

Occupational Safety & Health (OSH) Prerogatives for Women in Unorganized Sector: A Look into the Concerns of Agricultural Workers

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Abstract

This article is about the occupational hazards and safety concerns of the unorganized women laborers and specially agricultural women. This article also talks about the availability of regulatory framework for safety concerns of agricultural women.

1.1 Introduction

M.S. Swaminathan, “Some historians believe that it was women who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming. While men went out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, fibre and fuel.”¹ These lines put a vivid reflection on the age-old representation and participation of women in agriculture as a source of livelihood. The role of women in agriculture held a lot of importance as source of income and family dependency. This also puts light upon how the women formulated and cultured the act of farming as a primary occupation in the society.

Globalization has brought a drastic change in the status of women worldwide, changing the perspective that only men can be the part of the mainstream workforce. In the present state of development, women make up 48.5% of the global workforce and 27.6% of the agricultural workforce (rising to 66.5% in low-income countries).² Among all other sectors, agriculture remains a significant means of employment in African, Latin American and Asian countries.³ In the context of our country, agriculture is one of the largest sectors of production and the contribution to GDP is about 25 percent and 48 percent of the self-employed workers in agricultural sector is women.⁴ From the context of engagement of women in work is a good sign but whether those women are productive and have work safety environment or not, the picture is still hazy.

¹ Thamizhachi Thangapandian, *Don't ignore the women farmers*, THE HINDU, (4th November, 2024), <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/dont-ignore-the-women-farmers/article33487392.ece>

² ILO World Employment Social Outlook, available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_619577.pdf, accessed on 21/09/24

³ Rene Loewenson Training and Research Support Centre Harare, Occupational safety and health for women workers in agriculture: Public health issues in the agricultural sector call for specific technical inputs and for addressing the issues of deprivation and imbalances of power

⁴ Subbulakshmi S.M and Darling Selvi, *Problems For Women In Agriculture*, RAC Journal of Research 2(19): (93-98) 2019

Agriculture and the workers in agriculture fall under the unorganized sector. Unorganized sector includes unrecognized private enterprises, private households running various businesses, which also includes family run businesses. The agricultural sector does not recognize women's work and has poor employment and infrastructure to safeguard the health of women.⁵ There is no interference of the, government in running the unorganized business. This invites for looking into the various issues which are faced by the unorganized workers and more importantly, the agricultural workers. Various problems are faced by the agricultural workers as there is a lack of regulation in this regard and minimal or no occupational safety and health concerns affects the agricultural women the most.

This has raised certain concerns about the occupational health and safety of women, as it is essential and decides upon promoting or impeding their ability to deliver in today's competing world. Lack of proper measures has affected women working mostly in unorganized sectors, especially in the agricultural sector. They do not have a fixed income, no regularity of wages and there is lack of safety measures. The Constitution of India guarantees occupational health and safety to workers irrespective of any sector. It is seen that occupational safety of the women in the agricultural sector is ignored as a matter of right. The Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020 has within its ambit various establishments but has not referred directly to the unorganized sector, let alone the agricultural sector. It is debatable that whether the women working in the agricultural sector are within the ambit of any legal framework or not. The Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, 2008 defines unorganized worker as a home-based worker, self-employed worker or wage worker but the fact that it includes agricultural worker is still ambiguous.⁶ In India, presently, specifically Occupational safety and health measures exists in four sectors namely mining, factories ports and construction. At this juncture, it is very important to include the agriculture as an occupation under the existing legislations so that the safety and health priorities can be specific for the same.

2.1 Agriculture and Agricultural Women Workers

Agriculture is the most important occupation since the advent of civilization. Agriculture can be said to be an art or science which involves cultivating of soil, raising of crops, rearing animals and also include preparation and marketing of the resultant products.⁷ The people involved in agriculture are both male and female workers. Agriculture includes farming activities. Farming includes various activities used for agriculture which can be traditional and modern. This makes farming a subset of agriculture and the people engaged in farming, agricultural workers.⁸ The agricultural workers work in open fields with long hours of work. The nature of work and working requirements in agriculture is not like a formal office or establishment and not with the conventional system of employment. So, the agricultural workers come within the category of the informal sector which has no or minimal organizational facilities, registration

⁵ Shashi Bala, *The Invisibility of Women in Indian Agriculture: A Case of Uttar Pradesh (Town)*, NLI Research Studies Series No. 147/2022

⁶ GoI, Ministry of Law and Justice .Unorganised Worker., available at <http://www.wilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/686/Unorganised%20Workers%20Social%20Security%20Act%202008.pdf> , accessed on 20/9/2024

⁷ Marriem- Webster Dictionary, available at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agriculture>, accessed on 13/10/2024.

⁸ *Are agriculture and farming the same – Agriculture vs Farming*, NICHEAGRICULTURE, (13th October, 2024, 10.04 am) <https://www.nicheagriculture.com/agriculture-vs-farming/>,

as an organization and do not have the support of the government.⁹ So this has led to the agricultural workers not getting proper work place safety and less concerns about their health which in itself is very unfair. The agricultural workers work in no less dangerous conditions than various other work establishment, but till now little heed is being paid to them.

2.2 Agricultural Women Workers:

In India, till now, we do not have a definition of agricultural worker, let alone agricultural women worker, in any of the social security legislations. A very vague definition of agricultural workers would be the workers who work on other's field for wages. The type of work defines who is an agricultural worker. Few decades back it was seen that most of the agricultural work was done by the women without getting formal recognition. The agricultural women worker can be paid or unpaid. The agricultural women workers can be classified generally in the following way:

- A. Women as paid workers in the agricultural field of others for a wage which may be fixed or which may be fluctuating. This helps the women to get wages for their work, contribute to family and get social-economic security.
- B. Women working in their own field as a part of their household activity without any payment and their work is generally unrecognised. This do not help the women to get wages for their work, contribute to family and get social- economic security.
- C. Women who supervise or oversee the agricultural work of other women workers once it is done or directs how it is to be done which is generally paid. This helps the women to get wages for their work, contribute to family and get social- economic security.
- D. Women who work in the field of others as a favour or part of the family business without getting paid. This do not help the women to get wages for their work, contribute to family and get social- economic security

2.3 Why do the women take up the agricultural work:

In India, agriculture was mainly taken up by the men and women jointly. Both men and women used to contribute jointly. But with the advent of modernization, change of social outlook and responsibilities, agriculture as an occupation began to be seen differently by men and women. Due to the nature of activities, the men began to be involved more in agricultural activities with less women and it became a male dominated activity. Nevertheless, women continued to be a part of the agricultural activities. The role of women in agriculture is also influenced by various social factors such as caste, class and socio-economic status of the people.¹⁰

Many a times women work in the agriculture not by choice but because they are bound. It is seen that agricultural work is taken up by the house hold women very easily. There can be various reasons for it. It may be because of the fact that most of the house hold women have limited or very little access to education and work in agriculture do not require technical expertise. It can be taken up as a part of their day to day house -hold and also be a part of the family by taking care of the children and other things. There is also flexible work arrangement which is often by persuasion, and it becomes advantageous for the the women as they can work in the fields being close to the home or households.¹¹ Many a times the working hours also become adjustable and women become more comfortable in agriculture work. As it

⁹ KS Kalyani, KD Singh, SK Naidu, *Occupational health hazards of farm women in tobacco cultivation*. INDIAN RES J EXT EDU. 2008;8:9-12.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ S.Murty, *Socio-Economic Participation of Women in Informal Sector*. JAIPUR, RBSA PUBLISHERS; 2008.

is categorised above, agricultural women also include women who work in their own fields, so it is much feasible for the women to support their family business by working in their own fields.

There are also certain socio-cultural factors which compel a woman to work in agriculture. The casual and seasonal labour of the male members of various families compels a male member to go different work establishments which becomes a driving force to take up agricultural work. Sometimes the unemployment rates also instigates the women to join the fields and contribute in income of the family. Another reason is that many women from a particular locality work together for a common employer in the fields. This helps them to have a job security and have similar working environment which is preferred by various women.

The fact that is more important at this juncture is that there should be sustenance of employment of women in agriculture. Women should be able to keep their employment as an agricultural worker at par with men. Due to the informal nature, seasonal character of agricultural work and house hold pressure, there are drop-outs of women from work. This effects their socio-economic security and hence their interest. There are also several factors contributing to the same.

2.4 Production and Employment trends and its impact on women agricultural workers

Agriculture is one of the greatest human labour consuming activities from the ancient times especially in India. With the growth of the economy, the demand for more output in the agricultural sector has increased. This has revolutionised the production techniques in the agricultural fields. Different types of machinery and equipment's are being used based on the nature of operation and this is minimizing the need of human labour. Various countries use newer technologies in agriculture such as use of drone technologies, biotechnology for seeds, precision agriculture, controlled environment techniques etc.¹²

In India, recently, various employment and production techniques could be seen in agriculture. Mention can be made of Farmer Producer Organization (FPO), Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), Agricultural Finance etc,¹³ which aims at enhancing the farming activity along with empowering the farmers. This has mixed impact on the employment of women. Due to increased mechanization, the manual labour is decreasing, hence women employment is also assumed to be decreasing. Use of technology will be fruitful to the agricultural women workers if they are invited in the orientations related to the new schemes and technology. The government should take a women friendly approach in using technology in agriculture so that the employment rates can be increased. In recent years, it was also seen that technology had a positive impact on the employment of women. In the post-COVID years the employment of women in agriculture has increased as a response to the crisis and in the year 2022, the percentage of women employed in agriculture was 62.8% as compared to 38.1 % in men.¹⁴ However, whether the women can sustain their employment viz a viz technology is a question.

2.5 Role of Women in Agriculture viz a viz Advent of Technology

Women has always played a major role in agriculture whether it is recognised or not. With the emerging technology, the role of women cannot be negativized although, there has been more or less changes in the

¹² Top 13 Innovations in Agriculture/Farming in 2023, January 2023, (28th October, 2024) <https://www.jiva.ag/blog/top-13-innovations-in-agriculture-farming>.

¹³ P.Subburathinam , *Transformative Trends and Employment in Agriculture in India*, TEAMLEASE, (17th October, 2024),<https://group.teamlease.com/employment-in-agriculture-in-india/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20National%20Sample,%25%20recorded%20in%202018%2D2019.>

¹⁴ Richard Mahapatra, *Nearly 56 million Indians joined back agriculture in 3 yrs: Is it a good sign or an indicator of an economic distress?*, DOWNTOW EARTH, (17th October, 2024),[https://www.downtoearth.org.in/agriculture/nearly-56-million-indians-joined-back-agriculture-in-3-yrs-is-it-a-good-sign-or-an-indicator-of-an-economic-distress--95274.](https://www.downtoearth.org.in/agriculture/nearly-56-million-indians-joined-back-agriculture-in-3-yrs-is-it-a-good-sign-or-an-indicator-of-an-economic-distress--95274)

employment. It is very important at this juncture to look into the impact of technology on agriculture and whether it is a boon or a bane for the same.

The role of women in agriculture can be analysed through the following heads:¹⁵

- a. Participation rates in agriculture¹⁶: It is important to analyse that whether the participation of the women rates have decreased or increased due to use of technology in agriculture. If decreased, what are the reasons for the decrease and if increase, how to maintain the sustainability.
- b. Types of farming activities: It is also important to analyse the impact of technology on the type of activities the women generally take up. It is generally seen that due to mechanized farming, much of the manual labour activities have decreased. So whether it has enhanced the type of activities for women or whether it has shrunk the same needs to be addressed.
- c. Wages and systems of payment: Technology also has an impact on the working hours of both men and women. So, a comparative analysis has to be done on the ground that whether the advent of technology has lessened or increased the working hours for women and what impact does it have on the wages.

3.1 Need of Occupational Health Care

There is a profound need of occupational health care among the agricultural working women in India. One of the most important reasons being the occupation being mostly informal and unrecognised. Women are forced to work in the minimal conditions with no one to speak for them. Another reason is that there are no fixed standards of work in agriculture. Some women may work in good conditions which is considered to be agricultural work and some women work in worst conditions which is also considered to be agricultural work. It is also seen that in most of the states in India, women are among the lowest societal hierarchy, as a result of that, women lack access to health care, let alone the occupational health care. Since considerable number of women are employed in agriculture, if the farming output has to be increased, the health of the women has to be improved and then it will in turn increase the yield in the fields.¹⁷ Occupational safety and health measures of the agricultural workers are ignored as a matter of right.

3.2 Occupational Safety and Health Priorities for Women: An International and National Perspective

The occupational safety and health concerns of agricultural women workers is a matter of both national and international importance. Many international organizations such as International Labour Organization, United Nations Organization have pressed upon the need of occupational safety and health in Workplace. It states that the national policy of a country should aim to prevent accidents and injuries by minimizing the causes of Hazards in workplace.¹⁸ It further states that the national policy of the country should not be stagnant and be continuously evolving so as to improve that Occupational Safety and Health.¹⁹ It also provides certain guidelines for establishing OSH objectives, identification and assessment of hazards and to take required preventive and protective measures.²⁰ ILO also specifies certain guidelines which talks about technical awareness of certain areas of the OSH such as availability of a management system

¹⁵ M.Chattopadhyay, *Role of Female Labour in Indian Agriculture*, SOCIAL SCIENTIST, VOL. 10, No. 7, 43-54(1982)

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Piyush Kathane, Shiv Joshi, *Occupational Health Hazards in Female Agricultural Workers in India—A Narrative Review*, JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN MEDICAL AND DENTAL SCIENCE 2023, Volume 11, Issue 01, 11-16

¹⁸ ILO Convention No.155

¹⁹ ILO Convention No.187

²⁰ ILO-OSH 2001

for the health of workers, worker's health surveillance system, protection from radiation, ergonomics etc which is important for the agricultural women.²¹

The Sustainable Development Goals states that the women should be granted property rights and tenure.²² This is in furtherance of the fact that there should be security of agricultural land to women and welfare at the same time. This also puts some light on the fact that women should feel secure both socially and economically, so that the output of their work can be increased.

Labour is a subject of concurrent list in which both the state and the Central government can frame rules and regulations. So the policies for the agricultural women workers can be formulated by both the central as well as the state government. The constitution of India as well as several other laws upholds the occupational safety and health concerns of agricultural women workers as a mandate.

The need and importance of occupational health is stated in Constitution of India through the fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy. The Constitution of India establishes that there should be all people are entitled to equality before law and equal protection of law.²³ The women who work in the agricultural fields are entitled to protection from law in regards to their health. Many a times it is seen that the men can cope up with the agricultural work, but it becomes difficult for the women in some conditions where there are lack of sanitary facilities, resting facilities etc.

Also, the women working in agricultural fields are often paid lesser than the man which violates the gender equality established by our constitution.²⁴ It is also being established that the certain policies and laws which are established by the government should be such that all citizens are entitled to fair wages, equitable distribution of wealth, decent means of living for both men and women and proper protection of the labourers and children who work.²⁵, which should also include agricultural women workers. It is rarely seen though. Another mandate established by the constitution of India which is especially important for agricultural women workers is the responsibility of the state just and humane conditions of work including maternity relief.²⁶ Just and humane conditions in agriculture is not generally received by the women, which may be because of the reluctance of the employer and the ignorance of women.

Even under the mandate of civil law, under the law of torts, there is a specific responsibility of the employer towards the employee by the virtue of the master servant relationship. There is always a duty of care which an employer needs to have towards the employees and is under a civil obligation to make the employees aware of the potential dangers in the course of the employment. So this can be related to the agricultural work where the employees are exposed to various dangers and it is the responsibility of the employers to work for the prevention and prohibition of the same.

The Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020 was enacted to formulate certain laws for the occupational safety, health and working conditions for the persons working in an establishment. The agricultural workers cannot be said to be working in an establishment as it is mainly informal. Also, there is not a specific definition of agricultural workers. So, the applicability of this legislation to the agricultural workers is still ambiguous.

²¹ ILO Standards on OSH,(24th October,2024) available at webapps.ilo.org/static/english/osh/en/story_content/external_files/fs_st_1-ILO_4_en.pdf.

²² SDG 5.a.1

²³ INDIA CONST, art. 14.

²⁴ INDIA CONST, art. 15

²⁵ INDIA CONST, art. 39

²⁶ INDIA CONST, art. 42

The Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, 2008 was enacted for providing social security and welfare for unorganised workers. The interpretation of unorganised sector given in this Act is such establishment or enterprise for sale of goods or any sort of service and the workers employed in such employment is ten or less. The applicability of this definition to the agricultural workers is also ambiguous as it is not in the form of establishment or enterprise and the people working in the agricultural fields is generally of any number and not fixed. The definition of unorganised worker covers the definition of agricultural worker in the sense that they are daily wage earners.

So, it is seen that laws are well in place for the welfare of the women in agriculture. The implementation of the same will help the women to get the benefits of the welfare legislations and feel security of their health and wellbeing.

3.3 Labour laws and agricultural women workers in India

There are various laws formulated for the welfare of women workers in India. At this juncture, it has to be seen that whether they fulfil the welfare requirements which are needed for the agricultural women workers or not.

The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 is a welfare legislation formulated for the security of work for a women during her absence because of motherhood. This is in furtherance the constitutional mandate by which the state government is mandated to provide just and human conditions of work and maternity benefit.²⁷ Since agriculture mostly generates seasonal employment to women without direct recruitment rules whatsoever, women should be given the benefit of maternity in agricultural work whenever required. This practice is not generally seen in India, till now, but it should be implemented.

The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 states that there should be parity in wages according to similar the nature of work between the men and women. The Constitution of India also mandates that it should be the policy of the state to ensure equal pay for equal work between man and women.²⁸ The Supreme Court also stated that there should be no discrimination in recruiting men and women and the employer cannot take the plea of financial inability in not being able to pay equally to both male and female workers.²⁹ Many a times it is seen that in agricultural fields, in spite of the capability of women, men are employed more and there is disparity in the payment of wages.

The Minimum Wages Act, 1948, states that every person should get their minimum wages as fixed by the government. This is very important from the point of agricultural women workers. In many states of India, agriculture and work in the fields are considered to be a household activity and many women does not get paid as it is a household activity and in formal in nature.

The National Policy on Safety, Health and Environment at Workplace, issued by the Ministry of Labour states that it is required that the workers have a safe, clean and healthy environment so that people get social justice and can contribute to the economic growth of the country. It also been stated in this policy that the government is committed to regulate all economic activities for management of safety and health risks at workplace and to provide safety and healthy working conditions.³⁰ The preamble furthers states that particular attention needs to be given to the employees working in hazardous conditions and risk prone conditions and special attention has to be given to the migrant workers and other vulnerable groups. The

²⁷ INDIA CONST, art. 42

²⁸ INDIA CONST, art. 39

²⁹ People's Union for Democratic Rights Union of India

³⁰ Preamble, NATIONAL POLICY ON SAFETY, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT AT WORK PLACE

agricultural workers should be a part of the provisions of this policy as they are vulnerable as well as working under extreme conditions in the agricultural fields. In this regard the women agricultural workers are very much effected and special provisions need to be compulsorily applied to them.

The Agricultural Workers (Welfare and Protection) Bill, 2022 talks about the right of the agricultural workers. It states various rights about the agricultural workers in terms of working hours that it should not be more than 8 hours and after half the period there should be interval of half an hour rest. It is generally seen that most of the women who work in the paddy fields are ignorant about the duration of work and they continuously work for five six hours without any interval for rest.³¹

In 2011, M S Swaminathan, Rajya Sabha member (2007-13) proposed the ‘Women Farmers Entitlement Bill’, which lapsed in 2013.³² These kinds of legislations which are not enforced or brought to existence so that the contribution of women in agriculture can be acknowledged and women feel the sense of security and sense of productivity in their work.

4.1 Concept and Importance of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in agriculture:

Agriculture is primarily an occupation where both men and women are employed. This occupation invites long hours of work which has to be done mainly out in the open fields where men and women are exposed to harsh weather conditions, pesticides, infected water, biological creatures, to mention a few. This occupation also requires lot of manual and physical labour, though in modern times, additional use of machinery is done. This requires that occupational health and safety concerns has to be maintained in agriculture which is very rarely looked into till today in our country. Lack of occupational safety and health has an impact on the overall working of the women. It affects the behavioural, mental and physical well-being of the same. It often leads to lack of outcome, less performance, less job satisfaction of the women working in the agriculture. This becomes very unfair considering the human rights of the women in agriculture. International Labour Organization defines Occupational Safety and Health as a process by which work-related injuries and diseases can be prevented along with improvement of the health of the workers.³³

Occupational Health: Occupational Health can be said to be the overall well-being of the individual which will help the worker to yield according demand of the occupation. It also includes physical, social and mental wellbeing of the workers is at the maximum. It also refers to prevention of hazards related to diseases which may have long term or short term affects

Occupational Safety: Occupational safety implies safe working conditions so that the workers are not exposed to dangerous conditions during the course of employment and the job is not worrisome. It also means prevention and protection from the dangers associated to work and prevention of accidents which may cause injury . It also relates to prevention sudden severe conditions of work which affects the overall working environment.

Occupational Safety and Health Management systems (OSHMS):

Occupational Safety and Health Management system is a mechanism which occupational risk factors can be prevented at workplace. Occupational Risk factors may be in primary form which includes various sectors such as agriculture, animal husbandry etc, and it may also be in secondary form which includes

³¹ THE AGRICULTURAL WORKERS (WELFARE AND PROTECTION) BILL, 2022, Section 11 and 12

³² Supra note 8

³³ ILO, Occupational Safety and Health, (13th October,2024),<https://libguides.ilo.org/occupational-safety-and-health-en>.

various sectors such as industry, buildings, construction etc. This paves the way for a re-look into the maintenance of occupational safety and health. OHSMS is a multidisciplinary field, not concerned with a specific sector, specific group of people or specific norms. It is concerned with occupational safety and health of workers and more importantly concerned with welfare of people at the place of work. In order to ensure the execution and ensure occupational safety and health measures, each and every organization should have a proper Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems (OSHMS).

This has to be maintained in a systematic manner to ensure accountability and transparency and it has to be the primary duty of the employer. OHSMS is inclusive of the following measures:

- a. Safety and Health Policies decided by the employer in accordance to the standards set up by the government organizations.
- b. A systematic procedure of executing the policies which is equally applicable to the similar category of employees and has uniformity without any discrimination.
1. c. Each and every organization which has the OSHMS in place has to maintain certain standards of the policies and also have proper maintenance of records.
- c. Improvement of the working conditions so that the potential and the productivity of the workers can be enhanced such as clean environment, proper sanitary facilities etc.
- d. The employers should thrive to improve the health condition of the workers so that they do not back out, withdraw or cease to be employed due to ill health or poor working conditions.
- e. The working environment of the workers should be such that it is suitable to all categories of workers and help in their mental and physical development.
- f. The employers should also try to prevent the dangers of working which is detrimental to the health of the workers. Prevention of occupational risk factors improves occupational health and this in turn improves the safety of workers in the workplace.

4.2 Type of Occupational hazards faced by women in Agriculture

The classification of occupational health hazards in women in agriculture is being done by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India as those hazards which arise from the machinery used in the farms, agricultural tools, chemicals used in the agricultural fields, climatic conditions, biological factors and the psychological stress.³⁴ In furtherance to these specific problems, occupational hazards in agriculture can be classified in the following way:

Physical Hazards: There are various physical hazards faced by women in agriculture such as wild and toxic animals³⁵, insects, massive loads of substances, exposure to sunlight, dirt, debris, fertilizer induced water etc which greatly affect the health of the women and can be considered as an occupational hazard.

Chemical Hazards: The people working in the agricultural field are exposed to various types of chemicals such as fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, fumigants, anti-microbials³⁶, etc which is inevitable and generally it affects the health of the women who work in the fields for long hours.

Biological Hazards: Women workers are also exposed to infections and parasitic agents at the workplace. The women working with animal products and in the fields are likely to be exposed to various hazards

³⁴ Jyoti Nayak, Shiv Pratap Singh, Gayatri Moharana, *Occupational Health Hazard Of Farm Women*, TECHNICAL BULLETIN NO. 24, Directorate Of Research On Women In Agriculture, Orissa

³⁵ S. Singh, R. Arora, *Ergonomic Intervention For Preventing Musculoskeletal Disorders Among Farm Women*, JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE, 2010; 1:61-71

³⁶ Chiong Javier Me, *Women's Role In Agricultural Production And Its Health Consequences: Issue For Research*, VIRGINIA TECH (VT). THE PHILLIPPINES 2006.

which affect their body³⁷ such as prolonged movements, massive loads of substances, incorrect body positions etc.

Psychological Hazards: One of the problems faced by women working in agriculture is the occupational stress which can be seen from the gender perspective. Psychological hazards include monotonous work in the fields which can run continuously for many hours. It adds to the stress of women when such work becomes irregular, without any safety and health measures and most of the times it is seasonal. This can have adverse effect on the health of the women leading to change in the sleeping patterns and sleep deprivations, depression, hypertension, burn-out syndromes etc which again affect in the productivity of women.

4.3 Relationship between occupational safety and health of women and agriculture.:

There is a proportionate relationship between occupational health and productivity of women in agriculture. Agricultural Occupation requires good health of the women and the health of the women is closely related with ecological, political, cultural and socio-economic dimensions.³⁸ The family life, the economic dependency, education, awareness etc determines the productivity of women in agriculture. The most important is proper occupational health and safety. The kind of mental and physical distress which are suffered by the women working in agriculture shows that they were more related with their miserable working condition and lack of occupational safety rather than their lifestyle.³⁹

4.4 Specific problems of Women in Agriculture in relation to safety and health

The role of women in agriculture has become less acknowledgeable in the present stage of development as the agricultural activities have become male dominated and there are less activities available for women in the field. Nevertheless, women had and has been contributing to the agricultural activities and agricultural produce. The women suffer from some specific problems which needs to be addressed. Some of the general problems faced by the women in agriculture can be the level of employment confined to casual employment or kinship or the amount of time given by the women in the household actually affecting the women participation in agriculture, inequality in income due to variance in the nature of activities etc. The use of technology creates serious gender imbalances. It is being observed that the participation of in the economic activity are largely due socio-economic conditions and its inter-relation with the stage of development.⁴⁰ Women are more affected by the specific problems than the general issues.

Some of the specific problems faced by the women in agriculture can be enumerated as follows:

- a. Lack of education and modernization in the women who are engaged in agriculture has resulted in women not getting benefit of the welfare legislations and schemes in our country. Most of the women lack formal education which would make them eligible for direct benefit from the schemes. Many a times, due to their incapability to understand and analyse, they face deprivation.
- b. Role of women in agricultural output: Another issue faced by the agricultural working women in decrease in the agricultural output. This is because there is lack of safe working conditions for the women in the fields. There is often no or less organizational facilities in agriculture. So, they cannot

³⁷ Supra note 32

³⁸ J. Raja Meenakshi and Sigamani Panneer, *Occupational Health of Agricultural Women Workers in India* Indian JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY MEDICINE .2020 Oct-Dec; 45(4): 546–549.

Published online 2020 Oct 28. doi: 10.4103/ijcm.IJCM_397_19

³⁹ CU Thresia, *Women workers in Agriculture: Gender discrimination, working conditions, and health status Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development, CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES*. 2004

⁴⁰ Kak Shakti, *Rural Women and Labour Force Participation*, (1994), SOCIAL SCIENTIST, Vol 22, No 314, pp 35-59.

raise their voice for work place safety and health. Most of the women have to drop out from the fields as they cannot give the desired output.

- c. Lack of inspectorate facilities in agriculture: It is also seen that in the agricultural sector there are no inspectorate facilities. There may be some legal coverage in regards to wages and minimum facilities, there is no surveillance system in relation to the work, work environment and the quality of services.⁴¹ This affects the quality of work done by the women in agriculture.
- d. Lack of Union among the agricultural women workers: The agricultural workers do not have unionization facilities or even it is there, it is very non-existent in many states, let alone the agricultural women workers. This has led to hindrances in implementation of the established rules and regulations and agricultural women workers cannot raise a collective voice against the same.

5.1 Issues of agricultural women workers: A gender biased problem

Gender biasness in agriculture is one of the important issues faced by the women in agricultural sector. The mentality of the people in the society and the lack of social transformation is responsible for not doing away with the gender disparity. Gender discrimination can be seen in various ways in the agricultural fields. There is restriction in the mobility of women in regards to the agricultural fields. There is lack of decision-making authority and there is disparity in the participation of women in agriculture.⁴² It is also seen that many of the government policies which are framed for the agricultural sector do not emphasize on women as a farmer which puts restrictions on various avenues like institutional credit.⁴³

The World Economic Forum, in its Global Gender Gap Report, 2022, ranked India at 135 out of 146 countries in terms of gender gap, and noted that gender parity is not recovering and that it would take another 100 years to close the global gender gap.⁴⁴ According to the Food and Agricultural Organization, if the women are empowered through land and ownership rights then it has a positive impact on the agricultural output of the developing countries and this can in turn reduce a considerable percentage of hunger across the world.⁴⁵

Gender biasness in agriculture can be analysed broadly by the following points:

- a. Extent of participation: The reflection of gender-biasness in agriculture can be inferred from extent of participation. It is generally seen agriculture is still a male dominated sector. Most of the part of the agricultural activities are done by the men and they also receive wages which is comparatively more than the women. Also, the technology which is used in agriculture so far is not women friendly and they are not well acquainted with the uses. So, it effects the extent of participation of the women. For

⁴¹ ILO, 1997; Choudhry, 1989; Rother and London, 1998

⁴² *Problems of Women Farmers*, SOCIOMENTORS, <https://www.sociomentors.com/problems-of-women-farmers/#:~:text=Unpaid%20and%20Underpaid%20Labor%3A%20Women's,minutes%20a%20day%20for%20men.>

⁴³ Shreejit Borthakur, Charu Thukral, *Giving Women Farmers Access To Technology*, INDIAN DEVELOPMENT REVIEW, (13th October, 2024), [https://idronline.org/giving-women-farmers-access-to-technology-agriculture/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw3624BhBAEiwAkxgTOvJtjFMk866OOFey3bvQSDQKAj4mpZk97MaESJfo-jJqzWFVfnnm-hoCAvD_BwE.](https://idronline.org/giving-women-farmers-access-to-technology-agriculture/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw3624BhBAEiwAkxgTOvJtjFMk866OOFey3bvQSDQKAj4mpZk97MaESJfo-jJqzWFVfnnm-hoCAvD_BwE)

⁴⁴ Veena Gopalakrishnan, Vinduja Menon and Simranjeet Kaur, *Rights of women in the workplace - laws every Indian employer should know*, TRILEGAL, LEXICOLOGY, (11th October, 2024), [https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=7a86f087-3230-4139-afae-84825e652c05.](https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=7a86f087-3230-4139-afae-84825e652c05)

⁴⁵ FAO, 2011

instance, in the state of Assam, in the peak of the agricultural season, the time spent by the male workers in the fields is more than the female workers.⁴⁶

- b. Variation in employment due to crop variety: The participation of women in agriculture also varies according to different crop varieties. In some crop varieties, due to appropriate season and less effort in raising the crop more women are employed or sometimes it may result in opposite. So there is no definite rate of employment of women, but for men generally, it is the same.
- c. Size and extent of farming in the agricultural fields: Sometimes due to the large size of the agricultural fields more women are employed, but if the size of the fields are small, then men generally take care of the overall activities. This affects the employment of women in agriculture. This leads to de-motivation of the women to work in the fields.
- d. There is lack of access to women in matters related to essential agricultural inputs such as land, labour, knowledge, fertilizer, and improved seeds and seedlings.⁴⁷ Many a times the women are not given any orientation about the improved seeds, use of fertilizers etc.
- e. In relation to occupational hazards, there is under-reporting of dangerous working conditions of women in agricultural fields. Women may work in the same conditions as men but due to their biological set up, they may be exposed more to danger and distress. This is seldom realised. Sometimes it may not be difficult for men to work under certain conditions but for women it might be.
- f. There is Lack of acknowledgement of female labour contribution in the family, especially in agricultural work. It is generally seen that both men and women work in the agricultural fields but only the male labour contribution is acknowledged and it is felt that women do their agricultural activity as a part of their household activities and generally not recognised.
- g. Inequality in remuneration is also seen in the agricultural field. For the same amount of work and working hours, men are paid more and women are paid less. The women, due to ignorance of rules and regulations and collective bargaining systems cannot raise a voice against the same.

5.2 Women, Technology and Gender-biasness

One of the important issues faced by the women agricultural workers is the adoption of new technology in the agricultural fields. This also has led to gender biasness in agriculture. It has a positive impact as it increases the productivity of the fields and it decreases human labour. On the other hand, it has a negative impact on the overall working pattern of women agricultural workers. Technology has an impact on the cropping pattern, tilling of fields and it invites use of other machinery in the paddy fields of which the women are not used to.⁴⁸ Mechanization in the agricultural fields have an impact on the intake of women workers in the field depending on the operation mechanized.⁴⁹ Increased mechanization in the fields have also led to loss of employment of women in the agricultural season.⁵⁰ Many a times it has been seen that either the agricultural work has become male dominated due to the use of machines or even if women workers are employed, their contribution to productivity has decreased as compared to men.⁵¹ The design and the specific use of the machines are not suited to women and they cannot make most use of the

⁴⁶ Dr. Dimpi Chakraborty and Dr. Nilakshi Goswami, *Study Of Female Workforce Participation In Agriculture Of Assam: A Gender Analysis Of Family And Hired Labour*, INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT (IJM), 2020, Volume 11, , pp.1955-1964.

⁴⁷ Supra note 4

⁴⁸ Nilakshi Goswami, *Technological Change in Agriculture and Female workers: A reflection from the Brahmaputra valley of Assam*, SOCIAL SCIENCE JOURNAL OF GARGAON COLLEGE, 2019, Volume VII.

⁴⁹ Rakesh Basant, 1987

⁵⁰ Thangamani and Uma Rani, "Problems in Agriculture- A Gender analysis" ,2005

⁵¹ Easter Boserup, 1970

machines as compared to men. Whenever new machines are brought to be used, women are not invited in the orientation stage and they face huge challenges as an aftermath. Lack of training and equipment in women has also brought gender disparities. The use of technology in agriculture invites lots of training programs so that the workers can be at ease. There are very less training programs in relation to the equipment's and women are not generally invited to such programs as compared to men. Women also lack vocational training which is essential for appropriate use of technology in agriculture. So unless and until the women are made a part of the awareness programs, they will not have the required knowledge to work in the fields. Also, the women should have the mental preparedness to work with the upcoming technology. This will considerably reduce the gender biasness in agriculture.

6.1 Conclusion

It should not be felt that it is only the responsibility of the employer or the management to take care of the occupational safety and health of the workers. It is very important for the society to know about the importance of women's contribution in the agricultural output and development. In this regard it is very important to uplift the position of the women in the agricultural field specifically in the rural areas. It is also very important to look into the reasons gender discrimination in the agricultural sector. It is important to reflect upon whether it is work related or is it because of some societal reason. Elimination of gender inequality can be achieved only when equal rights in terms of contribution, employment and remuneration is given to the women. There should be participation of the workers on managing the workplace safety rules. It should be considered as matter of right if any worker informs the employer or the management about any eminent danger and it should be ignored. There should be proper disclosure of any possibility of any danger in the workplace by the employer to the workmen, even though it may be in the agricultural work. There is the need of proper research in the field of agricultural health and safety, particularly in the matter of diseases and ailments which the agricultural women workers suffer. Training and encouragement of women to work in the fields with various technologies should be done, which is feasible for the women to use in the fields for various tasks. Awareness programs should be conducted which will help the women to know about occupational health program for women. The government should take initiative of providing simple tools and equipment's to the women in agriculture which will suit to their limited education, type of work and their physical strength. There are various social security schemes for the women. but they lack provisions which specifically talk about the safety of the women in agriculture. So it is the high time that safety of the agricultural women workers should also be prioritized at both central and state level so that, as earlier stated, their workplace safety and health is not ignored as a matter of right.