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Original Article

Impact of Industrialization on Women's Employment in the Garment Sector

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Abstract

Industrialization has significantly transformed the structure of employment across the globe, particularly in developing countries. The garment sector, as a labor-intensive industry, has emerged as one of the largest employers of women. This article examines the impact of industrialization on women's employment in the garment industry, focusing on employment opportunities, economic empowerment, working conditions, gender inequality, and socio-cultural changes. While industrialization has created avenues for women's participation in paid work, it has also led to exploitation, wage disparities, and precarious working conditions. The study highlights both the positive and negative consequences of industrialization and suggests policy measures for improving women's employment conditions.

Keywords: *Industrialization, Women Employment, Garment Industry, Gender Inequality, Empowerment, Labour Conditions*

Introduction:

Industrialization refers to the transformation of an economy from agrarian to industrial production. The garment industry has been a major beneficiary of industrial growth, especially in countries like India, Bangladesh, and Vietnam. It is characterized by mass production, export orientation, and reliance on low-cost labor, predominantly women. Women constitute a significant portion of the workforce in the garment sector, often exceeding 50% in many developing countries . Industrialization has facilitated their entry into paid employment, altering traditional gender roles and economic structures.

Review of Literature:

1. Akter (2023): Examined the relationship between women's employment in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector and their empowerment. The study found that participation in garment work significantly enhances women's economic independence, decision-making capacity, and social status within the household. However, the research also highlighted that empowerment remains limited due to low wages, long working hours, and lack of job security. The author concludes that while the garment sector acts as a catalyst for women's empowerment, structural inequalities continue to persist.

2. Balachandran (2023): Analyzed the impact of neo-liberal globalization on women working in garment industries. The study revealed that globalization has expanded employment opportunities for women by increasing industrial production and export-oriented manufacturing. However, it also pointed out the exploitative nature of global supply chains, where women workers are often subjected to poor working conditions, wage discrimination, and limited labor rights. The author emphasizes that globalization has created a paradox of opportunity and exploitation for women workers.

3. Pramitasari (2024): Focused on garment industry-led urbanization and its implications for women workers. The study found that industrial growth has encouraged large-scale migration of women from rural to urban areas in search of employment. This migration has contributed to economic independence and exposure to modern lifestyles. However, the study also highlighted challenges such as poor living conditions, lack of social support, and increased vulnerability to exploitation among migrant women workers.

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4. A study published in World Development Sustainability (2022): Explored the impact of paid employment on women's empowerment. The findings indicate that access to paid work significantly improves women's bargaining power within households and enhances their autonomy. However, the study also noted that empowerment is not automatic and depends on factors such as working conditions, income level, and social norms. In many cases, women continue to face a dual burden of paid work and unpaid domestic responsibilities.

5. The MDPI (2023): Study on trade and female employment in SAARC countries examined the broader macroeconomic context of women's participation in industrial sectors. The study found that trade liberalization and industrialization have led to increased female labor force participation, particularly in labor-intensive industries like garments. However, the benefits are unevenly distributed, with women often concentrated in low-skilled, low-paying jobs. The study emphasizes the need for inclusive policies to ensure equitable benefits of industrial growth.

Objectives:

1. To analyze the socio-economic conditions of women labourers
2. To examine the impact of industrialization on women's employment in the garment sector
3. To identify the major problems faced by women labourers at the workplace

Research Methodology

The present study is based on a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the impact of industrialization on women's employment in the garment sector. The study is conducted in Ballari city, Karnataka, where garment industries employ a large number of women workers. Both primary and secondary sources of data have been utilized in the study. Primary data is collected from 146 women labourers through structured interviews. Secondary data is gathered from books, journals, reports, and previous studies related to the garment industry. The study adopts a simple random/purposive sampling method to select respondents. The collected data is analyzed using percentage and statistical to examine the relationship between socio-economic conditions and job satisfaction.

Analysis:

The analysis indicates that industrialization has significantly increased employment opportunities for women in the garment sector. A majority of respondents reported that they entered paid work due to the expansion of garment industries in the region. Industrial growth has facilitated rural-to-urban migration and provided regular income opportunities. However, employment is largely concentrated in low-skilled and low-paid jobs, with limited opportunities for career advancement. Thus, while industrialization has enhanced women's participation in the workforce, it has not ensured equitable employment conditions. The findings reveal that most women labourers belong to economically weaker sections, with low levels of education and income. A significant proportion of respondents earn modest wages, which are often insufficient to meet household needs. Despite this, employment in the garment sector contributes positively to family income and improves their economic independence. However, many women continue to face a dual burden of managing both paid work and household responsibilities, which affects their overall well-being. Access to social security benefits and welfare schemes remains limited. The analysis highlights several challenges faced by women workers in the garment industry. The most common problems include long working hours, low wages, job insecurity, and lack of proper safety measures. Many respondents reported health issues such as back pain, eye strain, and stress due to repetitive work and poor working conditions. Instances of gender discrimination, lack of promotion opportunities, and workplace harassment were also noted. Additionally, inadequate facilities such as sanitation, rest areas, and childcare support further affect their working conditions. The study shows that while industrialization has created employment opportunities and contributed to women's economic participation, it has also led to exploitation and inequality in the workplace. There is a need for improved labour policies, better working conditions, and stronger implementation of laws to ensure the well-being and empowerment of women labourers.

Growth of the Garment Industry and Women's Employment

The expansion of the garment industry is closely linked with globalization, export markets, and industrial policies. Industrialization has: Shifted women from agricultural to industrial work Increased demand for semi-skilled and unskilled female labor Encouraged rural-to-urban migration among women Studies show that trade liberalization and industrial growth have significantly increased women's participation in manufacturing sectors .Garment factories often prefer women workers due to perceptions that they are more disciplined, patient, and suited for repetitive tasks.

Positive Impacts of Industrialization

- Employment Opportunities

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- Economic Empowerment
- Regular income
- Decision-making power within households

Negative Impacts of Industrialization

- Poor Working Conditions
- Long working hours
- Unsafe environments
- Lack of health facilities
- Wage Inequality

Policy Implications and Recommendations

- Ensure equal wages for equal work
- Strengthen labor laws and enforcement
- Provide safe working environments
- Promote skill development programs
- Implement social security benefits
- Encourage unionization and worker representation
- Address gender-based violence at workplaces

Suggestions:

- Improve working conditions by providing proper ventilation, lighting, sanitation, and safety measures
- Reduce long working hours and ensure implementation of labour laws
- Provide health facilities and regular medical check-ups for workers
- Create awareness about labour rights and government welfare schemes
- Establish grievance redressal mechanisms to address workplace harassment and discrimination
- Provide skill development and training programs to improve career opportunities
- Introduce childcare facilities for working mothers
- Strengthen job security and social security benefits such as ESI and PF
- Ensure fair wages and equal pay for women workers in the garment sector

Conclusion:

Industrialization has played a crucial role in integrating women into the formal workforce through the garment sector. It has enhanced employment opportunities and contributed to women's economic empowerment. However, the benefits are accompanied by significant challenges such as exploitation, inequality, and poor working conditions. A balanced approach that combines industrial growth with social justice and gender equality is essential for ensuring sustainable development and improving the lives of women workers.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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