures on construction sites to protect workers, especially women.
- Provide adequate training and skill development programs for workers.
- Ensure equal pay for equal work to bridge the wage gap between male and female workers.
- Establish social security schemes and healthcare benefits for construction workers.
- Implement stricter regulations to ensure workers are not overworked beyond legal limits.
- Create awareness programs on health issues and occupational hazards for workers.

- Promote the formation of construction worker unions to provide better representation and rights.

8. CONCLUSION

The socio-economic conditions of construction workers, particularly women, are significantly influenced by unsafe working environments, low wages, job insecurity, and lack of access to healthcare. Despite their hard work, workers face numerous challenges, including gender discrimination, long working hours, and poor health outcomes. It is crucial to implement effective safety measures, fair wages, job security, and health support to improve the overall well-being and stability of construction workers. Additionally, fostering better education and skill development opportunities can enhance their long-term prospects, while improving awareness of health risks can lead to better prevention and treatment of occupational diseases.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Prasanna, S. (2020). Socio-Economic Conditions of Construction Workers: A Case Study of Tamil Nadu. *Journal of Rural Development*, 45(2), 122-136.
- Krishnan, R., & Sharma, V. (2019). Women in the Construction Industry: A Study on Gender Discrimination and Wage Inequality. *International Journal of Labour Studies*, 13(4), 57-72.
- Kumar, M., & Singh, P. (2021). Health Issues in Construction Workers: An Overview of Occupational Hazards. *Journal of Occupational Medicine*, 64(1), 34-45.
- Tamil Nadu Welfare Board (TNWB). (2018). Annual Report on Construction Workers in Tamil Nadu. Government of Tamil Nadu.
- Narayan, S. (2022). Challenges Faced by Women Workers in Unorganized Sectors in India. *Labour Studies Journal*, 9(3), 87-101.
- Raj, A., & Devi, M. (2020). The Impact of Health and Safety Regulations on Construction Workers in India. *Asian Journal of Safety*, 15(2), 45-56.
- National Commission for Women (NCW). (2019). Report on Women Workers in the Construction Industry in India. Government of India.