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An appraisal of contrasting working condition of own account workers and casual wage labours as a part of urban informal economy in Siliguri Municipal Corporation, West Bengal

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Abstract

The urban informal workers are the neglected and underserved economic group in any urban setup like Siliguri Municipal Corporation. The informal workers constitute a major part of the economy of any region or urban area but the facilities they get in return is very insufficient. Workers from different occupational groups are included in urban informal economy. The working condition of the informal workers are very much hazardous and associated with very much deteriorated condition. The informal workers due to their little bargain power and lack of awareness about their specific rights often has to work in those bad working condition. But the informal workers according to their nature of employment can be divided in different types like own account workers or the self-employed, casual wage labours, domestic workers etc. Their working condition also differs according to their control over work environment or surrounding. The own account workers usually are the self-employed workers like vegetable shop owners, fish & meat sellers, street vendors, auto & toto drivers, on the other hand the wage earners are the group where the workers are paid for their physical job or services like construction workers, porter, rickshaw pullers etc. The own account workers usually have the control over their working condition as they are the authority of their shop or workplace and are more associated with trading and business for their livelihood but the wage earners have to depend on the superior for their wage and the overall workplace is controlled by the authority or the superior. Hence the present paper is the humble attempt to understand the contrasting difference of working condition between the own account workers and casual wage labours as informal workers in Siliguri Municipal Corporation.

Keywords: Informal workers, Own Account Workers, Casual Wage Labourers, Working Condition, Informal Economy, Siliguri Municipal Corporation (SMC)

Introduction:

The informal workers are the major working sector of any economy but they are underserved as the role they play. The workers perform various complementary services in place of informal workers and play the role of distributor of various services in urban

economy. The major chunk of the urban economy is constituted by the informal workers (Papola, 1980) and largely they are the rural migrant from the countryside who have moved to the urban areas in search of job (Cherunilam, 1981; Bhattacharya, 1998). The concept of informal income opportunities was first initiated by K. Hart (1971) as a social group in his work of Ghana, where he analysed the distinction between informal and formal income generating opportunities and also discussed the terms like self-employed and the casual wage labourers. After that phase the different disciplines of social science become more concerned about the informal workers and the academic world shifted its focus to the studies regarding the betterment of informal economy. The concept of informal economy basically includes the works and the workers in informal sector and the informal employments outside the informal sector. Informal workers are not only present in the informal sector enterprises but also present in the formal sector jobs with different roles and less social security. Different international and national bodies like International Labour Organization (ILO), International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS), National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS), National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) have defined informal economy and informal workers from different point of views.

According to the 17th ICLS (2003) informal workers are the own account workers who are employed in their own informal establishments and the paid workers employed by any household. While, NSSO 66th round (2012) defines informal workers as the own account workers who work as a self-employed, owner, helper in household enterprises and the casual wage labourers as the workers who are getting paid in daily basis for the physical work they perform.

Literature Review:

Kashyap and Singh (1987) mentioned that the informal workers are the exploited sector of the society and the employers are use them to the fullest. While Kundu (1999) reported about the low wage and poor working condition of the urban informal workers. Waite (2001) mentioned about the effects hazardous working condition on the wellbeing of the informal workers and the different labour associations play a vital role in developing the working condition of the workers. Marjit and Bhattacharya (2006) showed how the condition of informal workers is deteriorating day by day in SMC, they have made temporal research to assess the overall living and working condition of informal workers. Das (2012) emphasized the absence of social security and the low wage problem among the informal workers. Chatterjee (2016) identified the harassment related problems among the informal workers in different regions. Basu and Thomas (2009) also expressed their concern about the underdeveloped working condition of informal workers in this era of Globalization where every sector is flooding with advanced technology but the informal workers are still doomed from the perspective of overall working condition.

Hence after reviewing all the literatures the basic problem that can be emphasized and needs further attention is the problematic working condition of the urban informal workers. So, the present study has been undertaken to assess the overall working condition of the urban informal workers in the SMC jurisdiction. The study will present a synoptic view as well as the contrasting underlying working condition of the two informal occupational groups.

Study Area:

The Siliguri Municipal Corporation (SMC) has been chosen for the present study, which is the sole metropolitan region of situated in the northern part of West Bengal. The location of SMC is approximately 26°40'44"N to 26°46'09"N and 88°23'51"E to 88°27'26"E and the city is situated in middle of dense forest in northern and eastern side, while encircled by River Mahananda and Balasan in west and south. SMC has a total population of 513264 as per 2011 Census and has a projected population of 749000 as per Census of India. Siliguri is referred as the 'Gateway of North-east India' and is a major centre for tourism and commercial activities. The region generates huge pull force for the rural to urban migrants of the surrounding states and districts. So, with time the population of SMC is betting larger. Administratively SMC covers 41.9. sq km. area with 47 wards, of which wards 1 to 30 and 45 to 47 falls under Darjeeling District and 31 to 44 falls under Jalpaiguri district administration. The city is situated in the terai foothill region of Darjeeling Himalaya and poses great scenic beauty with pleasant climate throughout the year. NH 31, NH12A, AH2, New Jalpaiguri railway station and Bagdogra airport connect this city with other part of the state and country.

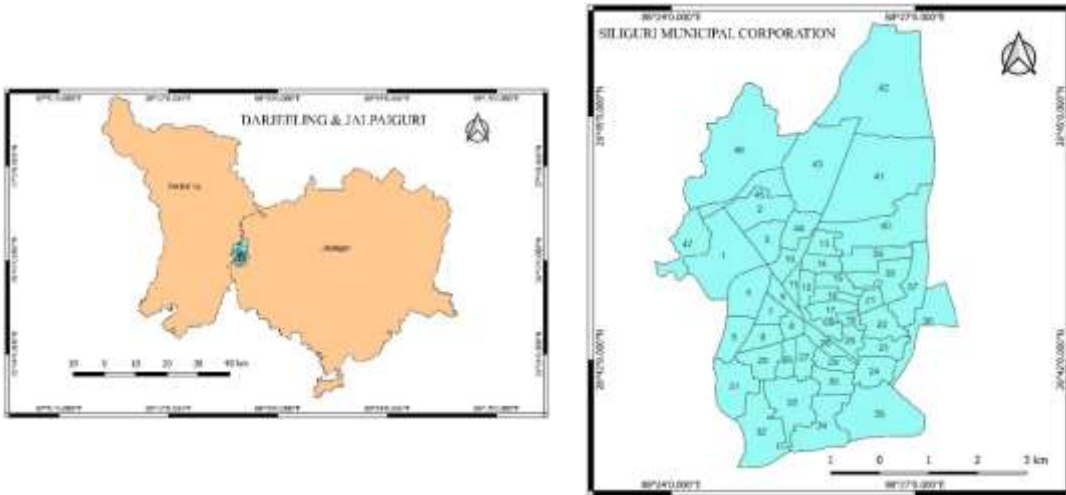


Figure 1: Location of Siliguri Municipal Corporation.

Methodology:

The study is heavily based on primary data collected from SMC jurisdiction area, during the year 2022-23. The respondents are chosen by stratified random sampling method where the total informal workers are divided in to 2 strata i.e., own account workers and the casual wage labourers. These 2 major informal workers strata have been further divided in to 2 sub-strata i.e., own account workers have been divided into vegetable shop owners and fish & meat sellers' occupational groups while the casual wage labourers are divided into 2 sub-strata like construction workers and porters. Then the samples have been drawn using random sampling method. The working condition related data of 5 parameters has been collected like workplace hygiene, verbal harassment, physical harassment, mental harassment and the feeling of exploitation. All the data is binary in nature, and clustering analysis has been done to identify the working condition groups across all informal workers.

	Nature of work	Occupation	Number of Samples	Total Sample
Informal workers	Own Account Workers	Vegetable shop owners	42	91
		Fish & Meat Sellers	49	
	Casual Wage Earners	Construction workers	54	94
		Porters	40	
Source: Primary Survey, 2022-23				

The collected data has been analysed using the chi-square test of independence to check the equal distribution of sample across all working condition, Cramer's V to check the strength of association and the K-means clustering analysis has been done to identify the workers having different working conditions.

Working Condition of the informal workers:

To assess the working condition of the own account workers and the casual wage labourers working group the 5 parameters related to the working condition has been analysed like:

Workplace hygiene: The term refers to the periodic cleaning and the waste disposal from the workplace which can probably impact the working environment of the informal workers. unhygienic working condition can lead to different health issues among the informal workers.

Verbal Harassment: This adverse working condition is related with use of foul language or the abusive tone or slangs towards the informal workers. The continuous use of verbal harassment can make the worker unwilling to perform their job.

Physical Harassment: This condition refers to the any kind of physical attack by using any object or simply pushing and hitting with hand, slapping, kicking or sexual harassment like unwanted touching or any intimate physical act without the consent of the workers.

Mental Harassment: This condition refers to the isolation of the workers during job, continuously questioning the ability of the workers or demeaning and insulting the workers unwantedly. This condition can impact the overall mental health of the workers.

Feeling of Exploitation: This workplace condition refers to the mental dissatisfaction arising due to overtime work, asking extra demand or favour by the customer or employer, asking for extra effort without proper payment etc. The feeling of exploitation sometimes makes workers unwilling to perform their job.

Workplace Hygiene Condition:

Among the workers 45% have responded that they have workplace hygiene and 55% have responded that they don't have workplace hygiene. Among the type of workers 24% own account workers and 22% casual wage labourers have reported that they have workplace hygiene. Among the others 25% own account workers have reported that they don't have workplace hygiene and 29% casual wage labourers have reported that they don't have the

parameter. So, the respondents are more or less equally distributed among the workplace hygiene conditions.

Workers		Yes %	No %	Total %
Type of workers	Own Account Workers %	24	25	49
	Casual Wage Labourers %	22	29	51
Total		45	55	100
Tests		Test Value		Sig.
Chi Square Test		0.627		0.428
Df		1		-
Cramer's V		0.058		0.428
Source: Calculated by Researcher from Primary Data				

The chi-square test is showing an insignificant test value for calculated p value. Thus, the null hypothesis stating 'the workplace condition does not varies according to the workers group' can be accepted, and the alternative hypothesis can be rejected. Cramer's V value is also very much low for a meaningful association between the two variables like workplace hygiene and the type of workers. So, it can be inferred that the workplace condition does not vary according to the type of workers and the own account workers like vegetable shop owners and fish and meat sellers and casual wage labourers like construction workers and porters have problems of workplace hygiene.

Verbal Harassment Condition:

Among the surveyed workers 45% workers have reported that they are facing verbal harassment and 55% workers have stated that they don't face verbal harassment. Highest 28% among the casual wage labourers are facing the verbal harassment at workplace on the other hand the 17% of the own account workers are facing verbal harassment. Rest of the workers from two informal workers groups are not facing any kind of harassment problem.

Workers		Yes %	No %	Total %
Type of workers	Own Account Workers %	17	32	49
	Casual Wage Labourers %	28	23	51
Total		45	55	100
Tests		Test Value		Sig.
Chi Square Test		6.812		0.009
Df		1		-
Cramer's V		0.192		0.009
Source: Calculated by Researcher from Primary Data				

The chi-square test is indicating that there is a significant variation of verbal harassment among the own account workers and the casual labourers. So, the null hypothesis can be rejected and the alternative hypothesis stating the variation of verbal harassment can be accepted. The Cramer' V result is indicating that there is a relatively weak association between two parameters.

Physical Harassment Condition:

Physical harassment is a serious workplace problem as there are many victims of that can be found, but the problem is that everyone is not willing to talk about that problem. very few shares of workers are 9% among all have reported about physical harassment. Among them 7% belongs to the casual wage labourers and 2% belong to the own account workers; however, the share of workers facing verbal harassment on casual wage labourers' group is more than triple as compared to the own account workers group.

Workers		Yes %	No %	Total %
Type of workers	Own Account Workers %	2	48	49
	Casual Wage Labourers %	7	44	51
Total		9	91	100
Tests		Test Value		Sig.
Chi Square Test		6.793		0.011
Df		1		-
Cramer's V		0.187		0.011
Source: Calculated by Researcher from Primary Data				

The chi-square test value is small yet indicating a significant variation in the verbal harassment scenario. The null hypothesis can be rejected and the alternative hypothesis can be accepted for this test which indicate a significant variation in physical harassment scenario. The Cramer's V value is also suggesting a relatively weak association between informal workers types and the physical harassment scenario. The test result may be small but the significant variation indicating a variable workplace condition.

Mental Harassment Condition:

The mental harassment is a serious issue which impact the mental wellbeing of the workers and 61% of the informal workers have responded that they are facing mental harassment and 39% are indicating they are not facing mental harassment. According to the workers group 42% of the casual wage labourers are facing mental harassment and 19% own account workers are facing mental harassment, rest of the respondents does not face any kind of harassment problems from both the informal occupation groups.

Workers		Yes %	No %	Total %
Type of workers	Own Account Workers %	19	30	49
	Casual Wage Labourers %	42	9	51
Total		61	39	100
Tests		Test Value		Sig.
Chi Square Test		34.892		0.000
Df		1		-
Cramer's V		0.434		0.000
Source: Calculated by Researcher from Primary Data				

The chi-square test is indicating a variable workplace condition among the informal workers types and the chi-square value is large enough to indicate a meaningful difference among the workers. So, the null hypothesis can be rejected and the alternative hypothesis can be accepted that the mental harassment condition is variable among informal workers types. The Cramer's V value is also suggesting a relatively strong association among the informal workers type and the mental harassment scenario. Hence, the mental harassment also differs according to the workers types in SMC.

Feeling of Exploitation:

The feeling of exploitation also makes the worker unwilling to work at any workplace and most importantly hamper the mental condition of the workers. Among the workers 54% of the workers have responded that they feel exploited at workplace and 46% workers reported that they don't feel exploited at workplace. Among the workers fee exploited the share of workers are high in casual labourers' group i.e., 35% and low in own account workers group. rest of the workers from other groups don't feel exploited at their workplace.

Workers		Yes %	No %	Total %
Type of workers	Own Account Workers %	19	30	49
	Casual Wage Labourers %	35	16	51
Total		54	46	100
Tests		Test Value		Sig.
Chi Square Test		15.148		0.000
Df		1		
Cramer's V		0.286		0.000
Source: Calculated by Researcher from Primary Data				

The Chi-square value 15.148 is indicating an association between the exploitation and worker type. The significance value of less than 0.05 is indicating a significant variation in exploitation condition among the worker’s type. So, the null hypothesis of no association can be rejected and the alternative hypothesis stating the variation in exploitation feeling can be accepted. The casual wage labourers feel more exploited in their workplace. The Cramer’s V result also indicating a relationship of moderate association among the exploitation feeling and the worker’s type.

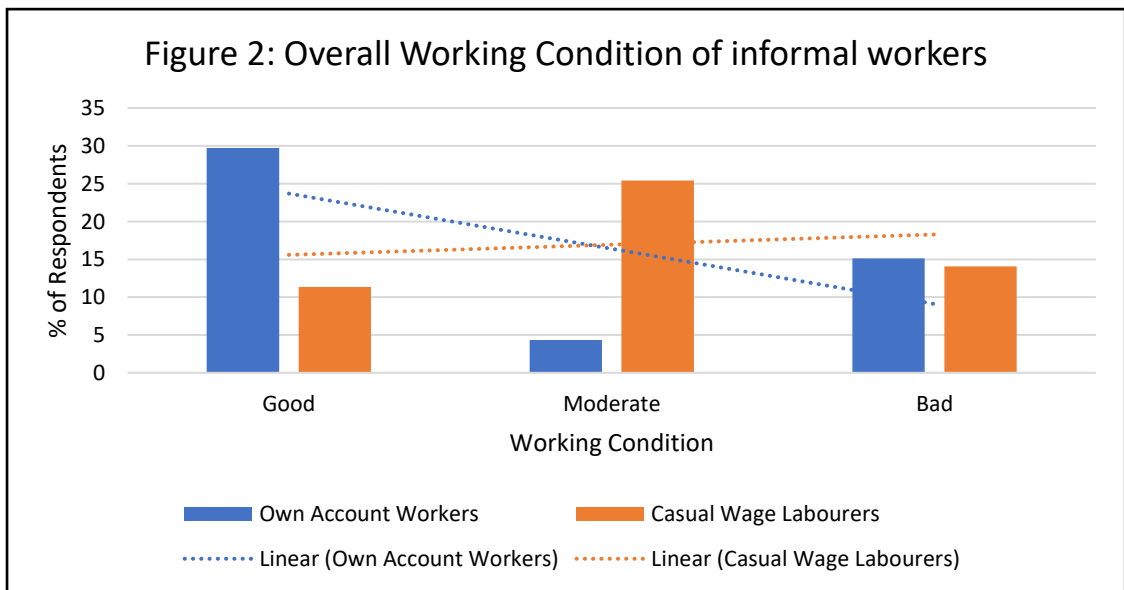
Assessment of overall working condition:

An attempt has been made to analyse the overall working condition of the informal workers. K means clustering analysis has been done using SPSS software using the composite score of each workplace parameters. The composite score has been formed based on positivity and the positive responses are marked as ‘1’ and the negative responses are marked as ‘0’. And all the parameters are given scores and the composite value of 5 parameters have been used for clustering analysis. So, the higher composite score indicates better working condition and the lower composite scores indicate bad working condition. Based on clusters formed the three working conditions marked as ‘Good’, ‘Moderate’, ‘Bad’ has been formed.

Table 7: ANOVA for effectivity of composite score						
	Cluster		Error		F	Sig.
	Mean Square	df	Mean Square	df		
Composite Score	230.958	2	.193	182	1197.919	.000
The F tests should be used only for descriptive purposes because the clusters have been chosen to maximize the differences among cases in different clusters. The observed significance levels are not corrected for this and thus cannot be interpreted as tests of the hypothesis that the cluster means are equal.						
Source: Calculated by Researcher from Primary Data						

The ANOVA table is showing that the composite score is effectively indicating the variations in the working condition. The significance value of 0.000 is also indicating the effectivity of the clustering analysis.

Table 8: Assessment of Overall working condition					
Workers		Good%	Moderate%	Bad%	Total %
Type of workers	Own Account Workers %	30	4	15	49
	Casual Wage Labourers %	11	25	14	51
Total		41	30	29	100
Tests		Test Value			Sig.
Chi Square Test		42.902			0.000
Df		2			-
Cramer’s V		0.482			0.000
Source: Calculated by Researcher from Primary Data					



Most of the own account workers have good working condition i.e., 30% and most of the casual wage labourers have moderate working condition. The other categories of working condition are also variable. So, the broad picture suggests the own account workers mostly have good to moderate working condition but the casual wage labourers on the other hand have moderate to bad working condition. The trend line in the above figure is also suggesting the same trend among the worker's type. The chi square result of overall working condition is also suggesting that it is variable among the occupational groups. the Cramer's V also suggesting a relatively strong relationship among the variables.

Conclusion:

The above discussion regarding the working condition of the own account workers and casual wage labourers is showing that they are highly variable accept the workplace hygiene in Siliguri Municipal Corporation. The vegetable, fish and meat sellers have to operate from the market are which is generally not hygienic and periodic cleaning is absent on the other hand the porter and construction workers also has to work in construction sites or transportation which are also nit very hygienic. But according to the other criteria the workplace conditions are variable but as the own account workers have more control over their shop so they have the less workplace problems than the casual wage labourers. Hence from the workplace condition perspective the casual wage labourers are more sufferers than the own account workers as they have to rely on outside condition at their workplace. So better policy formation, mass awareness generation are important for the betterment of workplace condition of the informal workers. The labour unions can also play important roles to improve the overall workplace condition of the informal workers especially casual wage labourers in SMC.

Conflict of Interest:

The authors declare they do not have any conflict of interest.

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