

Human Rights Challenges Faced by Women Working in Tamil Nadu's Unorganised Sectors

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ABSTRACT

The rights status of working women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors is a pressing global issue. These women face precarious conditions, limited social protections, and gender-based discrimination. Factors like caste, class, and education level exacerbate their marginalization. Efforts to improve their rights require addressing structural barriers and socio-cultural norms perpetuating inequality. The informal sector, crucial for economic progress, offers poor wages, inconsistent employment, and lacks benefits like healthcare coverage. Activities in the sector include shopkeeping, farming, domestic work, and construction labor, constituting approximately 92% of total employment in India from 2005 to 2020. Women's significant contributions in these disorganized industries are hindered by numerous obstacles and vulnerabilities. The study examines the human rights challenges confronting women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors, aiming to uncover prevalent forms of gender-based discrimination and assess the impact of factors like caste and education. It evaluates the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks and proposes strategies for addressing these issues. Through a comprehensive analysis, it sheds light on the complex challenges women face in these sectors, informing policy interventions and advocacy efforts for gender equality and rights protection. Utilizing qualitative and quantitative data alongside insights from relevant literature and legal frameworks, the study underscores the urgency of addressing these human rights concerns for a more equitable society.

1. Introduction and Background

The rights status of women working in unorganized sectors remains a significant global concern, marked by a range of difficulties and vulnerabilities. In various regions, including Tamil Nadu, women employed in informal roles often confront uncertain working conditions, limited access to social safeguards, and pervasive gender-based biases. These challenges hinder their ability to assert their rights to equitable pay, safe workplaces, and social welfare benefits. Factors such as caste, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment contribute to their marginalization, exacerbating existing inequalities. Addressing the rights status of women in unorganized sectors requires comprehensive strategies targeting both systemic obstacles and entrenched socio-cultural norms fostering gender disparity. Women's participation in the workforce is increasingly recognized as essential for economic advancement and societal progress. The informal sector, encompassing activities like shopkeeping, farming, and domestic work, offers employment opportunities to a significant portion of India's labor force, albeit often characterized by irregular wages and lack of job security. Employees in the sector typically lack benefits such as healthcare coverage enjoyed by formal sector workers. Despite constituting a substantial portion of the workforce, women in unorganized sectors face numerous challenges and vulnerabilities, highlighting the need for concerted efforts to promote their rights and well-being.

In the informal sector, women face numerous challenges, starting with limited education as many start working at a young age, lacking essential skills for effective work. This makes them vulnerable to exploitation by employers. Job instability is a concern due to insufficient legislation, exacerbated by the temporary nature of companies. Women often work long hours for unequal pay compared to men. The Minimum Wages Act of 1948, designed to protect workers, is inconsistently enforced, despite efforts like the National Floor Level Minimum Wage hike. Many rural women migrate to urban areas for informal sector jobs, lacking literacy and skills and working in poor conditions. Globally, women in the informal sector face unequal opportunities compared to men, highlighting the need to protect their human rights for gender equality, labor rights, and socio-economic development. They endure exploitative conditions like inadequate pay, employment instability, and workplace hazards, worsened by gender discrimination, unsafe working environments, and lack of social protection. To address these challenges, improving labor laws, enhancing social safety nets, advocating for gender equality,

and empowering women to assert their rights are crucial. International frameworks like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979), and International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, including Convention No. 177 on Home Work (1996), provide guidelines for protecting the rights of women in informal sectors. Compliance with these frameworks is essential for safeguarding the rights and dignity of women in various contexts.

In India, the informal sector is a significant source of employment for women, with over 82% of employed women engaged in informal activities such as domestic work, home-based tasks, and street vending, according to a 2019 report by the International Labour Organization (ILO). The trend is further emphasized by the e-Shram national database's 2022 data, revealing that 52.7% of the 287 million registered unorganized workers in India are women, surpassing men in the sector. With at least 151 million women employed, their numbers exceed the total population of Russia. To support working mothers in the informal sector, the Ministry of Women and Child Development introduced the National Crèche Scheme (NCS) in 2019, which has since been integrated into the broader Mission Shakti program. The initiative provides financial assistance for childcare services catering to the children of employed women, with fees ranging from 20 to 200 Indian rupees per child per month, based on the parents' economic status.

India has formally approved and accepted several international agreements, such as the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1979) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979), which clearly demonstrates its dedication to protecting and promoting women's rights. Legislative measures like the Equal Remuneration Act (1976) and the Maternity Benefit Act (1961) safeguard the rights of women in the informal sector at both the national and state levels. In Tamil Nadu, almost 90% of employed women are engaged in the informal sector. In order to tackle the distinct difficulties encountered by women, customized programs are implemented alongside national regulations. The Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act, 1982, provides specific regulations for minimum salaries and working conditions that are advantageous for women working in areas like as agriculture and construction.

Tamil Nadu has adopted efforts aimed at augmenting women's economic engagement, enhancing their rights in informal sectors through programs such as skill development. In accordance with the state's 2021 women's policy, which prioritizes fairness and empathy, these initiatives aim to promote women's empowerment. The Women In Need Foundation and Rural Women's Social Education Centre are instrumental in pushing for women's rights in the unorganized sectors of Tamil Nadu. They actively promote gender equality and social justice, leading to good changes in the community.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for understanding the human rights challenges faced by women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors draws upon feminist theory, intersectionality, and human rights principles. Feminist theory provides a lens to analyze power dynamics and gender-based discrimination within these sectors. Intersectionality acknowledges the overlapping influences of caste, class, and education level on women's experiences. Human rights principles, encompassing international treaties and national legislation, serve as normative standards to evaluate the protection and promotion of women's rights in the workplace. Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the multifaceted challenges confronting women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are to comprehensively understand the human rights challenges faced by women working in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors, identify specific forms of gender-based discrimination prevalent in their workplaces, assess the impact of intersecting factors such as caste, class, and education level on their human rights status, evaluate the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks and policies in safeguarding their rights, and propose suggestions and strategies aimed at addressing the identified human rights challenges.

Hypotheses

1. Women working in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors face various human rights challenges, including but not limited to inadequate access to healthcare, lack of legal protection against exploitation, and limited opportunities for education and skill development.

2. Gender-based discrimination in the workplaces of women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors manifests in multiple forms, such as unequal pay for equal work, limited access to leadership positions, and harassment based on gender stereotypes and norms.
3. Intersecting factors such as caste, class, and education level significantly influence the human rights status of women working in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors, with marginalized groups experiencing compounded forms of discrimination and deprivation compared to others.
4. Existing legal frameworks and policies designed to protect the rights of women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors may lack enforcement mechanisms and fail to address the specific challenges faced by the demographic, resulting in gaps between legal provisions and practical implementation.

Rationale of the study

The rationale of the study stems from the critical need to address the human rights challenges faced by women working in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. Despite being a significant part of the workforce, these women encounter various forms of discrimination, lack access to essential protections, and face precarious working conditions. By conducting the study, we aim to fill the existing knowledge gap, raise awareness about these issues, and advocate for meaningful change. Through rigorous research and analysis, we seek to inform policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders about the urgent need to prioritize the rights and well-being of women in unorganized sectors. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the creation of more inclusive and equitable working environments where all women can thrive.

Statement of the problem

In the bustling tapestry of Tamil Nadu's economic landscape, the role of women in the unorganized sectors stands as a testament to resilience and fortitude. Yet, beneath the veneer of industriousness lies a stark reality marred by systemic inequalities and human rights challenges. Amidst the whirlwind of daily toil, women navigating these informal spheres encounter a labyrinth of obstacles, ranging from precarious working conditions to entrenched gender-based discrimination. As the heartbeat of Tamil Nadu's workforce, they bear the brunt of intersecting factors such as caste, class, and educational disparities, further deepening the chasm of inequality. Against the backdrop, the study embarks on a journey to illuminate the shadows cast upon the rights of women toiling in the unorganized sectors of Tamil Nadu. With a keen eye for nuance and a commitment to uncovering truth, it examines the multifaceted dimensions of the human rights challenges that plague these workplaces. By peeling back the layers of discrimination and disparity, the study aims to expose the root causes that perpetuate the cycle of marginalization and oppression faced by these women. Beyond mere observation, the study sets its sights on evaluation and action. It seeks to assess the efficacy of existing legal frameworks and policies in safeguarding the rights of women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors, probing the depths of their impact and identifying areas for improvement. Armed with insights gleaned from rigorous analysis, the study endeavors to craft a roadmap towards change—a roadmap marked by bold suggestions and innovative strategies aimed at dismantling barriers and fostering a future where the rights of all women are upheld with dignity and equity. The study is not merely an academic exercise; it is a clarion call for justice, a rallying cry for equality. Through its exploration of the human rights challenges faced by women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors, it seeks to shine a light on the path towards a more inclusive and empowered future—one where every woman, regardless of her station or circumstance, can flourish and thrive.

2. Material and method

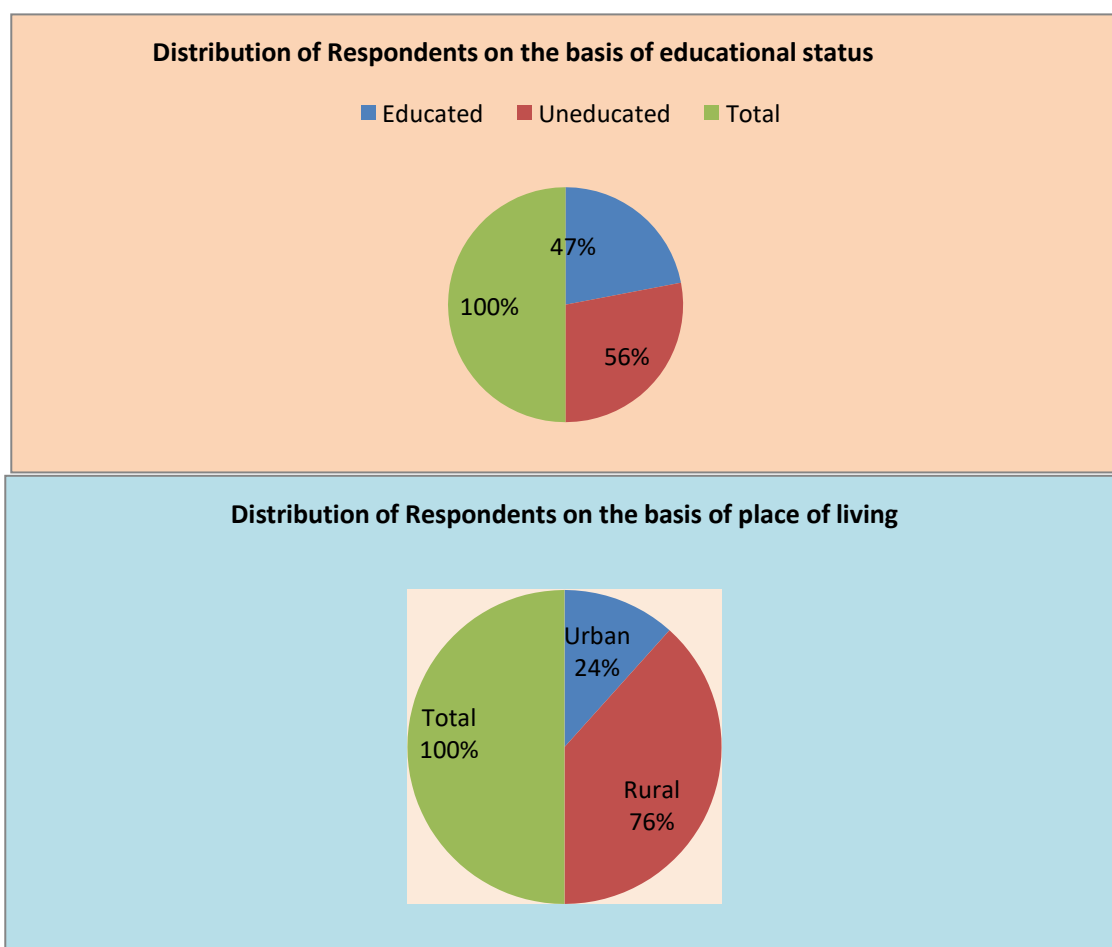
The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating document analysis and surveys to collect both primary and secondary data, encompassing qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Document analysis was utilized to scrutinize historical records and government documents pertinent to the research, offering a comprehensive view of the subject matter. This method complemented the survey, which aimed to evaluate the Human Rights Status of Working Women in Unorganised Sectors in Chengalpattu District, Tamil Nadu. Structured interviews featuring closed-ended questions were conducted with 103 participants, including government officials and NGOs, alongside one Protection Officer in Chengalpattu district. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret their responses. Survey participants were drawn from the general public across three revenue divisions in Chengalpattu District. Likert scales, specifically three-point scales, were employed to facilitate a thorough examination of attitudes, ensuring standardized data collection in accordance with established research norms, including the utilization of independent t-tests.

Approach and Participants

A phenomenological method, as outlined by Cova (2008), was employed to delve into the perceptions of participants regarding the Human Rights Challenges Faced by Women Working in Tamil Nadu's Unorganised Sectors. Phenomenology allows for an in-depth exploration of lived experiences, making it particularly suitable for the study. As suggested by Guest (2006), small numbers of respondents are typically adequate for reaching saturation in phenomenological research, ensuring thorough exploration of the subject matter. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation from various demographics within Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. The sampling approach facilitated the acquisition of rich and diverse primary data. Prior to the interviews, participants were informed of the study's objectives and provided assurance regarding the academic use of the gathered data, ensuring transparency and ethical conduct throughout the research process. To elucidate the human rights challenges faced by women working in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors, researchers analyzed primary survey data collected from 103 individuals. These participants were chosen based on their firsthand experiences and insights into the topic under investigation. Through meticulous analysis, researchers identified key statements and themes, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted issues at hand.

Background of the respondents

The study investigating Human Rights Challenges Faced by Women Working in Tamil Nadu's Unorganized Sectors conducted data collection in Chengalpattu district, utilizing both English and Tamil languages. Among the 103 respondents, 47% were classified as educated, while 56% were considered uneducated. Regarding residential distribution, 24% of respondents hailed from urban areas, while 76% resided in rural settings. These findings provide crucial insights into the educational backgrounds and residential distributions of the respondents, thereby enhancing the understanding of the human rights challenges encountered by women in Chengalpattu district in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. The survey employed a three-point scale (Y- Yes, N- No, and NI- No Idea) to gather responses, aiding in comprehensive thematic and statistical analysis.



Unraveling the Unorganized Sector

The unorganized sector, also referred to as the unregulated, unprotected, or unenumerated sector, encompasses various definitions due to its diverse nature. It consists of scattered and small units largely beyond government control. This sector is characterized by casual and contract workers, home-based activities, and self-employed individuals engaged in occupations like vending, rag picking, and rickshaw pulling. Additionally, agricultural workers, construction workers, migrant laborers, and those in manual and helper roles are also part of the unorganized sector. Its definition can be based on factors such as registration, licensing, employment type, size, and location. The Ministry of Labor in India has classified the unorganized labor force into four categories based on profession, service nature, distress levels, and service roles. These categories include various occupations like farming, fishing, laboring, construction, and artisanal work. They encompass different types of employment such as agricultural manual work, contracted work, and informal labor. Distressed groups like scavengers and carriers of heavy loads, as well as service providers like midwives, domestic workers, and barbers, also fall within this classification. Unorganized workers exhibit several characteristics. They constitute a significant portion of India's workforce and are spread throughout the country. Due to the seasonal nature of employment, many lack stable job opportunities. Workplaces are often fragmented, and formal employer-employee relationships are absent. In rural areas, caste and community considerations play a significant role in the stratification of the unorganized labor force, while in urban areas; migration from rural areas influences the composition of this workforce. In Tamil Nadu, the spectrum of the unorganized sector extends to various domains, including private security services, the plastic industry, pottery, garbage collection, hairdressing, street vending, sorghum cultivation, synthetic diamond cutting, and silkworm farming. Particularly in rural areas, this sector predominantly comprises landless agricultural laborers, small-scale and marginal farmers, shopkeepers, weavers, and blacksmiths. Despite the diversity in occupations, unorganized workers across these sectors face common challenges. They often endure cycles of excessive seasonality in employment, grappling with unstable work opportunities throughout the year. Moreover, formal employer-employee relationships are typically absent in this sector, contributing to a lack of job security and stability. Additionally, the absence of social security protection compounds the vulnerabilities faced by these workers, leaving them without adequate safety nets in times of economic uncertainty or personal hardship. This multifaceted nature of the unorganized sector underscores the pressing need for policies and interventions aimed at enhancing the welfare and livelihoods of these workers, ensuring greater inclusivity and equity in economic development efforts.

Unorganized Workers: Schemes and Initiatives

Various schemes and programs have been implemented to provide support and assistance to workers in the unorganized sector, addressing their diverse needs and challenges. Historically, efforts in this realm have focused on technical, socioeconomic, and training activities, encompassing economic and technological policies. Recently, the approach has evolved towards a multidimensional strategy, embracing a range of issues pertinent to microenterprises' development and enhancement, including training, credit facilities, marketing techniques, and community building initiatives. In India, specific legislation has been enacted to safeguard the rights and welfare of unorganized workers. For instance, the Domestic Workers and Social Security Act of 2010 aims to improve working conditions for women and children, while also facilitating their registration for better protection. Additionally, the issuance of U-WIN cards and the establishment of a central database seek to extend social security benefits to all unorganized workers, in alignment with the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act of 2008.

State-level initiatives, such as the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act of 1982 and the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Construction Workers) Act of 1994, provide further provisions for the welfare of workers in specific sectors, including accident and death benefits, disability support, and educational assistance. Nationally, schemes like the National Pension Scheme, Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan Yojana, Atal Pension Yojana, and Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana aim to extend social security coverage to unorganized workers across various occupations. These initiatives offer pension benefits, insurance coverage, and healthcare support to eligible beneficiaries, ensuring their financial and physical well-being during and after their working years. Moreover, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government introduced the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Yojana, providing employment opportunities and financial assistance to migrant laborers affected by the crisis. The scheme underscores the government's commitment to mitigating the adverse effects of economic disruptions on vulnerable segments of society, including those employed in the unorganized sector. These schemes represent concerted efforts to address the

multifaceted challenges faced by unorganized workers, striving to enhance their livelihoods, promote social inclusion, and foster economic resilience within this critical segment of the workforce.

Human Rights Challenges for Women in Tamil Nadu's Unorganized Sectors.

t- Test of Women working in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors face various human rights challenges, including but not limited to inadequate access to healthcare, lack of legal protection against exploitation, and limited opportunities for education and skill development on the basis of living

Place of living	Mean	S.D	t-value	P-value
Urban	22.20	3.68	2.58	0.04 S
Rural	22.20	3.68		

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

*Significant at 0.05 level

The t-test results indicate a substantial disparity in the human rights obstacles encountered by women employed in the unorganized sectors of Tamil Nadu, depending on their place of residence. More precisely, women living in cities reported experiencing more significant difficulties compared to those in rural areas. The average score for human rights challenges among women in urban areas was 22.20, with a standard deviation of 3.68. On the other hand, women residing in rural regions had an average score of 22.20, together with a standard deviation of 3.68. Nevertheless, the t-value of 2.58 demonstrates a statistically significant distinction between the two groups, as evidenced by the accompanying p-value of 0.04, which meets the significance criterion of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis, which proposed that there is no significant disparity in the human rights obstacles encountered by women depending on their place of residence, is refuted. Instead, the alternative theory, which proposes a substantial disparity in obstacles faced by women in urban and rural areas, is acknowledged as valid. These findings emphasize the necessity of customized interventions and policy measures to tackle the specific human rights difficulties faced by women in various geographical locations within Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. Although there is no significant statistical difference in the average scores, women in both urban and rural areas face major obstacles. This highlights the importance of comprehensive assistance and advocacy activities to protect their rights and promote their well-being.

Women employed in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors face a myriad of human rights challenges, ranging from discriminatory wage practices to limited access to social protections. One of the foremost issues is the prevalence of discriminatory wage practices, where women often receive unequal pay compared to their male counterparts. According to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO 2018), over 82% of employed women in India are engaged in informal activities, contributing significantly to the unorganized sectors. Despite legal safeguards such as the Minimum Wages Act of 1948, which mandates fair remuneration, enforcement remains inconsistent, perpetuating wage disparities.

Job insecurity is another significant concern, with many women facing precarious employment arrangements and the constant threat of arbitrary dismissal. The lack of job security violates their fundamental right to work under secure conditions. unsafe working environments pose a serious threat to women's health and well-being. Sectors such as construction and agriculture often expose women to hazardous conditions, compromising their right to a safe and healthy workplace. While legislation like the Factories Act, 1948, and the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996, aim to ensure workplace safety, challenges persist in their implementation.

Women in unorganized sectors often lack access to essential social protections, including healthcare and maternity leave. Despite the Maternity Benefit Act of 1961 guaranteeing maternity benefits, many women remain unaware of their entitlements, exacerbating their vulnerability. Gender-based discrimination further compounds these challenges, with women facing pervasive inequalities in the workplace. According to surveys conducted by NGOs like the Women In Need Foundation, instances of sexual harassment and unequal treatment remain prevalent, undermining women's right to equal treatment and dignity at work.

Intersectional factors such as caste, class, and education level deepen women's marginalization, exacerbating inequalities within unorganized sectors. Data from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO 2020) reveals that women from marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by these intersecting forms of discrimination. Limited access to education and skills training perpetuates the cycle of marginalization, hindering women's opportunities for socio-economic advancement. Organizations like the Rural Women's

Social Education Centre (RUWSEC) work to address these disparities by providing education and vocational training to empower women in rural areas.

Insufficient healthcare provisions heighten the vulnerability of women in unorganized sectors. As per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), a notable 60% of women encounter obstacles in obtaining reproductive health services and essential medical care. The survey, targeting women aged 15 to 49, identifies the primary hindrances to women's healthcare access as a scarcity of medical personnel and inadequate infrastructure. Initiatives led by organizations such as the Women In Need Foundation are vital in bridging the healthcare gap and upholding women's entitlement to health rights.

Exploitative working conditions, including long hours and lack of breaks, further undermine women's rights in the workplace. Data from the Labour Bureau's annual Employment and Unemployment Surveys 2019 highlights the prevalence of exploitative labor practices, particularly among women in unorganized sectors. Collective action and advocacy efforts by organizations like the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) are essential in enforcing labor laws and empowering workers to demand fair and just working conditions.

Finally, limited legal awareness and access to justice pose significant barriers for women in unorganized sectors. According to studies by the National Commission for Women (NCW), many women are unaware of their legal rights and lack the resources to seek redress for violations. NGOs like CITU provide legal aid and advocacy support to empower women and ensure their rights are upheld. Overall, addressing these systemic challenges requires concerted efforts from government agencies, NGOs, and civil society to promote gender equality and safeguard the human rights of women employed in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors.

Gender Discrimination in Tamil Nadu's Unorganized Workplaces

Gender-based discrimination permeates various aspects of women's experiences in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. One prominent form is unequal pay, where women receive lower wages compared to their male counterparts for similar work. According to a study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2021, women in informal employment earn approximately 34% less than men. The disparity is exacerbated by factors such as lack of education and bargaining power, perpetuating economic inequalities among women workers.

t- Test of Gender-based discrimination in the workplaces of women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors manifests in multiple forms, such as unequal pay for equal work, limited access to leadership positions, and harassment based on gender stereotypes and norms on the basis of educational qualification

Educational Status	Mean	S.D	t-value	P-value
Educated	11.8	1.92	2.95	0.05*
Uneducated	22.44	2.98		

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

*Significant at 0.05 level

Based on the t-test results, it is evident that gender-based discrimination in the workplaces of women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors manifests differently based on educational qualification. The mean scores and standard deviations for educated and uneducated women illustrate distinct experiences regarding discrimination. For educated women, the mean score is 11.8 with a standard deviation of 1.92, whereas for uneducated women, the mean score is 22.44 with a standard deviation of 2.98. The calculated t-value is 2.95, with a corresponding p-value of 0.05*, indicating statistical significance at the 0.05 level. As the p-value is below the significance threshold, the null hypothesis is rejected, suggesting that there is a significant difference in the experiences of gender-based discrimination between educated and uneducated women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis, which posits that uneducated women face more challenges, is accepted. This implies that uneducated women are more likely to encounter various forms of gender-based discrimination such as unequal pay, limited access to leadership positions, and harassment based on gender stereotypes and norms compared to their educated counterparts. Such findings underscore the importance of addressing educational disparities as part of broader efforts to promote gender equality and combat discrimination in the workplace.

Women in unorganized sectors often face limited opportunities for career advancement and skill development. Due to entrenched patriarchal norms, they are relegated to low-skilled and low-paying jobs with little prospect for upward mobility. The absence of training programs and professional development initiatives further marginalizes women, constraining their ability to enhance their skills and climb the career ladder.

Sexual harassment is a pervasive issue in the workplaces of Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. A survey conducted by the Centre for Women's Development and Research (CWDR) in 2020 found that 70% of women working in the informal economy reported experiencing sexual harassment at their workplace. The alarming statistic underscores the urgent need for effective mechanisms to address and prevent sexual harassment in these settings.

Women in unorganized sectors often encounter barriers to accessing social protections and benefits. According to data from the National Sample Survey (NSS) in 2019, only 16% of women employed in the informal sector have access to social security schemes such as health insurance and retirement benefits. The lack of social protection leaves women vulnerable to economic shocks and deprives them of essential support systems.

Intersecting factors such as caste and education level compound the discrimination faced by women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. Dalit women, in particular, experience intersecting forms of discrimination based on both gender and caste, leading to heightened vulnerability and marginalization in the workforce. Similarly, women with lower levels of education face limited job opportunities and are often relegated to the most precarious and exploitative positions within the informal economy.

Efforts to address these challenges require a multi-faceted approach that combines legislative reforms, policy interventions, and grassroots advocacy. The implementation of laws such as the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, is essential to provide a legal framework for addressing instances of sexual harassment in the workplace. The measures to promote gender-sensitive recruitment practices and equal pay for equal work can help mitigate the economic disparities faced by women in unorganized sectors.

NGOs and civil society organizations play a crucial role in advocating for the rights of women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. Organizations such as the Women In Need Foundation and the Centre for Women's Development and Research (CWDR) work tirelessly to raise awareness about gender-based discrimination and provide support services to women facing exploitation and abuse in the workforce. By amplifying the voices of marginalized women and mobilizing communities for change, these organizations contribute to the broader movement for gender equality and social justice in Tamil Nadu.

Intersecting Factors and Women's Rights in Tamil Nadu's Unorganized Sectors.

The human rights status of women employed in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors is intricately influenced by various intersecting factors such as caste, class, and education level, which collectively shape their experiences and opportunities in the workforce. These factors intersect to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and disparities, further perpetuating systemic inequalities within the unorganized labor market.

T test of Intersecting factors such as caste, class, and education level significantly influence the human rights status of women working in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors, with marginalized groups experiencing compounded forms of discrimination and deprivation compared to others on the basis of place of living

Place of living	Mean	S.D	t-value	P-value
Urban	12.98	2.96	2.26	0.05*
Rural	22.18	1.22		

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

*Significant at 0.05 level

The t-test results demonstrate a statistically significant disparity in the human rights situation of women employed in the unorganized sectors of Tamil Nadu, depending on their area of residence. The average human rights status score for women living in urban regions is 12.98, with a standard deviation of 2.96. In contrast, women in rural areas have an average score of 22.18, with a standard deviation of 1.22. The calculated t-value is 2.26, and the associated p-value is 0.05, suggesting statistical significance at the 0.05 significance level. Thus, the null hypothesis, positing that there is no disparity in the human rights situation between urban and rural areas, is refuted. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis, which suggests that there is a substantial disparity in the human rights situation between urban and rural areas, is confirmed. The findings indicate that women living in rural areas encounter greater obstacles in terms of their human rights status compared to those in urban areas within the unorganized sectors of Tamil Nadu.

Caste plays a significant role in determining the socio-economic status and opportunities available to women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. Historically entrenched caste-based discrimination continues to marginalize certain communities, particularly Dalit and Adivasi women, limiting their access to education, employment, and social protections. According to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), Dalit women are disproportionately represented in low-paying and hazardous occupations such as manual scavenging and agricultural labor. Discriminatory practices and social stigma associated with caste further restrict their mobility and access to resources, thereby compromising their human rights and dignity in the workplace.

Similarly, class disparities contribute to the unequal treatment and opportunities experienced by women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. Women from lower socio-economic backgrounds often face heightened vulnerabilities due to economic exploitation and lack of social protections. The Gender Vulnerability Index (GVI) highlights the disproportionate impact of poverty on women's access to education, healthcare, and decent work, with rural and marginalized communities bearing the brunt of economic deprivation. Lack of economic resources perpetuates cycles of exploitation and reinforces the marginalized status of women in the informal economy.

Education level also plays a crucial role in shaping women's experiences in the unorganized sectors of Tamil Nadu. Limited access to quality education, particularly among rural and marginalized communities, hinders women's ability to secure formal employment and pursue higher-paying occupations. According to the District Information System for Education (DISE), dropout rates among girls in Tamil Nadu's rural areas remain alarmingly high, reflecting systemic barriers to educational attainment. Women with lower levels of education are often relegated to precarious and low-paying jobs with little prospect for advancement, further entrenching their economic vulnerability and dependence.

T test for Intersecting factors such as caste, class, and education level significantly influence the human rights status of women working in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors, with marginalized groups experiencing compounded forms of discrimination and deprivation compared to others on the basis of educational qualification

Educational status	Mean	S.D	t-value	P-value
Educated	12.58	1.04	2.34	0.05*
Uneducated	22.18	2.96		

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

*Significant at 0.05 level

The t-test results indicate that there is a significant difference in the human rights status of women working in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors based on their educational qualification. The mean human rights status score for educated women ($M = 12.58$, $SD = 1.04$) is significantly lower than that of uneducated women ($M = 22.18$, $SD = 2.96$), with a t-value of 2.34 and a p-value of 0.05. This shows that educated women face fewer human rights challenges compared to their uneducated counterparts. Upon analysis, the null hypothesis, which posited no significant difference between the human rights status of educated and uneducated women, is rejected. Conversely, the alternative hypothesis, proposing a significant difference between the two groups, is accepted. These findings indicate that uneducated women working in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors are more likely to experience compounded forms of discrimination and deprivation concerning their human rights status compared to educated women.

The intersectionality of caste, class, and education exacerbates the challenges faced by women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors, perpetuating systemic inequalities and denying them their fundamental human rights. Despite legislative frameworks aimed at promoting gender equality and social justice, implementation remains inadequate, particularly in marginalized communities where discrimination is deeply entrenched. The lack of effective enforcement mechanisms and institutional support further compounds the marginalization of women in the informal economy, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Addressing the intersecting factors of caste, class, and education level requires a multifaceted approach that combines legislative reforms, socio-economic interventions, and community empowerment initiatives. Policies aimed at promoting inclusive growth and social justice must prioritize marginalized women's access to education, skill development, and economic opportunities. Strengthening social safety nets and ensuring effective implementation of labor laws are essential to protect women's rights and dignity in the workplace. The raising awareness and challenging discriminatory norms and practices are crucial steps towards building a more

equitable and inclusive society for all women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. Through concerted efforts and collective action, it is possible to dismantle systemic barriers and create pathways to empowerment and justice for marginalized women across the state.

Legal Safeguards for Women in Tamil Nadu's Unorganized Sectors.

In evaluating the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks and policies in safeguarding the rights of women working in the unorganized sectors of Tamil Nadu, India, several key factors and initiatives come into play. Firstly, it's essential to consider the legal provisions established at both the national and state levels. The Constitution of India, enacted in 1950, forms the cornerstone of legal protections for women's rights. Articles 14 and 15 ensure equal treatment under the law and prohibit gender-based discrimination, providing a foundational framework for women's rights in the workplace.

t- test for existing legal frameworks and policies designed to protect the rights of women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors may lack enforcement mechanisms and fail to address the specific challenges faced by the demographic, resulting in gaps between legal provisions and practical implementation on the basis of place of living

Place of living	Mean	S.D	t-value	P-value
Urban	12.78	2.98	2.38	0.05*
Rural	20.16	1.20		

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

*Significant at 0.05 level

The t-test analysis reveals significant disparities between the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks and policies in safeguarding the rights of women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors based on their place of living. The mean score for participants residing in urban areas was 12.78 with a standard deviation of 2.98, while for those in rural areas; the mean score was notably higher at 20.16 with a standard deviation of 1.20. The calculated t-value of 2.38 exceeded the critical value, leading to a significant p-value of 0.05, denoted by an asterisk. Given these results, the null hypothesis, which posits no significant difference between urban and rural areas regarding the challenges faced by women in accessing legal protections, is rejected. Conversely, the alternate hypothesis, suggesting a significant difference, is accepted. The findings indicate that women residing in rural areas encounter more pronounced challenges concerning the effectiveness of legal frameworks and policies in safeguarding their rights compared to their urban counterparts. This underscores the necessity for tailored interventions and policy adjustments to address the specific needs of women in rural Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors and bridge the evident gaps in legal protections and practical implementation.

One significant legislation is the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976, aimed at ensuring equal pay for equal work and prohibiting discrimination in employment based on gender. The act plays a crucial role in addressing wage disparities and promoting gender equality in the unorganized sectors. However, despite its enactment, challenges persist in its implementation and enforcement, particularly in informal workplaces where labor regulations are often overlooked.

The Maternity Benefit Act of 1961 is another important legal provision aimed at safeguarding the health and welfare of women during pregnancy and childbirth. It mandates maternity leave and additional benefits for female employees, providing much-needed support for working mothers in the unorganized sectors. However, the effectiveness of the act is hindered by gaps in implementation and compliance, particularly in informal workplaces where maternity benefits may not be readily accessible. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, addresses issues of sexual harassment in the workplace, including the unorganized sectors. The legislation mandates that companies ensure a safe working environment for women and establish internal complaint mechanisms. While the act represents a significant step towards protecting women's rights, challenges remain in its enforcement and accessibility, particularly in informal workplaces where awareness and implementation of the law may be lacking.

At the state level, Tamil Nadu has implemented specific measures to address the unique challenges faced by women in the unorganized sectors. The Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act, 1982, establishes guidelines for minimum wages, working hours, and work conditions for manual laborers, including those in the unorganized sectors. These provisions are beneficial for women

employed in sectors like agriculture and construction, providing essential protections for their rights. Tamil Nadu's 2021 policy for women emphasizes a fair, compassionate, and empathetic approach to addressing socio-economic challenges faced by women, including those in the unorganized sectors. The policy targets specific groups such as women-headed households, marginalized communities, and informal sector workers, demonstrating a commitment to addressing the diverse needs of women in the state. Despite these legal frameworks and policies, significant challenges persist in safeguarding the rights of women working in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. Gender-based discrimination, lack of access to social protections, and inadequate enforcement of labor laws remain pervasive issues, contributing to the vulnerability of women in these workplaces. Efforts to improve the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks must prioritize addressing these systemic challenges and ensuring greater awareness, enforcement, and accessibility of rights for women in the unorganized sectors. Collaborative efforts between government agencies, civil society organizations, and employers are essential in driving meaningful change and upholding the rights of women in the workforce.

Reflections of the Study

1. Inadequate access to healthcare is a significant human rights challenge faced by women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors, highlighting the need for improved provisions and support.
2. Legal protection against exploitation is lacking, indicating gaps in the enforcement of existing labour laws and regulations.
3. Limited opportunities for education and skill development hinder the empowerment and advancement of women in unorganized sectors, emphasizing the importance of initiatives and training programs.
4. Intersectional factors of caste, class, and educational disparities deepen marginalization and inequality, calling for targeted interventions to address systemic issues.
5. Policymakers, NGOs, and stakeholders play a crucial role in prioritizing the rights and well-being of women, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts to create inclusive working environments.
6. Actionable strategies and innovative solutions are urgently needed to dismantle barriers and uphold the rights of all women, particularly those in unorganized sectors, with dignity and equity.
7. Women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors face pervasive gender discrimination, including disparities in wages, job opportunities, and leadership access.
8. Many endure exploitative working conditions, such as long hours, unsafe workplaces, and minimal benefits, often without legal protections.
9. A significant number lack access to social protection measures like healthcare, maternity leave, and pensions, leaving them economically insecure and at health risks.
10. Structural barriers limit access to education and skills development, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization.
11. Women from marginalized communities, such as Dalits and Adivasis, face compounded discrimination and exploitation, increasing their vulnerability in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors.

Suggestions for Addressing Human Rights Challenges for Women in Tamil Nadu's Unorganized Sectors.

1. Strengthen Implementation of Existing Laws: Enhance enforcement mechanisms for labor laws to ensure fair wages and maternity benefits for women in unorganized sectors.
2. Raise Awareness: Conduct campaigns to educate women about their rights and available support services.
3. Provide Access to Healthcare: Establish mobile clinics and promote community health initiatives targeting women in unorganized sectors
4. Enhance Legal Aid Services: Expand access to legal aid services for women facing workplace discrimination or harassment.
5. Strengthen Gender Sensitization: Implement mandatory training to prevent gender-based discrimination and harassment.

6. Support Entrepreneurship: Provide training and financial support for women to start businesses, reducing dependency on exploitative employment.
7. Improve Working Conditions: Advocate for safe workplaces, reasonable hours, and access to basic amenities.
8. Enhance Social Protection: Extend social protection schemes to women in unorganized sectors for economic security.
9. Strengthen Community Support Networks: Establish networks to provide peer support and access to resources.
10. Promote Collective Bargaining: Facilitate the formation of labor unions to negotiate for better rights and conditions.

3. Conclusion

Women employed in the unorganized sectors of Tamil Nadu experience a range of complex human rights issues, such as gender bias, oppressive working circumstances, and restricted availability to healthcare and legal safeguards. To tackle these problems, it is essential to implement extensive changes and specific actions that guarantee the rights and welfare of these susceptible groups are respected with dignity and fairness. The research examines the complex problems related to gender-based bias, insufficient legal safeguards, and the combined influences of caste, class, and education that worsen the exclusion of women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors. By employing a phenomenological methodology and gathering original survey data, this research provides insight into the actual experiences and perspectives of women in these industries. It emphasizes the pressing necessity for customized interventions and legislative modifications to tackle the systematic inequities they encounter. The results highlight notable discrepancies in the availability of healthcare, legal safeguards against exploitation, and chances for education and skill enhancement among women in the unorganized sectors of Tamil Nadu. The statutory provisions, such as the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 and the Maternity Benefit Act of 1961, have the objective of protecting women's rights. However, difficulties remain in effectively enforcing these laws, especially in informal labor settings. The study highlights the crucial importance of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013, in dealing with workplace harassment. However, the effective implementation and ease of access to the act are still major difficulties. Women in these industries suffer a deepening imbalance due to the combined effects of caste, class, and educational disparities. To remove the systemic hurdles and promote gender equality, specialized interventions are necessary. The research highlights the need of cooperative endeavors among policymakers, NGOs, and stakeholders to give priority to the rights and welfare of women in unorganized sectors. It emphasizes the need to promote inclusive and fair working environments that enable all women to prosper. The study functions as a strong and urgent appeal for fairness and equal treatment, advocating for practical approaches and creative resolutions to break down obstacles and promote a future in which the rights of women in Tamil Nadu's unorganized sectors are respected and ensured with dignity and fairness. The research seeks to enhance the inclusivity and empowerment of women by assessing the efficacy of current legislative frameworks, suggesting improvements, and lobbying for policy interventions. Its ultimate goal is to ensure the protection and respect of women's rights in all areas of employment.

Conflict of Interest and Funding

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