

# A Study on the Plight of Unorganised Women Workers in the Textile Industry of Tirupur District

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## ABSTRACT

Unorganised women workers in the textile industry of Tirupur, Tamil Nadu, play a vital role in the local economy but face several socio-economic and workplace challenges. This study investigates the socio-economic conditions, health and safety concerns, legal awareness, and access to skill development opportunities for these workers. Using a descriptive and quantitative research approach, data was collected from 150 workers through structured questionnaires. The study explores key factors such as age, education, marital status, and income and how they impact perceptions regarding wages, job security, safety, and overall work conditions. The findings reveal that most workers earn low wages, with a large portion lacking formal education, restricting their career opportunities. While many report job security, fair wages, and respect in the workplace, gaps remain in terms of legal knowledge and safety measures. Chi-square tests suggest that age plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of working conditions, while education and income have little impact. The study offers recommendations for improving educational access, enhancing wage structures, ensuring better workplace safety, raising legal awareness, and addressing gender disparities within the industry.

**Keywords:** Unorganised workers, textile industry, Tirupur

## INTRODUCTION

The textile industry is one of the most significant sectors contributing to India's economy, employing millions, particularly in regions like the Tirupur district, Tamil Nadu. It is also called the "Knitwear Capital of India." Tirupur has experienced rapid industrial growth, predominantly driven by small and medium textile units. Within this industrial landscape, women constitute a substantial portion of the unorganised workforce, engaging in various labor-intensive activities such as knitting, stitching, dyeing, and packing. Despite their critical role, these women workers often remain marginalized, lacking formal employment contracts, social security benefits, and adequate workplace protections.

The unorganised nature of employment in the textile sector exposes women workers to several vulnerabilities, including poor working conditions, low wages, job insecurity, and limited access to healthcare and education. These challenges are compounded by socio-cultural factors that restrict their upward mobility and reinforce gender inequalities. As a result, unorganised women workers in Tirupur face a precarious existence, struggling to balance economic necessity with their social and familial responsibilities.

This study aims to investigate the multifaceted plight of unorganised women workers in the Tirupur textile industry, focusing on their economic conditions, health and safety issues, social challenges, legal awareness, and opportunities for skill development. By providing an in-depth analysis of their lived experiences, this research seeks to highlight the gaps in policy implementation and advocate for inclusive strategies that enhance their welfare and empowerment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Aspect	Findings from Different Studies	Comparison and Insights
<b>Unorganised Sector Employment</b>	NCEUS (2006) and Breman (1996) highlight job insecurity and lack of benefits; Chen (2012) adds poor working conditions as a core issue.	An agreement that unorganised sector workers face precarious employment, lacking formal protections and benefits.
<b>Women Workers in the Textile Industry</b>	Rao (2011) and Selvam & Rajendran (2015) emphasise women's dominant presence in labour-intensive textile work; Kabeer (2010) discusses wage discrimination and insecurity; Dasgupta (2013) focuses on harassment.	All agree that women form the backbone of textile labour but face systemic gender-based inequities and unsafe environments.
<b>Socio-economic Challenges</b>	Agarwal (2014) and Singh (2017) note poverty and illiteracy as barriers; Nair and Jayalakshmi (2018) mention work-life balance struggles.	Broad agreement that socio-economic disadvantages deepen women's vulnerability in the unorganised textile sector.
<b>Health and Safety Concerns</b>	Patel et al. (2016) and Kumar & Chandrasekaran (2019) report occupational hazards and inadequate safety; ILO (2017) stresses a lack of protective measures.	Strong alignment that health risks are significant and poorly addressed in these workplaces.
<b>Legal Awareness and Rights</b>	Jha (2015) and Chatterjee (2014) find low awareness of labour rights and social security among women workers.	Uniformly low legal awareness undermines workers' ability to access protections, highlighting a critical gap.
<b>Skill Development and Empowerment</b>	Das & Roy (2016) suggest that training improves independence; Sharma & Gupta (2020) note the limited reach of current initiatives.	There is recognition of training as a pathway for empowerment, but implementation challenges remain.

## GAP IN LITERATURE

While several studies address women workers in the textile industry or informal employment broadly, there is limited focused research on the specific conditions of unorganised women workers in the Tirupur district. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive understanding of their economic, social, and health-related challenges, coupled with an exploration of their legal awareness and empowerment opportunities.

## **OBJECTIVE AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Women employed in the unorganised sector of the textile industry in Tirupur District face several critical challenges, including low wages, unsafe working environments, and job instability. Despite their significant contribution to the industry, these workers experience gender-based discrimination and lack access to essential legal protections and social security benefits. Moreover, the absence of adequate representation by unions leaves them exposed to exploitation and poor working conditions. This study will focus on understanding the socio-economic conditions, safety issues, and overall well-being of these women workers, with the primary objectives of examining their demographic profile, education level, and income distribution and assessing factors such as fair wages, job security, safety measures, and work environment. The aim is to identify the basic factors contributing to their vulnerability and propose solutions for improving their working conditions and empowerment in the textile sector.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research design aims to assess the socio-economic conditions and workplace experiences of unorganised women workers in the textile industry in Tirupur. It employs a descriptive and quantitative approach, using structured questionnaires to collect primary data from 150 workers selected through stratified random sampling. The study focuses on variables such as age, education, and monthly income to analyse their relationship with workers' perceptions of wages, job security, safety, family support, and career opportunities. Data analysis involves descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests to identify significant associations. Moral considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, are maintained, and the study's findings aim to highlight areas for intervention, particularly in education, income inequality, and workplace safety. The findings inform policy recommendations to improve the socio-economic status and working conditions of these women workers.

## **HYPOTHESES**

- H1: There is a significant relationship between the age of unorganised women workers and their perception of working conditions (e.g., job security, working hours, safety).
- H2: Educational qualifications of the workers influence their perception of income sufficiency and career opportunities.
- H3: Monthly income is significantly correlated with the workers' perception of support for childcare and household responsibilities.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The textile industry in India is a significant sector that employs millions of workers, many of whom belong to the unorganised workforce. Among these workers, women play a crucial role, yet they often face numerous socio-economic challenges that affect their quality of life and work conditions. The unorganised women workers in the textile industry, particularly in regions like Tirupur, experience various hardships, including low wages, limited educational opportunities, and a lack of job security. These women, who are often married with family responsibilities, contribute significantly to the industry's growth but continue to work under difficult circumstances. This study aims to explore the socio-economic conditions of these women workers, focusing on factors such as age, education, marital status, and income and how these factors influence their perceptions of their work environment. Through this research, a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by unorganised women workers is provided, shedding light on the

need for interventions to improve their socio-economic conditions and enhance their workplace experiences.

**Table No. 1: Socio-economic condition of the unorganised women workers in the textile industry**

Variable	Category	Frequency (n=150)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	18-25	45	30.0%
	26-35	55	36.7%
	36-45	35	23.3%
	46 and above	15	10.0%
Marital Status	Married	100	66.7%
	Unmarried	40	26.7%
	Widowed/Separated	10	6.6%
Education	Illiterate	60	40.0%
	Primary education	50	33.3%
	Secondary education	30	20.0%
	Higher secondary and above	10	6.7%
Monthly Income (INR)	Below 5,000	80	53.3%
	5,001 - 10,000	50	33.3%
	10,001 - 15,000	15	10.0%
	Above 15,000	5	3.4%

The age distribution of women workers in the textile industry in Tirupur reveals a diverse workforce, with the largest group (30.0%) falling in the 18-25 years age range, indicating a youthful workforce in the early stages of their careers. The second-largest group (36.7%) is aged between 26-35 years, suggesting that many workers are in their prime working years, often balancing work with family responsibilities. A notable portion (23.3%) is between 36-45 years, which likely indicates accumulated experience in the sector. However, a smaller percentage (10.0%) of workers are aged 46 and above, pointing to the challenges older women face in continuing to work in the physically demanding textile industry.

The marital status of women workers in the textile industry in Tirupur shows that a significant proportion (66.7%) are married, indicating that many of them are balancing both household and work responsibilities, which could affect their work dynamics and availability. A smaller group (26.7%) of unmarried women are part of the workforce, likely representing younger or independent workers without family obligations. Additionally, a small percentage (6.6%) are widowed or separated, suggesting that these workers may face unique social and economic challenges in comparison to their married counterparts.

The education level of women workers in the textile industry in Tirupur reveals a significant educational gap, with 40% of workers being illiterate, which limits their opportunities for career advancement and better job prospects. A considerable portion (33.3%) has completed primary education, indicating basic literacy skills but limited access to further education. Only 20% have completed secondary education, pointing to the scarcity of opportunities for formal education in this sector. Additionally, just 6.7% of workers have attained higher secondary education or beyond, highlighting the overall low educational attainment among these workers, which impacts their potential for skill development and improved job prospects.

The monthly income of women workers in the textile industry in Tirupur highlights a significant economic concern, with more than half (53.3%) earning below INR 5,000 per month, which is insufficient to meet basic needs. A considerable portion (33.3%) earns between INR 5,000 and 10,000, indicating slightly better income but still within the low-income bracket. A smaller group (10.0%) earns between INR 10,000 and 15,000, representing a modest increase, though still relatively low given the rising cost of living. Only a small percentage (3.4%) earn above INR 15,000, reflecting a stark income disparity and suggesting that only a few workers are compensated better for their labour.

The data highlights that the unorganised women workers in the textile industry in Tirupur are predominantly young, married, and have limited educational qualifications. A significant number of them are illiterate, which restricts their economic mobility and job prospects. The majority of these workers earn low wages, with more than half earning less than INR 5,000 per month, making it challenging for them to meet basic needs. These socio-economic conditions point to the vulnerability of women workers in the textile industry, suggesting that interventions are needed to address education, income inequality, and job security.

**Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of unorganised women workers in the textile industry**

S.No.		Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I receive fair wages for the work I do.	4.420	1.2055
2	My income is sufficient to meet my family's basic needs.	4.420	1.2055
3	I have job security in my current workplace.	4.460	1.1506
4	My workplace provides adequate safety measures.	4.466	1.1331
5	The working hours are reasonable and manageable.	4.413	1.2271
6	I am treated with respect by supervisors and colleagues.	4.460	1.1506
7	I have access to proper healthcare facilities related to work hazards.	4.460	1.1506
8	I feel physically safe while working in the textile unit.	4.426	1.2115
9	I receive adequate protective equipment during work.	4.413	1.2161
10	I face discrimination or harassment at my workplace because of my gender.	4.453	1.1791
11	My family supports my work outside the home.	4.506	1.0975
12	I have the freedom to voice my concerns without fear.	4.506	1.0975
13	I have opportunities to learn new skills at work.	4.466	1.1272
14	I am interested in training programs that can improve my job prospects.	4.473	1.1214
15	My education level affects the type of work I get.	4.466	1.1212
16	I am aware of my legal rights as a worker.	4.240	1.3294
17	I know how to access government schemes for workers like me.	4.340	1.2892
18	I feel confident in reporting workplace issues to authorities.	4.506	1.1217
19	My work allows me to balance family responsibilities effectively.	4.326	1.2927
20	My family's living conditions have improved due to my income.	4.413	1.1711
21	I have adequate support for childcare and household work.	4.420	1.1716

22	I receive any welfare benefits or social security from my employer.	4.460	1.1506
23	I am covered under any health or insurance scheme through my work.	4.466	1.1624
24	I have access to government or NGO support programs.	4.493	1.1571

The table highlights the overall positive yet varied experiences of unorganised women workers in the textile industry. The majority of workers report favourable conditions, such as fair wages, job security, and respectful treatment, with mean scores ranging between 4.4 and 4.5. Family support for work outside the home and opportunities for skill development are also viewed positively, indicating a general sense of work-life balance and career growth. However, there is noticeable variability, as evidenced by the moderate standard deviations, particularly concerning awareness of legal rights and access to government schemes, where some workers feel less informed or supported. Overall, while many women enjoy decent working conditions, disparities in experiences and knowledge of available resources remain, highlighting areas for improvement in worker education and support systems.

**Table 3: Chi-square test for the age of the unorganised women workers in the textile industry**

S.No.		value	df	Sig.
1	I receive fair wages for the work I do.	13.024a	12	.367
2	My income is sufficient to meet my family's basic needs.	11.188a	12	.513
3	I have job security in my current workplace.	7.596a	12	.816
4	My workplace provides adequate safety measures.	7.971a	12	.787
5	The working hours are reasonable and manageable.	27.877a	12	.006
6	I am treated with respect by supervisors and colleagues.	7.596a	12	.816
7	I have access to proper healthcare facilities related to work hazards.	7.496a	12	.716
8	I feel physically safe while working in the textile unit.	32.265a	12	.001
9	I receive adequate protective equipment during work.	25.117a	12	.014
10	I face discrimination or harassment at my workplace because of my gender.	22.778a	12	.030
11	My family supports my work outside the home.	15.101a	12	.214
12	I have the freedom to voice my concerns without fear.	15.010a	12	.241
13	I have opportunities to learn new skills at work.	30.829a	12	.002
14	I am interested in training programs that can improve my job prospects.	23.119a	12	.027
15	My education level affects the type of work I get.	10.413a	12	.580
16	I am aware of my legal rights as a worker.	15.160a	12	.233
17	I know how to access government schemes for workers like me.	8.858a	12	.715
18	I feel confident in reporting workplace issues to authorities.	12.174a	12	.432
19	My work allows me to balance family responsibilities effectively.	15.980a	12	.192
20	My family's living conditions have improved due to my income.	9.964a	12	.619
21	I have adequate support for childcare and household work.	9.418a	12	.667
22	I receive any welfare benefits or social security from my employer.	14.653a	12	.261
23	I am covered under any health or insurance scheme through my work.	6.612a	12	.882



24	I have access to government or NGO support programs.	16.739a	12	.160
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The Chi-square test results indicate that the perceptions of unorganised women workers in the textile industry are influenced by age in some areas. Specifically, significant differences were found in how age affects views on working hours, physical safety, access to protective equipment, experiences of gender discrimination, and opportunities for skill development. These findings suggest that workers of different age groups may perceive these aspects of their work environment differently. On the other hand, factors like fair wages, job security, family support, and awareness of legal rights show no significant age-related differences, indicating that these aspects are largely consistent across all age groups. Thus, while certain work conditions appear to vary with age, many others remain relatively uniform across different age cohorts.

**Table 4: Chi-square test for the educational qualification of the unorganised women workers in the textile industry**

S.No.		value	df	Sig.
1	I receive fair wages for the work I do.	17.028a	12	.149
2	My income is sufficient to meet my family's basic needs.	16.317a	12	.177
3	I have job security in my current workplace.	12.128a	12	.435
4	My workplace provides adequate safety measures.	13.369a	12	.341
5	The working hours are reasonable and manageable.	3.304a	12	.993
6	I am treated with respect by supervisors and colleagues.	12.872a	12	.378
7	I have access to proper healthcare facilities related to work hazards.	12.872a	12	.378
8	I feel physically safe while working in the textile unit.	6.040a	12	.914
9	I receive adequate protective equipment during work.	7.201a	12	.844
10	I face discrimination or harassment at my workplace because of my gender.	7.389a	12	.831
11	My family supports my work outside the home.	9.689a	12	.643
12	I have the freedom to voice my concerns without fear.	9.689a	12	.643
13	I have opportunities to learn new skills at work.	10.537a	12	.569
14	I am interested in training programs that can improve my job prospects.	9.608a	12	.650
15	My education level affects the type of work I get.	13.072a	12	.364
16	I am aware of my legal rights as a worker.	8.485a	12	.746
17	I know how to access government schemes for workers like me.	11.960a	12	.449
18	I feel confident in reporting workplace issues to authorities.	10.611a	12	.563
19	My work allows me to balance family responsibilities effectively.	18.032a	12	.115
20	My family's living conditions have improved due to my income.	7.968a	12	.788
21	I have adequate support for childcare and household work.	13.040a	12	.366
22	I receive any welfare benefits or social security from my employer.	9.603a	12	.651
23	I am covered under any health or insurance scheme through my work.	8.215a	12	.768
24	I have access to government or NGO support programs.	15.175a	12	.232

The Chi-square test results for the educational qualifications of unorganised women workers in the textile industry show that education level does not significantly influence most aspects of their workplace experiences. The p-values for most statements, including fair wages, income sufficiency, job security, safety measures, and work conditions, are all above 0.05, indicating that educational qualifications do not significantly impact workers' perceptions of these factors. For example, perceptions about fair wages, safety, respect, and opportunities for skill development all show non-significant results (p-values above 0.05). Additionally, workers' awareness of legal rights, access to government schemes, and confidence in reporting workplace issues also show no significant differences based on education level. The only exceptions are related to work-life balance and family conditions, where the p-values are slightly lower but still above 0.05, suggesting no clear pattern of educational influence on these factors. Overall, the results indicate that the educational background of workers does not significantly shape their perceptions or experiences in the workplace.

**Table 5: Chi-square test for the monthly income of the unorganised women workers in the textile industry**

S.No.		value	df	Sig.
1	I receive fair wages for the work I do.	13.558a	16	.632
2	My income is sufficient to meet my family's basic needs.	12.156a	16	.733
3	I have job security in my current workplace.	24.744a	16	0.74
4	My workplace provides adequate safety measures.	14.775a	16	.541
5	The working hours are reasonable and manageable.	25.575a	16	.060
6	I am treated with respect by supervisors and colleagues.	13.689a	16	.622
7	I have access to proper healthcare facilities related to work hazards.	13.986a	16	.698
8	I feel physically safe while working in the textile unit.	22.656a	16	.123
9	I receive adequate protective equipment during work.	21.958a	16	.145
10	I face discrimination or harassment at my workplace because of my gender.	13.341a	16	.648
11	My family supports my work outside the home.	12.781a	16	.689
12	I have the freedom to voice my concerns without fear.	12.781a	16	.689
13	I have opportunities to learn new skills at work.	10.078a	16	.863
14	I am interested in training programs that can improve my job prospects.	12.482a	16	.710
15	My education level affects the type of work I get.	15.661a	16	.477
16	I am aware of my legal rights as a worker.	13.313a	16	.650
17	I know how to access government schemes for workers like me.	12.274a	16	.725
18	I feel confident in reporting workplace issues to authorities.	14.240a	16	.581
19	My work allows me to balance family responsibilities effectively.	14.097a	16	.591
20	My family's living conditions have improved due to my income.	16.265a	16	.435
21	I have adequate support for childcare and household work.	26.638a	16	.046
22	I receive any welfare benefits or social security from my employer.	15.890a	16	.461
23	I am covered under any health or insurance scheme through my work.	11.757a	16	.761
24	I have access to government or NGO support programs.	13.359a	16	.646



The Chi-square test results for the monthly income of unorganised women workers in the textile industry show that there is little significant relationship between their monthly income and various workplace factors. Most of the p-values are above the 0.05 threshold, indicating no significant differences in how women with different income levels perceive various aspects of their work environment. For example, perceptions regarding fair wages, job security, safety measures, respect from supervisors, healthcare access, and opportunities for skill development all show non-significant results (p-values above 0.05). However, there is one notable exception: adequate support for childcare and household work, which has a p-value of 0.046, indicating that monthly income does have a significant relationship with the availability of such support. It suggests that women with higher incomes may feel they have better support for managing childcare and household duties. In general, the results suggest that income does not strongly influence workers' views on most workplace conditions, except for support for childcare and household work.

## Conclusion

The socio-economic conditions of unorganised women workers in the textile industry in Tirupur reveal that, while many of them experience favourable work conditions like respect from supervisors and job security, there are several challenges they face, including low wages, limited educational chances and inadequate access to health care and protective measures. The Chi-square test results highlight that certain factors, such as working hours, physical safety, and opportunities for skill development, vary significantly by age, while education and income levels do not have a major impact on workers' perceptions of their work environment. The findings indicate a need for focused interventions to address educational gaps, improve income, enhance workplace safety, and ensure better work-life balance. Empowering these workers through education, better pay, safety protocols, and legal awareness would contribute to their socio-economic upliftment and improve their overall quality of life.

To improve the well-being of workers, particularly in the unorganised sector, several key recommendations are proposed. These include enhancing education and skill development through training programs, improving wage structures to ensure fair compensation, and strengthening workplace safety with regular inspections and protective measures. Increasing awareness of legal rights through workshops, supporting work-life balance with family-friendly policies, and addressing gender discrimination with sensitivity training are essential. Additionally, expanding access to social security programs and fostering collaboration between the government and NGOs can provide comprehensive support for workers, ensuring better financial, legal, and healthcare assistance.

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