UNIT 4 ESTIMATING WOMEN’S WORK

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

Assessing women’s work has always been one of the most arduous and multifarious exercise before the estimators of labour statistics. Unfortunately, women’s work such as nursing, mothering, nurturing tasks do not form part of any national accounting system nor are a part of the GDP. They often work as unpaid workers on family farms/enterprises or in several of the informal sector activities, which are neglected while being documented. Their household work frequently gets mixed up with economic work and becomes difficult to be separated both at a conceptual level as well as at the operational level. The unorganised sector engulfs a huge chunk of such workers (more than 90%). The workers in the unorganised sector (also referred to as the informal economy) lead a life of complete unawareness and ignorance with regards to their rights and facilities. Most of the workers in this sector happen to be women belonging to the marginalized sections of the society. They are imbibed within this sector either as daily wagers, household workers or are simply self-employed.

Box No. 1

In spite of facing enormous hardship, women’s work tends to be hidden, unaccounted and under accounted mainly because of the fact that the women’s work is primarily seasonal, irregular and uncertain.

This unit essentially introduces the national accounting processes in India such as Census of India, National Sample Survey and other processes which enumerate women’s work. The Unit will also deal with the bias and flaws existing within the system that tends to ignore the real contribution of
women in the economy. The Unit also discusses the role and contribution of women to informal economy in India.

Let us look at the major objectives of this unit.

### 4.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you would be able to:

- Discuss enumeration of women workers by the national documentation processes; and
- Explain work force composition in India;
- Assess the contribution of women workers towards the informal economy of the country.

Work assignments for the women comes through a chain of middlemen. They are completely unaware as to who their real employer is. Thus, the labour laws within the unorganised manufacturing economy particularly in the urban areas have usually resulted in denial of justice for these women.

### 4.3 WORKFORCE COMPOSITION

The work force structure of India can be categorized under three segments. At one end of it are the elite **white-collar workers** like the senior public sector officials and the managerial class of the private sector, accounting for not more than 1 percent of the labour force. Job security and social security provisions for this category are part of their work contracts. In the present era of trade liberalization and increasing globalisation (You will read about it in detail in Block 6 of this Course) this elite group are quick to avail themselves of the salary and compensation packages that are at par with international standards.

While at the other extreme are the workers such as the self-employed, the informal sector workers and casual labourers accounting for 92 to 93 percent of the total labour force. There exists only a minimal social security provisions for this lot. It is this 93% of the work force where the concentration of women workers is the maximum and those who are outside the gambit of labour laws and social security.

In between these two categories are the regular wage employees of the public sector and the organized private sector, which account for about 6 to 7 percent of the labour force. The bulk of the government legislation for labour market and social insurance schemes concerns this particular group. The major thrust of the state activities basically hover around the minimum wage legislation and various promotional measures for employment generation, which is unlikely to be effective in view of implementation problems.
The concentration of women workers is maximum among those who remain outside the gambit of labour laws and social security.

Let us now read how census and NSSO estimate work force in India. You have already read about macro data sets like the census and NSSO in MMG-005 Block 3 Unit 4. The Indian labour force statistics mainly relies upon two major sources of information. These include the ‘Census of India’ and data collected through the ‘National Sample Survey Organization’ (NSSO).

4.3.1 Census of India

The Decennial Census conducted by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India provides data on various characteristics of the labour force, once in every 10 years, for the entire country under various demographic, social and economic characteristics. The data so collected on workers are tabulated as main worker and marginal worker.

The Work Participation Rate (WPR) is defined as the percentage of workers to the total population, which is 39.3 per cent as per the 2001 Census. The WPR in 1991 Census was 37.5 percent. Table no 1, given below show the Work Participation Rates (WPR) according to Census of India, 2001. The most significant improvement is seen in case of rural marginal workers, which improved from 0.7 percent in 1991 to 7.9 percent in 2001 for males and from 8.1 percent to 14.2 percent in case of females during the corresponding period.

Table No. I: Distribution of Total workers, Main workers, Marginal workers and Non-workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>India</th>
<th>Total/ Rural/ Urban</th>
<th>Persons/ Males/ Females</th>
<th>Proportion to Total Popn.</th>
<th>Total Workers</th>
<th>Main Workers</th>
<th>Marginal Workers</th>
<th>Non-Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001 Census (Provisional)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In fact, there is a perceptible decline in the proportion of main workers between 1991 and 2001 from 34.1 percent in 1991 to 30.5 percent in 2001. This sharp fall in percentage of main workers comes from rural areas especially rural males which drops to 44.5 in 2001 from 51.8 in 1991. This indicates that the agricultural activities are not providing sufficient job opportunities forcing the families to migrate and seeking job opportunities in home-based activities. A comparison of Work Participation Rate (WPR) as per the Census of India 2001 is made with the WPR estimated on the basis of sample survey by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in India (Refer Table No 2). We see that at the national level the difference between the two sets of returns is marginal.

### Table No 2: Work Participation Rate (WPR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Persons/Males/Females</th>
<th>Work Participation Rate (WPR)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>As per 2001 Census</td>
<td>As per NSSO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>39.26</td>
<td>38.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>51.93</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>25.68</td>
<td>22.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 Census (Provisional)
NSSO (National Sample Survey Organisation), 55th Round (July 1999).
The WPR refers to ‘Usual Status’ (i.e., Principal Status and Subsidiary Status).

### 4.3.2 National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO)

Data collected through the NSSO gives information related to certain key parameters of employment and unemployment in its surveys annually and through a comprehensive survey on employment and unemployment quinquennially. It brings out a number of reports based on these surveys. Important NSSO rounds like 55th, 56th and the 61st gives detailed information related to workers. The 55th round of NSSO covered the agricultural and
non-agricultural enterprises during July 1999 - June 2000. It identified and subsequently estimated the magnitude of both formal and informal workers in the country. The 56th round of NSSO data provided an in-depth view of the unorganized manufacturing sector under various heads. The 56th round was conducted during July 2000 - June 2001, which covered the unorganized manufacturing enterprise as a follow-up of Fourth Economic Census held during 1998. The 61st round discusses the employment and unemployment situation in India in 2004-05. It shows a large gap in terms of employment between the men and women both in the rural as well as urban areas. The gap in the urban areas is extremely high with 57% men and only 18% women being employed. The women in the urban areas are mostly absorbed by the informal economy and remain unaccounted.

A study of the NSSO data on the basis of the 55th and 56th rounds reveal that the total employment in the country increased from 374 million in 1993-94 to 397 million in 1999-2000 (based on Usual Principal and Subsidiary Status). Out of this, around 28 million (7%) are in the organized sector and the balance 369 million (93%) are in the unorganized sector. The workforce within the unorganized manufacturing sector has been classified by the NSSO on the basis of type of employment into three categories. These are:

- Own Account Manufacturing Enterprises (OAME) - Household enterprises not employing hired worker on fairly regular basis. Here one person manages the entire process from production to marketing.
- Non Directory Manufacturing Enterprises (NDME) - Small establishments, employing workers not exceeding five in number, which include household members.
- Directory Manufacturing Enterprises (DME) - Top layer of establishments employing six or more workers including household members.

Before reading the next section, take the following exercise to assess your understanding of the sections that you have just read.

**Check Your Progress:**

1) *Name the two important sources that estimates working population in India. How do they differ in their methodology of estimation.*
Let us read about the position of women in informal economy.

**4.4 WOMEN IN INFORMAL ECONOMY**

With Globalization, it has been observed that there is large scale redundancy and many men have become unemployed. This has forced the women to undertake work at a very low rate of payment in order to shoulder economic responsibilities during the crisis. A majority of the women work force is engaged in the unorganized sector where labour laws are not only flouted but the work conditions are fixed by the employer according to their whims and wishes. The salaries are below the prescribed norm. There are no leave or medical benefits/compensation. Table No 3 shows the proportion of gender wise worker distribution in the organized and unorganized sectors in 1991. Though the table dates back to 1991, it gives a fair idea about the high concentration of workers in the unorganized sector for both men and women. Of the total women workforce the share in the organized sector is only 4.2 per cent, while the rest of the 95.8 per cent are in the unorganized sector where there are no legislative safeguards even to claim either minimum or equal wages at par with their male counterparts, leave alone the other benefits that the women from the organized sector enjoy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sectors</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>22.95</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>26.73</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unorganized</td>
<td>85.99</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>201.41</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>287.40</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>89.77</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>224.36</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>314.13</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Computed based on the Census data and of the DGE and T, GoI
The unorganized sector has a good base for supply of work due to the demand for consumer goods and other ancillary activities of the metropolitan cities. It is estimated that three fourths of the total working population, especially among the poor and the developing nations, belong to the world of unorganized sector, which has been largely responsible in promoting the poverty levels within these societies. These workers are without any social security or legislative provisions. For example, in the case of accidents, sickness over long duration, unemployment or old age, the informal sector provides no alternative for the workers to fall back upon. The unorganized economy comprises of a vast range of economic activities and industries ranging from the home-based electronics assembly, garment piece-rate work, crafts, street vendors, daily wage, textile weaving, block printing, embroidery, handicraft production, food products, etc. It's a major source of non-agricultural employment in the developing nations and therefore tends to concentrate in the urban slums of the metropolitan cities. The workers in this sector include the home-based, the self-employed, the daily wage earners, vendors and so on.

The importance of this sector can very well be judged from the study conducted by the National Commission of Labour, which estimated almost 60% of the national income and 60% of the home savings are contributed by the unorganised sector. According to estimates, in India, the contribution of informal sector to India's exports is roughly 40 percent (IIFT, 1999). Despite the fact that the informal economy has tremendous potential, the sector is beset with manifold problems such as obsolete technologies, unorganized production system, low productivity, inadequate working capital, conventional product range, weak marketing link and an overall stagnation of production as well as sales. Over and above all this, the situation is even more grave as only a trickle of the benefits percolate down to the grass roots consisting 90% of the workforce (Dutta, 2011). This is mainly due to exploitation by the middle persons and other entrepreneurs. Globalisation and tough competition from the mill sector has worsened the economic conditions of the women workers and they are forced to work for less than the minimum wages stipulated by the government. Thus, their lives leave much to be desired.

Women in Manufacturing Sector

Among the workers engaged in the unorganized sector, a large proportion of the women workers are engaged in the unorganized manufacturing sector. The predominant share of the unorganized manufacturing enterprises has been brought to light with the 56th round of NSSO results. Accordingly, unorganized sector enterprises accounted for 98.19%, which forms a major chunk in terms of number of enterprises (NSSO, 2000-2001). Inspite of the voluminous, gigantic status and complex links to the organized sector, the unorganized economy, continues to remain largely invisible. A high
unemployment rate combined with the disguised employment, forces a large number of the workers to migrate along with their families towards the cities from interior rural areas in search of better job prospects.

Box No. 3

Work assignments for the women in manufacturing sector comes through a chain of middlemen. Women are completely unaware as to who their real employer is. Thus, the labour laws within the unorganised manufacturing economy particularly in the urban areas have usually resulted in denial of justice for these women.

Attracting mass scale in-migration (You will read more about it in Block 4 Unit 1 of this Course) to the cities from the neighboring regions, work in the informal sector tends to be one of the most flexible forms of employment, particularly the contract work, which is usually home-based. It has emerged as a key component in the restructuring of the global economy and often forms the last link in a network of international trade. It spreads across continents, producing goods sold by large retailers. The work conditions of home-based workers, including employer-employee relationships and methods of supervision are very different from those existing in the factories. Since, there is no direct control or supervision and no fixed hours of work, the method of wage fixation therefore cannot be on the time-rate basis as in the factories. In practice, it is found that the actual wages paid ought to be calculated taking into account various deductions made by the employers, and work expenses incurred by the worker. This brings down the per day earnings to a bare minimum. This massive chunk of population who face enormous hardships despite putting in colossal work inputs throughout their lives is certainly an issue, which cannot be ignored.

According to a report of the National Commission of Labour, (Bhatt, Ela R., 1988) the laws and statutes cater mainly, if not solely, to the organized sector, which accounts only for less than 10% of the workforce. The remaining 90 to 93% is today outside the coverage of social security systems, is more vulnerable and therefore, more in need of social security entitlements.

In a patriarchal society, the women have no means to address their economic and criminal grievances, which requires tremendous effort, resources and time. The most important issue in majority of the labour laws has been the establishment and existence of employer-employee relationship and the need to identify who is the concerned employer! Often it is hard to identify who the actual employer is. The fact mainly because of the fact that either the employer keeps changing frequently or there is no direct relationship with the actual employer. Generally, the only point of contract for the concerned target group is with a lower level intermediary - be it a beedi rolling activity, agarbatti making inside the homes, construction work or stitching on a piece rate basis.
On the other hand, most of ‘self-employed’ women are supposed to be their own employers. That is one woman is responsible from production to marketing. For example, activities like pappad, pickle and, lace making, embroidery, the Zardozi work, and so on are usually undertaken by single women.

Among the unorganized manufacturing sector as has been classified by the NSSO, a major concentration of the manufacturing enterprises is in the OAME category both for rural as well as urban areas (Refer Table No 4). In the OAME category, there is a high concentration of the women workers. While in the case of the NDME and the DME categories, these are areas of male domains. This reflects that the women mainly manage those manufacturing enterprises, which are run without the help of hired workers. Most of the self-employed and the home-based type of workers are engaged in the OAME category of manufacturing enterprises.

Table No 4: Distribution of Workers (%) in Rural/Urbam Areas 2000 - 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAME</td>
<td>74.16</td>
<td>88.80</td>
<td>79.82</td>
<td>34.42</td>
<td>78.10</td>
<td>45.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDME</td>
<td>11.39</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>8.50</td>
<td>34.19</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td>27.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DME</td>
<td>14.45</td>
<td>8.43</td>
<td>11.68</td>
<td>31.39</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>27.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL (in 000s)</td>
<td>14,706</td>
<td>9,279</td>
<td>23,985</td>
<td>9,875</td>
<td>3,219</td>
<td>13,095</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table No 4, clearly displays the pattern of gender distribution of workers. While the gap between male and female workers in OAME category for the rural areas is not so prominent, the same in the case of urban areas is quite marked. Thus, the urban cities depict a major concentration of women workers in the OAME category.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

Estimating women’s work has been one of the most complex exercises before the estimators of labour statistics. The discussion above shows how women have had to come forward to shoulder economic responsibility and become the shock absorbers for the family. This is the result of globalization which has seeped into the homes making many of the men redundant and jobless. Outsourcing and contractual labour seems to have become in vogue, converting the formal labour into an informal activity. The informal labour does not have a formal employee – employer relationship and hence do not fall under the purview of labour laws. More than 90 % of the women
workers are in the informal economy and get exploited and marginalized. The largest number of the women workers in the informal economy is in the OAME category, where a single woman is responsible for the entire job that is from production to marketing. Such a scenario is generally found among the women in the urban areas. Thus, the urban areas are a common place where women are usually found engaged with OAME activities where their work contribution frequently remains unrecognised.

4.6 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) Discuss the importance of the unorganized sector in Indian economy.
2) Why is it that mostly women are found engaged in the OAME category in the urban slums? Explain.

4.7 REFERENCES


4.8 SUGGESTED READINGS
