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IDENTIFYING THE KEY PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKING WOMEN IN URBAN AREAS OF ODISHA: A DATA-DRIVEN ANALYSIS

Sampurna Nanda

"Empowering women is empowering the future; data reveals the path that reforms must follow." — Sampurna Nanda

ABSTRACT

Women's participation in the workforce is vital for socio-economic progress, yet they encounter numerous challenges that affect their well-being and job satisfaction. This study exclusively investigates the problems and challenges faced by women workers from Cuttack—135 from the unorganized sector and 15 from the organized sector—and proposes evidence-based recommendations to improve working conditions and societal support structures. The findings highlight the importance of personal resilience, family support, and peer networks in managing workplace stress and adversity. The study concludes with tailored recommendations for policymakers, organizations, and community stakeholders to foster an inclusive and supportive environment for working women.

INTRODUCTION

Working women in India, especially in cities scattered all over in Odisha, navigate complex social, economic, and cultural landscapes. Women in the organized sector benefit from structured support mechanisms, but those in the unorganized sector remain exposed to instability, low wages, and exploitation. This article focuses exclusively on the key problems and challenges faced by working women in organized and unorganized sectors in Cuttack city.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to identify the key problems and challenges faced by working women in Cuttack city.

METHODOLOGY

A structured questionnaire survey was conducted among 150 women—135 from the unorganized sector and 15 from the organized sector in Cuttack city. Quantitative data analysis was used to derive insights and formulate relevant recommendations.

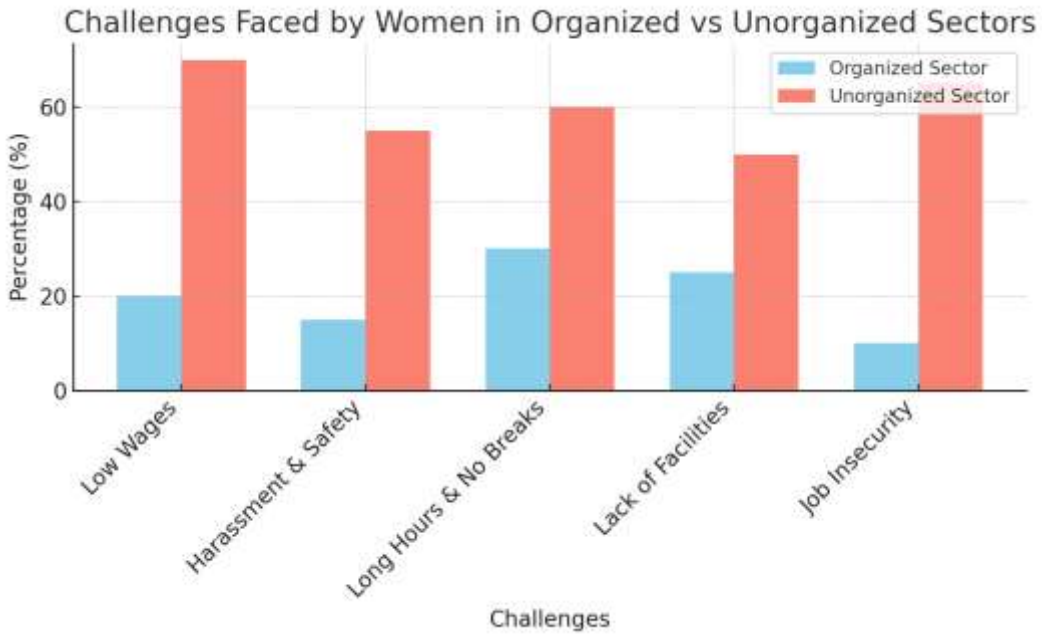
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The study encompassed a diverse group of 150 working women from Cuttack, including 135 from the unorganized sector and 15 from the organized sector. Quantitative analysis of their responses revealed a sharp disparity in working conditions, rights awareness, and coping mechanisms between the two groups.

Key Findings:

- Low Wages: 70% of women in the unorganized sector cited inadequate wages as a major issue, compared to only 20% in the organized sector.
- Harassment and Safety: 55% of women in the unorganized sector reported experiencing verbal or physical harassment, while only 15% of women in the organized sector faced similar issues.
- Long Working Hours and No Breaks: 60% of unorganized sector women complained of extended working hours with no formal break time, while the same concern was reported by 30% in the organized sector.
- Lack of Facilities: Half of the women in the unorganized sector highlighted lack of toilets, resting areas, and maternity leave, while 25% in the organized sector reported inadequate facilities.
- Job Insecurity: 65% of unorganized sector women felt insecure about their job continuity; this was a concern for only 10% in the organized sector.

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DISCUSSION

The comparative data analysis underscores stark inequalities between women in the organized and unorganized sectors. While the former benefit from some level of institutional protection, the latter struggle with a lack of fundamental rights and work benefits.

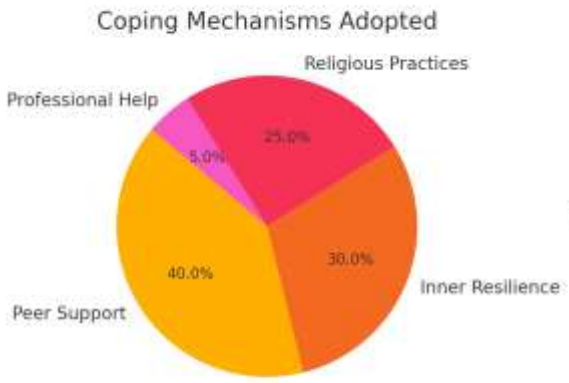
The unorganized sector, constituting the majority of respondents, revealed a disturbing pattern of neglect. Women face low wages, inconsistent working hours, and the absence of basic amenities. Many also deal with frequent harassment and virtually no legal redressal mechanisms. The absence of awareness regarding rights and entitlements further exacerbates their vulnerability.

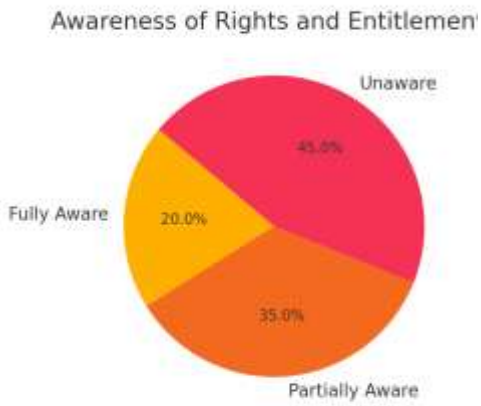
Conversely, although organized sector women fared better, they were not entirely free from workplace issues. Harassment, long hours, and a lack of adequate rest still emerged as concerns. However, access to grievance mechanisms and better awareness levels helped mitigate the impact of such challenges.

Another crucial finding was the coping mechanisms adopted by women. Many relied heavily on peer support, inner resilience, or religious and cultural practices for stress management. However, professional mental health support was almost entirely missing from their environment.

This analysis validates the need for sector-specific policies that address not just economic empowerment, but also safety, security, and mental well-being. Empowerment cannot be achieved through employment alone—it requires institutional support, community awareness, and systemic reform.

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Recommendations

1. Regular organization of workshops and seminars on women empowerment in collaboration with NGOs and government bodies.
2. Training camps on self-defense techniques to handle physical assaults.
3. Easy access to police helplines and emergency services.
4. Awareness programs on mental health to help women manage personal and professional stress.
5. Provision of recreational and interactive sessions at workplaces for stress relief.
6. Enhanced legal literacy programs focused on rights and entitlements.
7. Implementation of flexible working hours and childcare facilities for working mothers.
8. Ensuring social security coverage and insurance schemes for unorganized sector workers.

CONCLUSION

The study underscores the resilience and adaptability of working women in Cuttack. While self-driven coping mechanisms are prevalent, comprehensive institutional support is essential to ensure long-term well-being and professional growth. A multi-level policy approach encompassing training, safety, legal rights, and social security is critical to achieving these objectives.

Final Thought

"When women rise above challenges with strength and grace, they shape not only their destiny but the destiny of the nation." — Sampurna Nanda

Empowered She Rises (a poem by SAMPURNA NANDA)

With courage in heart and fire in soul,
She breaks the chains, she claims her goal.
In fields and firms, in shops and schools,
She rewrites fate, defies old rules.
No role-conflict shall dim her flame,
She knows her worth, she plays no game.
She balances life with thoughtful grace,
And lifts her voice to claim her place.
Let laws be fair and minds be wide,
For she's no shadow, she's the stride.
With wings of choice and sky so vast,
She soars beyond the limits cast.