

Understanding The Vulnerabilities Of Migrant Women Workers Engaged In Construction Sector In Guwahati, Assam

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Abstract

With the advent of globalisation and liberalisation in India, employment opportunities to a large number of women entering the unorganised labour market got a boost. Reference can be made to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) report 2018, where 82% of the women working in India are concentrated mostly in the informal sector, particularly in domestic work, home-based work, waste picking, construction, and street vending. Guwahati, a city in the northeastern part of India, is considered as the economic hub of Assam. With the rise in industries and other developmental avenues, it provides informal livelihood opportunities to a significant portion of women who migrate from inter-district as well as from other states. Despite the increasing labour force participation in the construction sector, women still face discernible discrimination based on their gender. A range of strong patriarchal and social norms in the workplace and domestic sphere often limit their accessibility to social security benefits. This systematically excludes them from formal or social recognition, thereby restricting their decision-making capabilities.

Based on mixed research study, the present study seeks to explore the vulnerabilities encountered by women migrant workers in the construction sector in Guwahati city of Assam. The findings of the paper are an outcome of in-depth interviews conducted purposively in six selected construction sites within the city and critically examine the push and pull factors of these women and their status in the construction sector through a gender lens. The study found that these women migrant workers have poor living and working conditions, unequal wage distribution, lack of entitlements, and endure hardships. The paper recommends social security and protection that needs an urgent strategy to address these established norms, structures, and imbalances.

Keywords: *Construction Sector, Women Migration, Social Security and Vulnerabilities.*

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I. Introduction

Migration of an individual is an unavoidable part of human history. People from rural areas migrate in search of better livelihood, survival, and opportunities. In recent decades, with the advent of globalisation and liberalisation, the pattern of migration has accelerated with the opening of ample livelihood opportunities in the country (Molankal, 2011). Economic growth in India has largely been concentrated in urban areas, fuelling the trend of migration among rural communities. The expansion of informal sector in India has helped in providing employment to a large number of people particularly women. A report by the United Nations Development Programme (2009) notes that internal migration is four times more common in India than international migration. Furthermore, as per the Census report 2011, the overall migrant population has surged to 44.9% that is 455.79 million, which was 314.54 million in Census 2001, out of which 80% of the women migrated as a marginal workforce (DowntoEarth, 2020). The fastest growing migration in India is rural-urban migration as these migrants are more inclined towards working in better-paying non-farm occupations and industrial establishments (United Nations Development Programme, 2009) which is also affirmed in the Census 2011, indicating a significant increase from 226.67 million in 2001 to 295.11 million in 2011 (DowntoEarth, 2020). These migrant populations hailing from rural backgrounds contribute extensively to the economy but often remain invisible with a limited to zero voice in the society.

There is a strong relationship between informal work and poverty where majority of the rural migrants are generally unskilled labour who migrate in search of better livelihood opportunities. This portion of the migrants mostly comes from marginalized communities/groups such as Adivasis, Dalits, and religious minorities, who are pushed into a greater level of deprivation in the cities (Jayaram, Jain, & Sugathan, 2019). They mostly engage in unorganised, labour-intensive jobs such as brick kilns, construction sites, quarries, and mines, where social welfare schemes, safety, health, and sanitation are often limited. Predominantly, a large portion of these

rural migrants are agricultural workers, but the growing challenges in the sector are decreasing their productivity (Bellampalli & Kaushik, 2020). The marginal and small farmers are being pushed to migrate to urban cities and towns and switch to other livelihood opportunities. The migrant workers moving to the urban areas for better livelihood options often remain in the periphery of the society.

With time there has been significant changes in the pattern of migration particularly for female migration. Studies by (Sundari, 2005; Bhattacharyaa & Korinek, 2007) witnessed a trend in the female migration in India where earlier it was traditional shorter distance, post-marriage migration with husband and families but with increasing opportunities in the informal sector, economically motivating migration to aid household's income is seen among the women. The liberalisation of trade has resulted in a massive expansion and policy changes in the informal sector, affecting both men and women differently (Khurana, 2016). It is evident that liberalisation has expanded opportunities for women; however, these opportunities are predominantly concentrated in casual, temporary, and low-paid jobs. These rural migrant women, mostly unskilled, find themselves working in certain sectors- domestic work, street vending, and construction. For these women, employment in these sectors saves them from disrupted livelihood opportunities and unemployment in rural areas. Over time, the simplistic portrayal of women as passive followers has been replaced by a nuanced understanding of the experiences of emancipation and vulnerability in the context of shifting social and patriarchal norms (Bhattacharyaa & Korinek, 2007). According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) report 2018, it is found that about 82% of the women working in India are concentrated in the informal sector, particularly in domestic work, home-based work, waste picking, construction, street vending, and so on (Dey, 2023). With no formal and social recognition, the work of these women mostly remains invisible and casual, with limited accessibility to social welfare schemes and benefits.

II. Women In Construction Sector: A Gendered Dimension

The Construction sector in India is the second largest employer after agricultural sector and the second largest Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) recipient sector in India in 2020-21 and is estimated to employ 34 million workers (Ray, 2023; National Investment Promotion & Facilitation Agency, 2023). The sector is labour-intensive and it provides employment opportunities to a million men and women. The labourers engaged in the sector are generally unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled workers. The sector is governed by several regulations like the Minimum Wages Act (1948), the Interstate Migrant Workmen Act (1979), and the Building and Other Construction Works (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act (1996). However, the practical implementation of these acts is questionable and requires a critical examination of their effectiveness.

The construction sector is characterised as unsafe and with lots of health hazards, no specific working time, no permanent employee-employer relationship, casual, and lacks social protection. Migration patterns in the construction sector are diverse, with a significant portion being seasonal and distress migration (Chitra, 2016). Moreover, studies found that rural migrants typically enter this sector through a social network involving family members, friends, and relatives who are already engaged in the construction sector (Fernandes & Paul, 2011).

Women occupy a significant portion of the construction industry. Primarily, women from the most marginalised section of society undertake migration with the aspiration to get a healthy and basic standard of living. These vulnerable women are drawn towards the construction sector with the belief in a financial status, but face systemic inequalities. The work environment prevalent in the construction sector became a pool for the poor, unskilled, illiterate migrant women, as it offers a flexible entry and exit option. Women entering into this sector face exploitation with respect to wage discrimination, harassment, and gender-based discrimination (Banu, 2017). Further, study by (Bhattacharyaa & Korinek, 2007) also identified that female migration in India especially those seasonal migrants engaging in unprotected jobs lies in the bottom of the labour market and are subjected to exploitation by their employer and others.

These migrant women hailing from poor socio-economic backgrounds migrate mostly due to distress-induced calamities such as landlessness, underdevelopment, poverty, etc (Molankal, 2011). Conversely, factors such as fulfillment of basic needs of food and shelter, availability of healthcare facilities, employment opportunities, etc., attract them to the urban centres. But these poor homeless women in search of better livelihoods end up in temporary shelters, slums with a filthy environment, low wages compromising their health, and dietary intake affecting their Quality of Life (QoL).

III. Objective

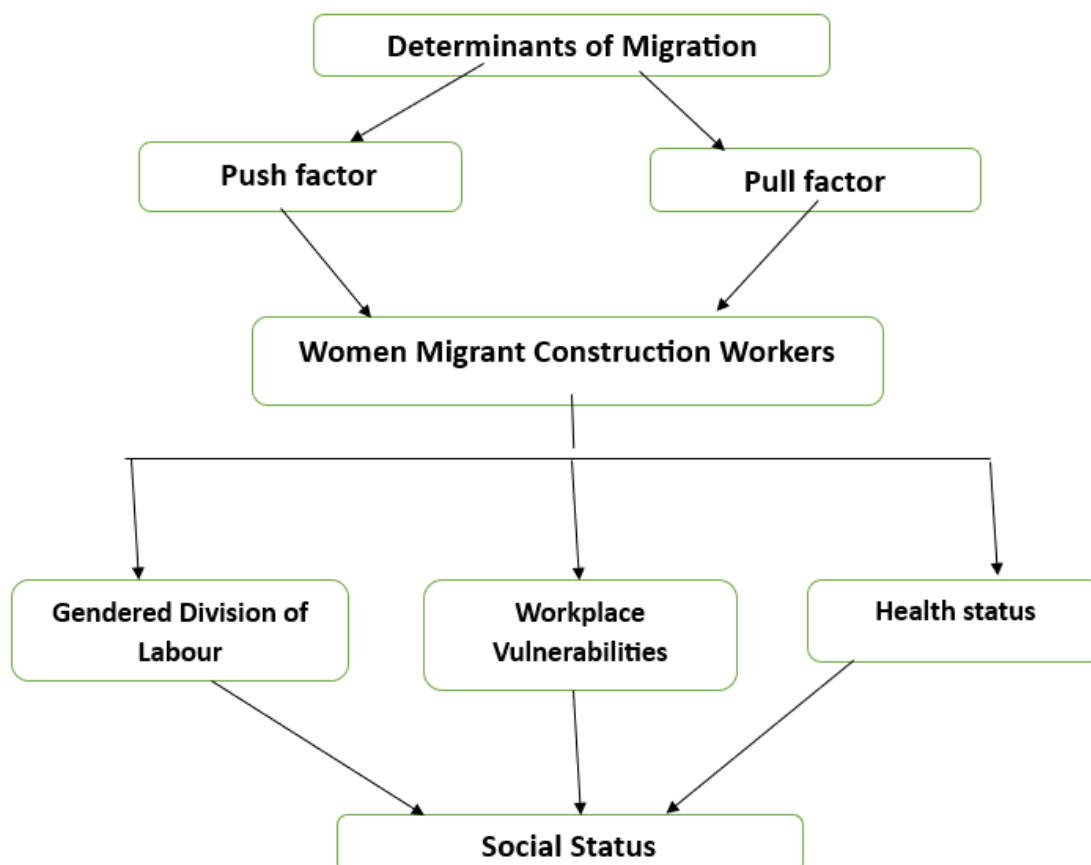
The present study aims to understand the vulnerabilities encountered by women migrant workers in the construction sector in Guwahati city of Assam and to critically examine the push and pull factors and their status in the construction sector using a gender lens in the context of Guwahati.

IV. Materials And Methods

The present study is mixed in nature and employs both qualitative and quantitative methods for an in-depth understanding of the scenario. 150 migrant women construction workers from six construction sites in Guwahati were purposively selected for the study. With the Smart city initiative of the Government of Assam, an increasing number of construction activities, both residential and commercial, in Guwahati city, construction women workers are thronging the city for work from inter-district as well as from other states. Therefore, Guwahati was selected for the study. Secondary source of data was also used by the researcher, where international articles, journals, research papers, government data, FAO reports were reviewed.

Conceptual Model Of The Study

For the understanding of the objective of the study, the following conceptual model was developed.



V. Findings And Discussion

Socio-demographic profile of the Women Migrant Construction Workers

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

Category	Frequency (n=150)	Percentage (%)
Age		
18-29	65	43.3%
30-41	47	31.3%
42-53	19	12.6%
54-65	12	8%
66 and above	7	4.6%
Religion		
Hindu	49	32.6%
Muslim	83	55.3%
Christian	18	12%
Others	0	0
Caste		
General	9	6%
ST	18	12%
SC	50	33.3%
OBC	73	48.6%

Others	0	0
Educational Qualification		
No schooling	89	59.3%
Primary	56	37.3%
Middle school	5	3.3%
High school	0	0
Higher Secondary	0	0
Graduation	0	0
Post graduation	0	0

Source: Primary data

The table above provides a detailed analysis of the socio-demographic profile of women in construction work in Guwahati.

It can be seen from the above data that majority of the respondents, that is 43.3% of them, were in the age group of 18-29 years, whereas 43.3% are in the age group of 30-41 years. Only 12.6% of the respondents were in the age group of 42-53 years, followed by 8% of them in 54-65 years age group, and 4.6% of them were in the age group of 66 and above. It can be inferred that majority of them were in the age group of 18-41 years, which is considered the 'earning population'. In the construction sector, the nature of the job is strenuous, and age is one of the important parameters for women to consider when engaging in the labour force. Thus, the relatively young age of the migrant women engaged in the construction sites reflects them to be energetic and fit for the strenuous nature of construction work.

Majority of the migrant women engaged in the construction sites were Muslim that is 55.3% by religion whereas 32.6% of them were Hindu by religion. Only 12% of them were Christian by religion. Furthermore, majority of them belong to the lower castes- SC category (33.3%) and OBC category (48.6%). Apart from these, 12% of the respondents were from ST category and 6% of them were from General category. It is seen that members of SC, OBC and ST categories are generally engaged in menial jobs and are often subjected to social exclusion (Bhattacharyaa & Korinek, 2007).

Education is a critical determinant for empowerment that can bring opportunities for decent employment, gender equality, poverty reduction, which can help in enhancing chances of a healthy life and overall development (Shivashankar & Prasad, 2015). In terms of educational status, the level of education among the migrant women construction workers in the present study is found to be very low. The prevalence of illiteracy was high, where 59.3% of them received no schooling at all. Further, 37.3% of them have only received their primary education, and a negligible percentage of women, that is, 3.3% of them, have received middle school education. The primary reasons cited for dropout and lack of formal education of the women were mainly due to their poor financial condition, low parental income, and inadequate government support among others. Due to poor educational attainment, along with their gender and lack of vocational training restricts these women to the bottom of their occupation making them engaging only in menial labour in construction sites. Finding from the study by S., Kumar M., & A., (2021) discusses along with the parents, the children of the construction workers tend to remain illiterate. Job insecurity and low wages make the reach of education for the children a distant dream for these migrant construction workers.

Previous work engagement of the women migrant construction workers

Table 2: Previous work engagement of the respondents

Sl. no.	Type of work engaged	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Domestic work	21	14%
2	Agriculture work	88	58.6%
3	Construction work	11	7.3%
4	Others (street vending, saleswoman, brick kilns)	30	20%
	Total	150	100%

Source: Primary data

On asking about the previous work engagement, it was found that majority of the respondents, that is 58.6% were engaged as agricultural workers. Some of these women during the interview reported have their own cultivable land, whereas the majority of them work as hired labourers in leased land. Further, 20% of the respondents reported engaging brick kiln work, street vending, and a few of them reported engaging as saleswomen. Further, 14% of the respondents reported of engaging in domestic work. It can be implied from the data that that majority of these migrant women interviewed were previously engaged mostly as casual labour. Seasonal job availability pushed these women to migrate and join construction sites. Similar finding was observed in the study by Bellampalli & Kaushik, (2020) where the migrant workers were mostly engaged as agricultural labourer, brick making, casual labour and the nature of work was not permanent making them migrating from one work to another. s

Source of migration:

The present study found that the women working as construction labourers in Guwahati are migrants from nearby districts within the state of Assam particularly from Goalpara, Dhubri, Mancachar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari and from other states particularly from Bihar and West Bengal. Poor financial condition at the source along with landlessness, poverty, temporary nature of work acts as a push factor for these women migrant. Further lower wage compounded with casual nature of work increased out migration. This finding gets supported in the study by Devi & Kiran, (2013) where poverty is cited as one of the factors pushing the women to join the construction industry.

Marital status of the women migrant construction workers:

Table 3: Marital status of the respondents

Sl. no.	Marital status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Unmarried	11	7.3%
2	Married	98	65.3%
3	Widow	17	11.3%
4	Abandoned	24	16%
	Total	150	100%

Source: Primary data

Vast majority of the migrant women that is 65.3% interviewed for the study are married and they had migrated along with their husband to Guwahati and engaged themselves in construction work. Further, 16% of the respondents reported being abandoned by their husband followed by 11.3% of them reported being widow. Among the respondents, those who were widow and abandoned have migrated with their relatives in the city and are presently engaged in construction sites. This signifies the fact that social network plays an important role for these women to engaged in the construction sector (Fernandes & Paul, 2011). Moreover, 7.3% of the respondents reported that they are unmarried. A strong patriarchal control and prescribed social position controls the independent migration of the women. This leads the women to migrate with their close ties. The study by Bhattacharyya & Korinek, (2007) also establishes the fact about absence of lone female migrants and point towards the social and normative prescriptions and behavioural restrictions put on women. Furthermore, it was found that the spouse takes the decision to migrate and accordingly the women follow. Another study by K. Chaitanya (2018) also found that the migrant labourers are greatly depended on the labour contractors or brokers who provide them with work and these contactors are mostly the people who become their 'intimate exploiters'.

Living Status of Migrant Women Construction Workers

Table 4: Living status of the respondents

Category	Frequency (n=150)	Percentage (%)
Housing type		
Kuccha	129	86%
Semi-Kuccha	17	11.3%
Pucca	4	2.6%
Ownership of house		
Own	5	3.3%
Rented	145	96.6%

Source: Primary data

Poor socio-economic condition pushes these women to migrate to different parts of the region or country. These labourers are especially vulnerable as they leave behind their place of residence and come to a new place. In the new setting, they must adapt to a new culture, language, social system, and food habits, making them vulnerable and at risk of losing their own cultural identity. The living conditions of migrants vary from one place to another, and they are generally measured based on their financial status and the nature of work they are engaged in.

The above table discusses the living status of the respondents. It can be seen that majority that is 86% of the respondents reported living in *kuccha* house, while 11.3% of them live in a semi-*kuccha* house. A very minimal percentage that is only 2.6% of the respondents reported living in a *pucca* house. This type of settlement has a detrimental effect on the overall quality of life of the migrant women in construction work.

Facilities and Amenities available to the Migrant Women Construction Workers

Table 5: Facilities and amenities available

Sl. no.	Facilities and amenities available	Yes	No	Total
1	Separate kitchen	12 (8%)	138 (92%)	150 (100%)
2	Toilet	26 (17.3%)	124 (82.6%)	150 (100%)
3	Electricity	10 (6.6%)	140 (93.3%)	150 (100%)
4	Drainage	32 (21.3%)	118 (78.6%)	150 (100%)
5	Drinking water	65 (43.3%)	85 (56.6%)	150 (100%)
6	LPG connection	18 (12%)	132 (88%)	150 (100%)

Source: Primary data

In the study area, the respondents shared the fact that low earning has a direct influence on their living standard. A holistic perception of the study area is gathered while interacting with these migrant women construction workers in Guwahati about the deplorable living conditions. The majority of them reside in nearby slum areas with poor sanitation facilities, inadequate provision of safe drinking water, and no electricity supply. This fact is further supported by the above data, which shows that 92% of respondents reported not having separate kitchen facilities, and 82.6% of them do not have toilet facilities. Further, 93.3% of the respondents reported not having electricity facilities, and 78.6% of the respondents reported not having drainage facilities. 56.6% of the respondents reported that they do not have any drinking water facilities within their household facilities, and 88% of the respondents reported that they do not have LPG connections and rely on firewood. One of the women shared:

"I live in a slum area near the construction sites. I live in a single-room kuccha house with no ventilation facility and no provision for a separate kitchen. I use firewood for cooking as I don't have an LPG connection. We have a common toilet facility near our house that is shared by more than 20 families, but lacks a proper drainage facility. There is a tubewell near the toilet facility, which is used for drinking water and other purposes."
-Mumtaz Begum, 34 years (name changed)

This finding is in sharp contrast with the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, and the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Assam Rules, 1981 (Labour Commissioner, Assam, 1982) which stipulates that the employer or contractor must provide suitable accommodations to the labourers. However, despite this, deplorable living conditions remain typical among women in construction sites, especially among migrant women.

Nature of Working, Working Hours and Payment of wages in the Workplace

Table 6: Nature of work of the respondents

Sl. no.	Nature of work	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Skilled	2	1.3%
2	Semi-skilled	9	6%
3	Unskilled	139	92.6%
	Total	150	100%

Source: Primary data

The condition of work greatly depends on the nature of work and number of hours and days assigned. It is seen in the study area that the respondents are largely engaged in menial and unskilled work. It can be seen from the above data that 92.6% of the respondents are engaged in unskilled work in the construction sites. The job they are associated are mainly digging soil, mortar mixing, carrying bricks and mortar, loading and unloading, picking up and throwing rubble, sweeping the construction site. As no formal training is required for this type of work, they are designated as unskilled labourers and locally known as *Jogali*. In contrast to the women workers, the males (locally known as *mistri/rajmistri*) are assigned skilled tasks such as masonry, carpentry, using machines, polishing stone tiles, welding, painting, etc.

The nature of engagement for these women is highly casual, with many of them working as daily wage labourers and facing heightened workplace vulnerability. The tenure of the job is not fixed, and there is always a fear of termination. During the rainy season, they do not receive regular work, making it difficult for them to make ends meet. One of the women shared:

"During that time, I had no choice but to take up other menial jobs to support myself. Some of us even returned to our villages, hoping to find some work there, as there was hardly anything available at the construction sites."

-Parbati Das, 38 years (name changed)

Furthermore, in the absence of any contract or fixed tenure, these migrant women lack access to benefits provided to employees, such as sick leave, bonus facilities, and creche facilities.

Hours of working

Table 7: Hours of working

Sl. no.	Hours of work	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	8-9 hours	21	14%
2	9-10 hours	49	32.6%
3	More than 10 hours	80	53.3%
	Total	150	100%

Source: Primary data

The average working hours of the women, that is, 53.3% of them interviewed, are working for 10 hours per day with a lunch break of an hour and a half at the construction sites. The workers generally do not have a fixed timing of their work, but it usually starts from 8 am to 9 am and ends between 4.30 pm and 5.30 pm. During peak construction season, the women workers are required to work overtime. It was said by the majority of the women that, in most cases, they are paid nothing for those overtime shifts. Contractors argue that since women generally do not work at night during those shifts, they were not given double wages.

This is in contrast to the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, which mentions that overtime wages should be twice the ordinary rate of wage. Lack of information about such provisions among these women makes them vulnerable, and they are easily exploited by the contractors. The women interviewed work for a minimum of 20-25 days per month during the non-rainy season, which is in contrast to the Factories Act, 1948, in India, which specifies that an adult should not work more than 48 hours per week and not more than 8 hours per day. In the study by Jayaram & Varma (2020), it is found that contractors are often found to be accountable for wage fraud or exploiting the wages of marginalised migrant workers.

Pattern of wage payment

Table 8: Pattern of wage payment

Sl. no.	Wage payment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Daily	96	64%
2	Weekly	38	25.3%
3	Monthly	16	10.6%
	Total	150	100%

Source: Primary data

The above table discusses in detail the pattern of wages received by the respondents. The women workers informed patterns for the payment of wages, daily and weekly. It can be seen that 64% of them are receiving the payment on a daily basis, whereas 25.3% reported receiving wages on a weekly basis. Only 10.6% of them reported receiving wages on a monthly basis. The payments are done on the basis of hours of working; however, during the interview, many women reported wage forgery. The absence of a formal contract and limited bargaining capacity make the workers susceptible to contractor-driven wage withholding. Their economic marginalisation enables the contractors to delay wages, perpetuating a cycle of financial insecurity and labour vulnerability.

Further, it was informed by the respondents that the average wage received by them in the construction site varies between Rs. 350/- to Rs . 370/- per day, whereas the wage received by the male varies between Rs. 680/- to Rs . 700/- per day. Despite the Equal Remuneration Act, these women in construction sites are paid less in comparison to male coworkers. Reference can be made to Minimum Wage-Construction or maintenance of roads and buildings, and stone breaking or stone crushing with effect from December 2022 (Wage Indicator, 2023), the minimum wage fixed for unskilled and semi-skilled work in Assam is Rs.371.87 and Rs.432.20, respectively which is again contrary to the specified amount.

Despite this wage differentiation, the migrant women continue to engage them in the construction sites because they are receiving higher wages in comparison to their previous work. Additionally, the study by Bellampalli & Kaushik, (2020) shows that temporary and seasonal migrants spend less on their food, fuel, and other consumption than permanent migrant labourers. One of the women shared:

"My husband and I are working in the same site, but I face discernible discrimination because of my gender. I am engaged as a Jogali, where I am assigned menial tasks. I am paid Rs . 350/- per day, whereas my husband is paid Rs . 700/-. Because of my low skill, I cannot bargain with the contractors, and sometimes my wage is handed over to my husband. I don't have any control over my earnings."

-Sanju Kumari, 34 years (name changed)

The stereotypical notion of associating the construction sector with men and portraying women as fragile was well observed during the interview. Further, as they lack training, therefore they are assigned unskilled tasks

and are assistants to the males. Moreover, the sexual division of labour had implications for differential wages, designations, and social status that men and women are entitled to.

Facilities provided to the migrant women workers in the Workplace

Table 9: Facilities provided in the workplace

Sl. no.	Facilities	Yes	No	Total
1	Drinking water	9 (22%)	141 (78%)	150 (100%)
2	Separate toilet	2 (.7%)	148 (99.3%)	150 (100%)
3	Separate restroom	1 (.3%)	149 (99.7%)	150 (100%)
4	Safety equipment/gears	12 (7.3%)	138 (92.7%)	150 (100%)
5	Creche facility	0 (0%)	150 (100%)	150 (100%)
6	Maternity benefit	0 (0%)	150 (100%)	150 (100%)
7	Sick leave	6 (4%)	144 (96%)	150 (100%)

Source: Primary data

The above table discusses the facilities available in the workplace for the migrant women workers in the construction sector. It can be seen that 78% of the respondents reported not having access to any drinking water facilities, 99.3% reported not having separate toilet facilities, and 99.7% reported not having separate restrooms. Further, 92.7% of them reported not being provided with any safety equipment/gear. A significant finding is that 100% of the respondents reported not having creche facilities or any maternity benefits. 96% of the respondents reported not having any facilities for sick leave. In terms of resting time and other facilities provided, no separate resting period or place is allotted to the migrant women. One of the women stated:

"I work 5 days a week, and the working hours begin from 8 am to 9 am and end between 5 pm and 6 pm. We get only a half-hour break for lunch. There is no provision for a separate resting place or toilets on the site where I am currently engaged. Safety gear, such as helmets, gloves, and masks, is not provided to us by the contractors. Provision of paid sick leave is also absent, and our salary gets deducted if we take a leave for a day or two."

-Sazida Khatun, 32 years (name changed)

It is observed during the interview that these women during their lunch break, sit together and have their lunch. Following this, they find some shady place or an under-constructed room for their rest. All these findings are in sharp contrast to the gender-specific facilities outlined in the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1996. Thus, it is seen that longer working hours and a lack of facilities in the construction sites are making the migrant women construction workers vulnerable to industry exploitation.

Health Conditions of the Migrant Women Workers

Table 10: Health conditions of the respondents

Sl. no.	Health conditions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Chronic body pain	25	16.6%
2	Weakness and fatigue	73	48.6%
3	Skin problem/Allergies	12	8%
4	Breathing problem	23	15.3%
5	Others (Tumor, TB, Cancer, High BP, Diabetes)	17	11.3%
	Total	150	100%

Source: Primary data

The health of a worker largely depends on the workplace environment in which he/she is engaged. Low level of income has a direct implication on the health of these migrant women in construction sites. It can be seen from the above data that 48.6% of them reported frequently experiencing weakness and fatigue, and 16.6% of them reported having chronic body pain. Furthermore, 15.3% of them reported experiencing breathing problems, 11.3% reported having other health conditions such as tumor, TB, cancer, High BP, diabetes, and 8% of them reported having skin problems/allergies. Absence of basic facilities at home, drinking contaminated water, lack of basic facilities, and relying on low-quality health care facilities together make them prone to diseases. One of the women stated:

"As our work is physically demanding, body aches, headaches, and fatigue are frequent. But as there is no provision of sick leave or facilities for medical treatment, the health issues remain untreated."

-Durga Kumari, aged 33 years (name changed)

Migration to a new place makes it more challenging for these women to address healthcare vulnerabilities. Studies conducted by Patel & Pitroda (2016) and Panneer (2019) talk about issues faced by women in construction sites where the sanitation facilities are mostly unisex and with no privacy and low maintenance, leading to several health issues. A report by the National Commission on Women also pointed out that pregnant women in construction work engage themselves till the last moment of delivery and come back to work soon after delivery. Carrying heavy loads causes miscarriages, and pregnant and lactating mothers face more hardships because of heavy physical work and low nutrition. Feeding the newborn becomes tough for the lactating mothers because of a lack of privacy, and often they have to hide from the contractors while feeding their babies (Gogoi, 2020).

Migrant Women Construction Workers and Social Security Benefits

Table 11: Social security benefits

Sl. no.	Social security benefits	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Housing benefits	11	7.3%
2	Pension scheme	5	3.3%
3	PDS	32	21.3%
4	Insurance	9	6%
5	Not received any benefits	93	62%
	Total	150	100%

Source: Primary data

Migrant workers face significant obstacles in accessing social security benefits. It can be seen from the above data that the majority, namely 62% of the respondents, reported not receiving any benefits from the government. A study by Mehrotra (2019) discusses that 90% of the workforce is informal in India, and they work without any social security benefits. Further, 21.3% of the respondents reported receiving PDS. However, it was reported that the respondents were concerned about the irregular supply of rations, which creates hindrances for them in managing their daily dietary patterns. Furthermore, 7.3% of the respondents reported benefitting from housing facilities, 6% of them receiving insurance, and only 3.3% received a pension scheme. It is observed during the interview that there is an existing gap in the government's policy in providing social security benefits, such as the Ujjawala Yojana, Ayushman Bharat card, and job card, which deprives women of enjoying their benefits in accessing free healthcare services and subsidies for LPG cylinders.

VI. Suggestion And Conclusion

Economic development and liberalisation have brought opportunities in the unorganised sector for rural unskilled migrants, particularly women, resulting in a massive influx of them from rural areas to urban construction sites in Guwahati. However, these women migrating to urban job sites and engaging in construction work often lack bargaining capacity and are at the bottom of the labour market. Though there exist a number of labour laws for these workers, still, it lacks a problem of implementation. The result of the study suggests proper implementation of already existing social welfare schemes, creating policies reflecting women's interests and needs so that women can benefit from them.

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