

Women's Empowerment in the Unorganized Sector with Special Reference to:

A Study on Women Dustbin Bag Sellers in the Kolhapur Region

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Abstract:

This study explores the lives of women engaged in the unorganized sector as dustbin bag sellers in the Kolhapur region, focusing on their socio-economic challenges, daily routines, and empowerment. Despite being a largely overlooked occupation, these women play a significant role in their households and communities. Through primary data collection, including interviews and observational methods, the research examines their financial independence, decision-making capabilities, and the impact of government schemes like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Mukhyamantri Mazi Ladki Bahin Yojana.

The findings reveal that these women earn approximately Rs. 300 per day, which is barely sufficient for their daily needs, and face challenges such as seasonal income fluctuations and lack of savings. However, their work fosters a sense of empowerment, enabling them to contribute to household decisions and gain social recognition within their communities. The study highlights the need for inclusive policies, such as integrating them into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and providing alternative livelihood opportunities, to enhance their economic stability and overall well-being.

By addressing these issues, the research underscores the potential for transformative change in the informal sector, contributing to the broader theme of women empowerment and inclusive development.



Introduction:

Among the unorganized occupations, the selling of dustbin bags stands out as a small yet significant trade that remains largely unexplored in academic and socio-economic discourse. This research delves into the lives of women engaged in this occupation, shedding light on their daily routines, challenges, and the socio-economic dynamics that shape their existence. By examining their struggles, empowerment, and the role of government support, this study aims to highlight the broader implications of their work on women's rights and economic inclusion in the informal sector. Through a focus on women dustbin bag sellers in Kolhapur, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of their resilience and the transformative potential of targeted interventions in the unorganized workforce.

Statement of the Problem:

It aims to understand how this unorganized occupation impacts their financial independence, decision-making, and overall quality of life.

Objectives:

- To understand the daily work routine of women dustbin bag sellers.
- To examine the financial viability of this occupation.
- To analyse whether the profits earned are sufficient for a sustainable livelihood.
- To investigate the role of migration in this sector.
- To explore the government schemes available and their effectiveness in supporting these women.
- To study the impact of this work on their personal and family lives.
- To assess whether this occupation empowers women economically and socially.

Hypothesis:

This study suggests that women working in the informal sector, especially those selling dustbin bags in the Kolhapur region, face many socio-economic challenges because they belong to marginalized groups. However, their work in this field helps empower them by giving them financial independence, a voice in household decisions, and respect in their communities. The research also believes that providing better access to government programs and creating new job opportunities can improve their financial stability and overall quality of life. This, in turn, can support gender equality and inclusive growth in the informal sector.

Limitations:

This research is geographically limited to the Kolhapur region, focusing exclusively on women dustbin bag sellers in this area. As a result, the findings may not be universally applicable to other regions or contexts, where socio-economic conditions, cultural dynamics, and government policies might differ. Additionally, the reliance on primary data through interviews and observations, while providing depth, may introduce subjective biases. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the results and applying them to broader contexts.

Methodology:

Given the lack of existing literature or published studies on women engaged in the unorganized sector of dustbin bag selling, this research relies exclusively on primary data collection. To gain an in-depth understanding of their lives, challenges, and socio-economic conditions, the study employs a qualitative approach centered on interviews and observational methods.

The data collection process involved direct interactions with women dustbin bag sellers, including visits to their residences and workplaces. Structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather insights into their daily routines, income patterns, challenges, and aspirations. Additionally, observational studies were carried out to analyse their working environments, customer interactions, and the broader socio-economic context in which they operate. This hands-on approach ensured the collection of authentic, firsthand data, providing a comprehensive perspective on their lived experiences in the informal sector.

What is Unorganised Sector?

“The term ‘Unorganized Worker’ has been defined under the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, as a home based worker, self-employed worker or a wage worker in the unorganized sector and includes a worker in the organized sector who is not covered by any of the

Acts mentioned in Schedule-II of Act i.e. the Employee's Compensation Act, 1923 (3 of 1923), the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 (14 of 1947), the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948 (34 of 1948), the Employees Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provision Act, 1952 (19 of 1952), the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (53 of 1961) and the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972 (39 of 1972).” Ref¹

“As we have said earlier, in India, the terms ‘unorganised sector’ and ‘informal sector’ are used interchangeably in research literature. The term ‘unorganised sector’ is used commonly in all official records and analyses. It is defined as the residual of the organised sector. The term ‘organised’ is generally used when we refer to enterprises or employees in which 10 or more employees work together. The various methods employed in estimating data on employment in the organised sector by the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), Employment Market Information (EMI) programme, etc.,” Ref²

This highlights the structural exclusion of unorganized workers from formal labour protections, emphasizing the need for inclusive policies to address their socio-economic vulnerabilities and ensure equitable access to social security and labour rights.

Women in unorganised Sector.

The Indian Constitution grants women equal rights, ensuring their participation in social, political, and economic spheres. The principles of gender equality are embedded in the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles. India has also ratified international conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, to uphold women's rights. Despite constituting nearly half of the global population, women in India often face a paradoxical reality, sometimes revered as goddesses, yet frequently treated as subordinates. This disparity is particularly pronounced for women workers, especially those in the unorganized sector, who face significant disadvantages. The challenges faced by women workers reflect the broader status of labour in India, spanning both organized and unorganized sectors. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, considering economic, political, psychological, sociological, and legal dimensions. Ref³ (Bhoi, 2015) Ref⁴

Therefore, this study focuses on the often-overlooked occupation of dustbin bag sellers in the Kolhapur region. It aims to explore their daily lives, challenges, and how they navigate their socio-economic realities, shedding light on their struggles and resilience in the unorganized sector. The following section provides a detailed analysis of the primary data collected through interviews conducted for this study.

1. Demographic Profile of Women Dustbin Bag Sellers

The women engaged in selling dustbin bags are primarily from marginalized communities, with most being married and part of joint families. The majority are in the age group of 25-30 years, and while older generations lack formal education, the younger generation is now accessing educational opportunities. These women belong to a close-knit community that has been residing in Kolhapur for over 25 years, having migrated from Rajasthan (Community language is Rajputi) generations ago. They live in government-provided housing and have integrated well into the local culture, speaking fluent Marathi.

2. Daily Routine and Work Dynamics

They source their products from Pune, transporting them via local buses with additional courier charges. Their selling spots include Bakeries near Rajarampuri, Mahadwar Road, Gardens,

chawks, and khau gallis (food streets). They work alongside family members, as marriages often occur within their community, reinforcing familial and occupational ties. Despite the long hours, their work is a collective effort, with family members supporting each other.

3. Challenges in the Informal Sector

The women face several challenges, including high courier charges for transporting dustbin bags and reliance on daily earnings for survival. Unlike formal sectors, there is no concept of savings, as their income is entirely consumed by daily needs. Seasonal fluctuations in income further exacerbate their financial instability. However, they report no significant harassment or safety concerns, and they have access to basic facilities like clean water and toilets at their community residences.

4. Income and Financial Dependence

On average, these women earn around Rs. 300 per day, which is barely sufficient to meet their daily needs. They do not save any portion of their earnings, relying entirely on daily income for sustenance. Additional income sources include their husbands working as ear cleaners and mothers-in-law making and ropes. During medical emergencies, they rely on government hospitals and schemes like Aadhaar and ration cards for healthcare and food security.

5. Empowerment and Decision-Making

Despite the modest income, these women feel a sense of financial independence and satisfaction from their work. They play a significant role in household decision-making, particularly in matters related to children's education and daily expenses. Their work has boosted their confidence and social standing within their community, although they remain underconfident about their broader societal recognition. Family support is strong, with in-laws actively encouraging their work.

6. Migration and Social Integration

Having lived in Kolhapur for generations, these women consider themselves locals rather than migrants. They face minimal discrimination, although their lifestyle sometimes leads to being perceived as outsiders by the local population. Government housing schemes have provided them with stability, and they have adapted well to the local language and culture. Migration has not significantly impacted their work or income, as they have established a steady routine over the years.

7. Government Schemes and Support

The women are aware of and benefit from various government schemes, including Pradhan Mantri - Awas Yojna (housing), Mukhyamantri - Mazi Ladki Bahin Yojna, and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (Ration card). These schemes have provided them with housing, financial aid, and food security. However, they express a desire for more substantial support, such as opportunities for alternative livelihoods that offer stable income and better living conditions.

8. Aspirations and Broader Implications

They are open to switching to other occupations if provided with stable earning opportunities. Their primary desire is to transition from the uncertainty of daily earnings to a more secure and sustainable livelihood. They also hope for improvements in the informal sector, such as better work conditions and more government support for small-scale businesses.

Results/Findings:

This research concludes that women dustbin bag sellers, operating in an often ignored and unrecognized sector, face significant challenges, including limited income growth and societal marginalization. Despite earning a modest Rs. 300 per day, these women demonstrate resilience and a desire for improvement. The study highlights the need for inclusive discussions and targeted interventions, such as integrating them into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and government schemes, to foster their socio-economic development.

Additionally, societal acceptance as locals, rather than migrants, is crucial for their empowerment. It is imperative that their struggles and potential for growth are acknowledged and addressed through collective efforts by society and the government. Such initiatives can significantly contribute to the broader theme of women empowerment, enabling these women to break free from the cycle of stagnant earnings and achieve sustainable progress.

Conclusions:

The lives of women dustbin bag sellers reflect both resilience and vulnerability. While they have carved out a niche for themselves in the informal sector, their daily struggles highlight the need for systemic support. Government schemes have provided some relief, but more targeted interventions are required to uplift these women and their families. Their aspirations for education and stable livelihoods underscore the potential for transformative change, provided they receive adequate resources and opportunities.

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URLs

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