

**DETERMINANTS AND CONSEQUENCES  
OF WOMEN'S WORK IN THE  
UNORGANISED SECTOR**

**A CASE STUDY WITH REFERENCE  
TO THE WOMEN IN THE TEXTILE SALES SECTOR  
OF TRIVANDRUM CORPORATION AREA**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Unemployment is the major blight on the development of Kerala and educated unemployment has assumed alarming proportions in recent times. Gender difference in educated unemployment is also increasing substantially. The industrial as well as the traditional sectors are losing their hold as labour generators. The state is withdrawing from the education sector and the people are losing chances for higher education. Job opportunities for unskilled and partially skilled workers are becoming lesser or rather nil in government and public sectors. People prefer only white-collar jobs. Educated are averse towards manual and blue-collar jobs. Myrdal has referred to the negligible functional mobility of the educated as they are looking for non-manual work and are not prepared to accept the jobs that soil their hands. (Myrdal 1968: 1124-31) However according to Blang et al, this view at least is a sociological half-truth. They pointed out that the educated do ultimately accept the less paid quasi-manual work; otherwise they may lose the whatever earnings they get in the meantime.

The commercial sector becomes the only accessible resort for the white-collar job seekers. Between 1971 & 1978 the absorption of labour in the organized sector was only around 10 to 11% of the annual increase in labour force, while the rest 90% either drift to informal sector or unorganized sector. Despite considerable modernization and advance on the road to industrialization, most of the cities and industrial centers in the developing countries continue to have a large and in some cases increasing proportions of their activities in the informal and the non-organized units. This phenomenon has led to some observers to

advocate a strategy of development emphasizing the non formal and non organized sector as the focal point as an alternative to widely used strategy of relying on technological modernization and large scale production units. It is presumed that this sector makes a greater use of abundantly available human labour with no rigid bars on entry. The employment in this sector is more accessible to those lacking economic endowment. Growth based on the informal organization is presumed, therefore to be more effective in tackling the problems of unemployment, poverty and inequality Entry into the informal sector is unrestricted while that in the formal sector labour market is restricted artificially to raise hiring standards. The supply of the labour in the informal sector is mostly new entrants in the labour market, migrant or young persons, especially women .Social characteristics and extra economic constraints makes women increasingly vulnerable to poverty and at the time of entry into the labour market the labour market is exploiting women as a bendable resource.

Women constitute only 25% labour force in India. According to the indicators of development identified by the World Bank (1994), there are only 25 females in the labour force for 100 males as against ratio of 38 females for 100 males in the developed countries. NSSC has defined work as gainful activity pursued for family gain or in other words the activity adds value to the rational product. Normally it is an activity which results in production of goods and services for exchange. More than 90% of the women workers are concentrated in the unorganized sector. According to the Ministry of Labour almost 96% of the female labour force of India are women in the informal sector. But paradoxically all the laws made so far have been with an eye on the

women in the organized sector. This has resulted in the marginalisation of majority women workers so much. So the definition of work and production as it exists today, whether in the census reports or in other surveys on work are such that the substance of production and services provided by women are either ignored or taken into account marginally.

### **Context of the study**

State of the women in the textile sales sector is very underprivileged in Kerala. Exploitation is very acute in this field. The labour is unstable and irregular. Even existing laws are being always violated. A cardinal feature of the labour laws is that all the enactments pertaining to social security, welfare, safety and working conditions and the like, is based on the presumption of an employer-employee relationship. In a situation where unemployment is high and alternative job opportunities are few, any attempts to bargain for better conditions leads to the replacement of the still existing job. The fear of having no work and no income restrain the workers from asserting their legal rights. In this context it is very important to study the condition of women in the textile sale sector of Kerala. This study is about the women working in the textile sale sector of Trivandrum corporation area. Trivandrum being a major city in Kerala it will depict the typical situation.

### **Objectives:**

- To map the socio economic and demographic profile of the women in the textile sale sector of the Trivandrum Corporation area
- To bring out the consequences and determinants of women's work in the unorganized sector

- To find out the depth of gender discrimination and exploitation in the textile sale sector

### **Methodology**

#### **Sampling:**

The samples are taken as per the size of the shop. Big shops (Class I) are those having more than 20 sales staff. Class II shops are shops having sales staff between 10 and 20. Small shops (Class III) are shops having less than 10 sales staff. Samples are also collected from the shops where women and men are working together. Some shops where the whole staff are Tamil migrants have been excluded.

#### **Data collection:**

Data is collected from women from their place in accordance with their convenience. It was very difficult to find time to spend for this. Some of them have the work schedule extending from 8 o'clock in the morning to 8 o'clock in the evening, including the time for their journey. Many of them have to work even in the holidays including Sundays. More over they are not bold enough to respond to an outsider on their personal and service related matters since they are of the fear that this may lead to the deprivation of the still existing small job. The social situation force them to become more silent on whatever problems they have. They have also internalized the perception of the society. So the data collection become highly difficult. The samples are limited to 30 from various representative shops. Samples from men are also collected to understand the discrimination and difference. It is very difficult to get in touch with a woman working in the textile sale sector. Almost all the shops have closed circuit television system to watch the movements of

sales staff. Shop owner's managerial staff and also fellow male staff will not allow women staff to interact with any people coming to the shop. They themselves are very reluctant to interact with anyone from outside. Majority of the women sale staff don't want to reveal their identity as sales woman. Due to all this factors, the data collection became a very difficult task. The members of their family also were averse to any outside contact. They view every body with suspicion. They feel that any intervention from outside may worsen their situation. They also think that nobody will support them. They have no time for this type of interaction, of course they believe that they have no benefit from this and also they suspect some danger in it. But after a series of inter action they became ready to open up their minds.

To understand the situation of the women who had left the field, some data were also collected. It was also very difficult to get in contact with these women. They were also reluctant to reveal their past. In some cases their husbands don't want them to reveal their identity as a sales woman. Majority of women left the field sending their sisters for the same job.

### **Secondary data collection:**

I have collected data from the Labour offices related to the textile sale sector. But unfortunately in no way it is matching with the primary data collected from the field. In labour offices they are not keeping the data. Service details related to the textile sale staff is not available in the department. Shop owners are giving a list of employees every year. They will change the name sometimes just to avoid the responsibility of giving any service benefits including increments. Some times they are

appointing some women as apprentices to avoid some benefits of the existing employees.

**Focus group discussion:**

To understand the perception of life and the society of the women in the textile sales sector, the focus group discussion was very helpful. Some films were shown to the focus group to make them open up their mind. They were not revealing anything as they think that it is necessary for them to be like that to keep the image of a silent good woman. After viewing films, they became interactive and expressed their views about family, men, women, and also about life.

**Case studies:**

Some case studies are also done on some of the typical cases to have a better understanding of the situation.

**Structure of the report:**

The report contains the socio economic and demographic characteristics of the samples. A brief analysis of the determinants, exploitation and gender discrimination is also done. Health issues related to the work of the women in the textile sales sector is also attached. To understand the perception on life and society, their concepts and the responses of the society have been analyzed. Three case studies are also included in the report.



## 2. SOCIO ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN IN THE TEXTILE SALES SECTOR

### WOMEN IN THE TEXTILE SECTOR:

The samples are collected from three classes of shops. The classes are fixed as per the number of workers in the shops.

1. Class1: Shops where workers are in number more than 20
2. Class2: Shops where number of workers are workers are below 20 and above 10
3. Class3: Shops where number of workers are below 10

### 1. Class 1

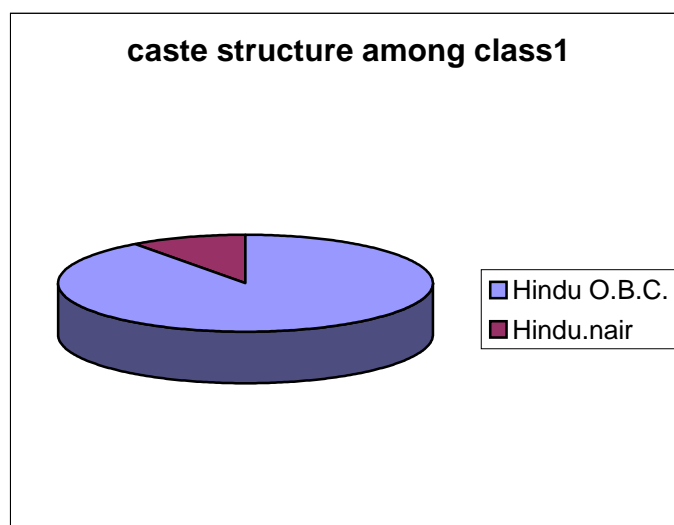
Table 1

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF WOMEN IN TEXTILES SALES SECTOR

Sample	Age			Marital Status	Religion/ Caste	Educational Status			Language	Size of the Family
	Below 18	18-22	22 & above			below SSLC	SSLC & above	PDC & above		
1		√		UM	Hindu OBC	√			Tamil	13
2		√		UM	Hindu OBC		√ (Technical)		Tamil	11
3			√	UM	Hindu Nair			√	Mal.	9
4		√		UM	Hindu Ezhava		√		Mal.	12
5		√		UM	Hindu OBC			√	Mal.	8
6		√		UM	Hindu Ezhava		√		Mal.	12
7		√		UM	Hindu Ezhava		√ (Computer)		Mal.	14
8		√		UM	Hindu Ezhava		√		Mal.	2
9		√		UM	Hindu Ezhava		√		Mal.	10
10		√		UM	Hindu Ezhava		√		Mal.	9

### 1. Caste structure:

Among the 10 samples, 90% belongs to OBC category of Hindu religion. Rest of the others belongs to Nair community of Hindu religion itself. None of the samples belongs to either Muslim and Christian religion



### 2. Age:

90% of the women of samples belongs to the age group between 18 and 22 years, and rest of the 10% belonged to the age group of 22-25 years.

### 3. Educational Status:

70% of the women in the sample are having education SSLC and above, 20% having PDC and 10% of them have not completed SSLC.

#### 4. Language:

20% of the women this class are speaking Tamil and the rest are speaking Malayalam.

**5.Marital Status:** 100 % of the women this group are unmarried.

#### 6.Family size:

Average family size of this group is 10.

**7. Wages:** 10% of this group is getting above 2000 rupees as salary, 40%aregetting betweenrupees1000 and 2000 and 50% of the women are getting below 1000 rupees.

**8. PF/ESI:** Only 20% of this group are the benefit of PF and ESI.

**9. Service:** The average service of this group is 2.5years and it ranges from 5 years to 1year.

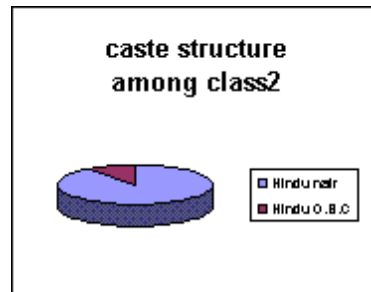
## II. Class 2:

Table2

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF WOMEN IN SALES SECTOR

Sample	Age			Marital Status	Religion/ Caste	Educational Status			Language	Size of the Family
	Below 18	18-22	22 & above			below SSLC	SSLC & above	PDC & above		
1		√		UM	Hindu-Nair	√			Mal.	9
2		√		UM	Hindu-Nair		√		Mal.	12
3			√	UM	Hindu-Nair			√	Mal.	13
4		√		UM	Hindu-Nair			√	Mal.	9
5		√		UM	Hindu-Nair			√	Mal.	8
6		√		UM	Hindu-Nair		√		Mal.	12
7		√		UM	Hindu-Nair		√		Mal.	8
8		√		UM	Hindu-Ezhava		√		Mal.	12
9			√	UM	Hindu-Nair	√			Mal.	13
10		√		UM	Hindu-Nair	√			Mal.	10

1. **Caste structure:** 90% of this sample belongs to Hindu Nair, 10% belongs to Hindu Ezhava caste.



2. **Age:** 80 % of this group belongs to the age group of 18-22 and 20% of the group coming above 22 years
3. **Educational status:** 40% of the women coming under this group are having above SSLC, 30% of them are having below SSLC and 30% are having PDC and above
4. **Language:** All women coming under this group are Malayalam speaking.
5. **Marital status:** All women are unmarried.
6. **Family size:** Average size of the family is 11.
7. **Wages:** All women of this group are getting wages below rupees 2000.
8. **PF/ESI:** None of these women are getting this benefit.
9. **Service:** Average years of service period of this group is 3.5

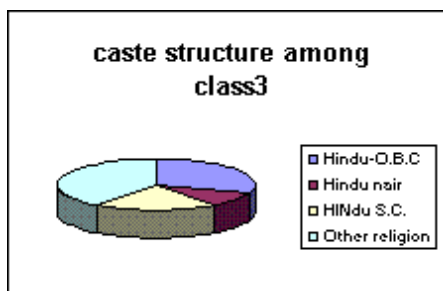
### III. Class 3:

Table 3

#### SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF WOMEN IN SALES SECTOR

Sample	Age			Marital Status	Religion/ Caste	Educational Status			Language	Size of the Family
	Below 18	18-22	22 & above			below SSLC	SSLC & above	PDC & above		
1	√			UM	Hindu-Ezhava	√			Mal.	9
2	√			UM	Hindu-SC	√			Mal.	8
3	√		√	M	Hindu-Chetty			√	Tamil	7
4			√	UM	Hindu-Vaniya	√			Tamil	6
5		√		UM	Christian			√	Mal.	12
6		√		UM	Muslim	√			Tamil	10
7			√	UM	Christian			√	Mal.	11
8	√			UM	Hindu-Nair	√			Mal.	8
9		√		M	Christian		√		Mal.	9
10		√		UM	Hindu-SC		√		Mal.	10

1. **Caste structure:** 30% of this group are Chrstain 10% are Muslim and 60% Hindu.



2. **Age structure:** 40% of this group belongs to the group of below 18 years, 40% belongs to the age group of 18-22 years and 20% of the group belongs to above 22 year
3. **Educational status:** 50% are below SSLC 20% above SSLC and 30% are having PDC.
4. **Language:** All women in this group are speaking Malayalam.

5. **Marital status:** 80% of this group are unmarried and 20% are married.
6. **Family size:** the average family size of this group is 9.
7. **Wages:** 50% of the group are getting salary above rupees 1000 and the other 50% are getting below 1000 rupees
8. **PF/ESI:** None of this group is getting this benefit.
9. **Service:** Average service period of this group is 2.3years.

#### IV. COMPARISON OF THE THREE CLASSES

TABLE 4

##### COMPARISON BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT CLASSES OF SHOPS

Category	Age	Education	Wage	Religion	Marital status	Family size
Class –I	Below18 – Nil 18 – 22 – 90% 22 and above – 10%	Below SSLC – 10% SSLC and above – 70% PDC and above – 20%	Below Rs.1000 –50% Rs.1000-Rs.2000 – 40% AboveRs.2000 –10%	Hindu OBC-90% Hindu Nair 10%	All Unmarried	10
Class –II	Below18 – Nil 18 – 22 – 80% 22 and above – 20%	Below SSLC – 30% SSLC and above – 40% PDC and above – 30%	Below Rs.1000 –Nil Rs.1000-Rs.2000 – 100% AboveRs.2000 –Nil	Hindu Nair 90% Hindu Izhava- 10%	All Unmarried	11
Class –III	Below18 – 40% 18 – 22 – 40% 22 and above – 20%	Below SSLC – 50% SSLC and above – 20% PDC and above – 30%	Below Rs.1000 –50% Rs.1000-Rs.2000 – 50% AboveRs.2000 –Nil	Christian-30% Muslim-10% Hindu-60%	Unmarried -80% Married- 20%	9

1. **Caste structure:** In class 1 100% of the women are Hindu 90% are OBC and 10% of them are coming under the caste Nair. While in class 2 90% belongs to Hindu Nair, 10% belongs to Hindu Ezhava. In Class3 30% of Christians, 10% Muslims and 60% Hindus. Among the Hindus 20% of them belongs to Scheduled Caste 30% Nair and the rest OBC.

2. **Age structure:** In class1, 90%of the women are in the age group of 18-22years,10%of women are in the age group of 22-25.In class2 80% of the women coming under 18-22years and20% are above 22years.In the class 3, 40% of women are below 18 years ,30% coming under 18-22years and 30% are above 22years.
3. **Educational status:** In class 1 70% of the women are having SSLC,20% of them are having PDC and 10% of the women are below SSLC. In the class 2, 40% of women are having SSLC and above,30%PDC and above and 30% are below SSLC. While in the class 3, 50% of women are below SSLC, 20% are above SSLC and 30% are having PDC.
4. **Marital status:** In class1 and 2 100% of women are unmarried while in class 3,20% of the women are married.
5. **Wages:** In class 1, 40% of women are getting above 1000 rupees as wages, 50% of women are getting below 1000 rupees as wages and 10% are getting above 2000 rupees. In class 2 ,all the women are getting wages below 2000.While in class 3 .50% are getting below 1000 as their wages and the other 50% are getting above 1000 as wages.

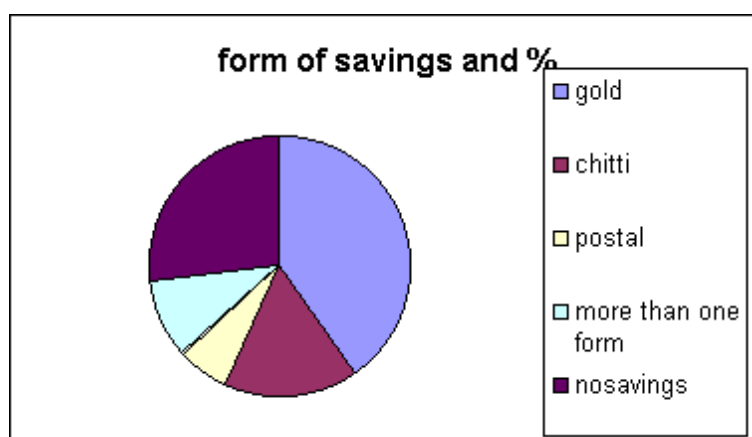
## V. SAVINGS:

Table 8

### FORM OF SAVINGS OF WOMEN IN THE TEXTILE SALE SECTOR

Gold		Chitti		Postal		More than one form	
No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
12	40	5	16.6	2	6.6	3	25

1. Only 12 numbers are that is 40% of the women are saving a little money out of the wages they are getting
2. 16.6 % are saving money by joining with local chitti companies.
3. 6.6 % of women are having postal savings.
4. 3% of the women in the textile sales sector are having more than one form of savings.



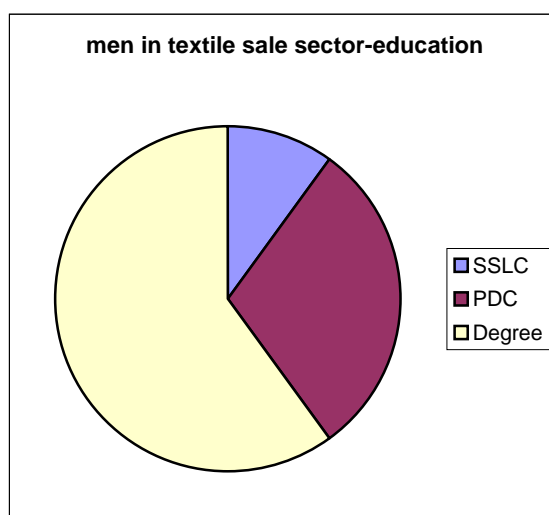


## VI. MEN IN THE TEXTILE SALES SECTOR

TABLE 6

### MEN IN TEXTILE SALES SECTOR

Sample	Age	Education	Wage	Marital status	Religion & caste	Mode of stay
1	22	PDC	2400	UM	Christian	Shelter Provided By the Owner
2	23	B.Com	2500	UM	Christian	Shelter Provided By the Owner
3	38	PDC	3000	Married	Hindu-vaniya	Own
4	35	SSLC	2800	Married	Muslim	Own
5	34	PDC	2900	Married	Muslim	Own
6	30	PDC	3000	Married	Christian	Own
7	29	B.Com	3200	UM	Christian	Own
8	28	PDC	3000	UM	Hindu-	Own
9	28	PDC	3000	Married	Hindu	Rented



1. **Caste structure:** 40% of the men in the sample taken are Hindu, 40% are Christians and 20% are Muslims.
2. **Age structure:** In this group of men the average age is 29 years.

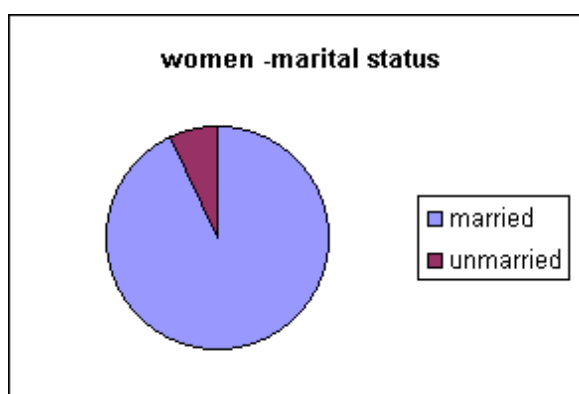
3. **Educational status:** 60% of them having PDC, 30% are graduate and the rest are SSLC.
4. **Marital Status:** 40% of the men are unmarried and 60% are married.
5. **Wages:** Wages are varying from Rupees 3200/toRupees 2400 and the average wage is Rupees 2880/

## VII. COMPARISON BETWEEN MEN AND THE WOMEN IN THE TEXTILE SALES SECTOR

TABLE 7

COMPARISON WITH MEN AND WOMEN IN THE TEXT  
SECTOR

Category	Average Age	Education Status	Marital status	Religion And Caste	Mode Of Stay	Wage
Men	29	22% Degree 11 %SSLC67%PDC	44% Unmarried 56% Married	Hindu 40%, 20% Muslim 40% Christian	67% Own House 11% For Rent 22% % Shelter Provided By Owners	2880
Women	19	26% Below SSLC 7% Technical 67% Above SSLC	93% Unmarried 7% Married	10% Christain,3. % Muslimand 87% Hindu	83% Rented 7% Hostel 10% Own	1800



1. **Caste structure:** 40% of the men in the group belongs to Hindu while in the women's side 87% of them belongs to Hindu. 40 % of the men coming under Christians, at the same time only 10% of women are coming under Christians. 20% of the men are in the Muslim religion while only 3% of the women are in Muslim religion.
2. **Age structure:** The average age of the men in the sample is 29 while that of women is 19.
3. **Educational status:** 60% of the men sample are having PDC 30% having degree and 10% are SSLC. At the same time 26% of the women are from the lower SSLC strata and 67% are having above SSLC and 7% are having technical qualifications.
4. **Marital status:** 40% of the men are unmarried and 60% are married. While 93% of women are unmarried and only 7% are married.
5. **Wages:** Men are getting an average wage of Rs.2880/ while women are getting only Rs.1800/

TABLE 8

## COMPARISON IN WORKING CONDITIONS

Category	Working Hours	Lunch Breaks and Other Breaks	Toilet Facility	Distance traveling	Mode of Travel
Women	10	3%	2%	12	Bus
Men	8	96%	67%	8	Bus

6. **Working Hours:** Men are working for 8hours while women have to work 10 hours.3%of the women are getting lunch breaks and 96% of the men workers are getting not only lunch breaks but also other breaks such as tea breaks.
7. **Toilet Facility:** Only 2% of the women workers are provided with the toilet facility and 67% of the men are having the facility of toilets.

# **VIII. WOMEN WHO LOST THEIR JOB IN THE TEXTILE SALE SECTOR**

TABLE 9

## **WOMEN LOST THEIR JOB IN THE TEXTILE SALES SECTOR**

Sample	Education	Age		Retirement Benefit	Employment Of Husband	Size Of The Family	Cause Of Deployment	Mode Of Stay	Years Of Service	Satisfied With The Benefits Or Not	Wished To Continue Or Not
		AT THE TIME OF MARRIAGE	NOW								
1	SSLC	22	28	1000	Coolie	4	marriage	Rented	4	Yes	Yes
2	SSLC	20	26	500	Auto Driver	3	marriage	Rented	4	No	Yes
3	Below SSLC	26	30	Nil	Hotel Worker	3	marriage	Rented	6	No	No
4	PDC	24	26	2000	Auto Driver	3	marriage	Rented	6	No	Yes
5	SSLC	18	19	Nil	Sales man	2	marriage	Rented	2	No	Yes
6	Below SSLC	23	27	500	Coolie	5	marriage	Rented	5	No	Yes
7	Below SSLC	25	28	200	Sales representative	3	marriage	Rented	8	No	Yes
8	PDC	20	22	1000	Auto Driver	3	marriage	Rented	4	No	Yes
9	PDC	19	21	1000	Sales representative	3	marriage	Rented	2	Yes	Yes
10	SSLC	20	21	1000	bakery worker	3	marriage	Rented	3	Yes	yes
11	Below SSLC	22	23	1000	Auto Driver	3	marriage	Own	6	No	Yes
12	Below SSLC	23	25	1000	Painter	4	marriage	Rented	7	No	Yes

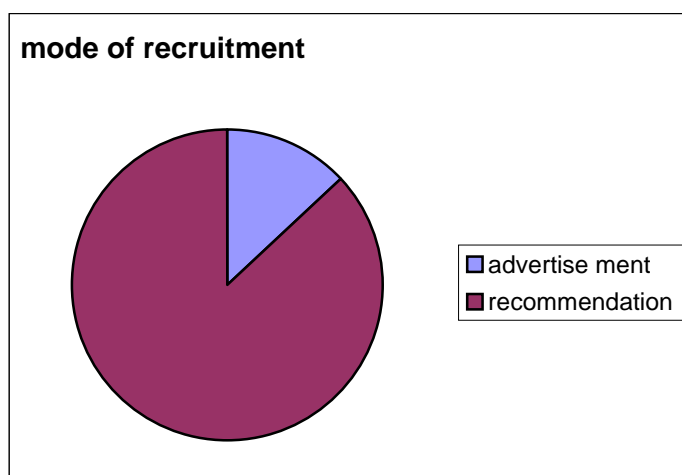


1. **Educational Status:** 33% of the women who quit the field were having SSLC, 42% were below SSLC and 25% were having PDC.
2. **Age Structure:** The average age in which women qui the job is 22 years.92% of them were wanted to continue the work and the rest 8% were not willing to work
3. **Benefits:** 50%of the women got Rs1000/ as a' retirement benefit' , 8% got the benefit of Rs2000/,17% got only Rs500/, 8% got Rs200/ and17% have not any money at all.25% of the women satisfied with the benefit given and the rest were not satisfied with the given benefits.
4. **Mode of Stay:** 75% of the women in this group are staying in rented houses, 8% in their own houses 7% are staying in the houses of some relatives.
5. **Continuation in the Service:** 92 % women were wished to continue in the service while 8% were willing to quit.
6. **Re-employment:** None of these women had got any new job after quitting the sales sector.
7. **Average Size of the Family:** The size of the family is 3.
8. **Average Service in the Sector:** This group has an average of service 5yers ranging from8 years to 2 years.

Table 10  
Mode of Recruitment

Advertisement		On recommendation	
No	%	No	%
4	13	26	86.6

86.6 % of the women in the sample taken got the job from some familiar persons. While 13.4% got the job through the advertisement.





### 3. EXPLOITATION IN THE FIELD

1. **WAGES:** As per the Minimum Wages Act, the employees are eligible to get certain minimum wage but only two women are getting the minimum wage as per the existing law.

As per the existing law increment is not a must. The Minimum Wages Act is silent about the yearly increment. The employers are not ready to give even the provisions in the law. The lacuna of the law will be a blessing for them. So the women are not sure about getting increment as the year passes. The working hours as per the act is 8 hours per day but all of the employees are working more than this. The Minimum Wages eligible for them in 2000 as per the Minimum Wages Act is Rs 2166/-. But the Average of the wages of the samples here is Rs 1800/- only, i. e 83% of the minimum wages.

**Working conditions:** women are not provided with adequate space for taking food and rest. They are not provided with toilets. Either they have to depend the near by places or they have to postpone it to the time after reaching home. Women working in the shopping complexes are a bit lucky in this regard. The shopping complexes are provided with toilet facility in each floor. Women in this field are not getting service benefits as and when they quit the field. The women in this field are getting a nominal increment as per the whims and fancies of the owner. The facility of provident fund and insurance is limited to two percent. Bachelor male employees are provided with the residential facilities while women are deprived of this. Men in the field are getting lunch breaks and other breaks while women are not getting this advantage.

97% of the women are taking the lunch from whatever limited space they have in the shop and also that too in the working hours.

### **Future in the field:**

Very few are getting any other job after quitting this job. There is no surety of getting a better job or even any job as per their experience. These work force are seldom considered as a work force. The income they get are to give support to their family or otherwise their family cannot survive with out their income. Their future is related to the status they have in the society. Society is silent about their contribution and also about the family. At the same time they are doing very hard work for their family as well as for the society. The variable, age is a controlling factor here. Even though experience is a qualifying factor for the job, age is a disqualification. This is a paradox .How can we attain experience with out spending some time? The time constitute years and then age. In the case of male it is different. In this case experience enhances the quality and it is directly proportional to the wages. The gender difference of the society looks for under aged girls for their work. But the experienced male get the preferences of experience. None of the employees are getting any kind of appointment order or contract order get signed as a sign of employment. They are not in a position to raise voice against their denial of job or termination of any kind. In no way they are having any kind of legal status for their employment.

Labour department is also silently supporting this illegal system of operation. They are not keeping their register annually. There is no continuity in it. No identity marks or bio data is needed for verification by the Labour Department. It seems only an eyewash to the system.

Owners of the shops are expert violators of the existing system. The existing system has a lot of limitation even then it is not properly followed.

### **Gender issues:**

A lot of gender issues are rampant in this field. The name of the job itself is expressing it very strongly. The male counter part I called as salesman but not sales boy. That denotes the gender discrimination. The job is only for the girls, that the job is restricted to a certain age. While in the case of male it is not restricted only to the adolescent age. In the case of male, experience is an additional qualification while for female it is a disqualification. The female gender in this field is projected as an attraction, but not a qualification. Always they are lower paid. Working time of women extends from 8 to 11 hours while for men it does not varies so much and it is 8 hours. Men are taking small leisure time for taking tea, smoking and chitchat. But women are not entitled for any such leisure. Even when women requests for it they will not get it. Women going out for taking tea are considered as a bad woman. No shopkeeper wants to keep a bad woman in his shop. Women are not allowed to sit in the shop during working hours since it is not a good sign, while men can sit whenever he wants without disturbing the working atmosphere. But sales women sitting in shop is symbol of arrogance that will not be acceptable to customers. If any customer harasses or misbehaves to a sales woman she can not even resists because that also will affect the business. She has to suffer it silently. It is part of the business. Marriage is a disqualification for women. But for men it is not so. That is a personal choice. Man is thus considered as an

individual working in the field, whereas woman is not considered so. The closed circuit T.V. installed inside the shop is intended to watch the sales women also. Always they are watched by many higher men .It may be a boss or a colleague, but definitely a man !

### **Insecurity**

Many women in the study group expressed their insecurity not only during their work but also in their life as a whole. They are exploited by the fellow male workers, owners, as well as by the customers. The women are not ready to complain with any of the formal bodies since they may lose their job due to this complaint. They feel that any of their colleagues or their friends and family members will not support them in such a critical situation. So they will not lodge a complaint in any of the available forums. It is reported that some of them left the job due to the exploitative behavior of the shop owner and joined another shop with much lower wage. They are not in a position to express what is happening to them not only during the working hours but also during way, to and back to the workplace. One girl working in a small shop described how she and her friends are subjected to harassment during their way back. Some of local scoundrels will wait in some turnings to pester them in the late evenings. They come on motorbikes. Most of their families know this. But none of them are ready to interfere. We can see the pale, scared faces of women working in the textile sale sector in the late evenings in the city bus stand. One girl worked in a better waged shop had left the job due to this and went for another job with much lower pay but she could leave the place much early. They feel that they are the most powerless people and they can be

attacked from any where. They are not confident to get any support from any where. This powerlessness and insecurity grabs their life as a whole. They assume themselves as most unwanted beings in the world. They have nothing to enjoy any outings such as viewing films as that will affect their career. It will raise the eyebrows of the owner if it seen by him or known to him. One girl told a story of her colleague who lost her job due to a similar incident. She had gone to the museum with her boyfriend and she was seen by her owner's friend and then she was thrown out. The girl who told the story is also of the opinion that because of her impudence only she lost her job. It is improper to behave like this when having a job of a sales girl. She is of the impression that if the salesgirl and her boyfriend is seen together in the museum by the customers, definitely it will affect the business of the textile shop. The family members such as brothers and fathers knew that these girls are getting harassed in various manners. Even then they cannot protect them since they are not in a position to support them on their own. I met father of a girl who used to take his 18 year old daughter every day to the shop and back. She is getting only Rs.1200/- as wages. They have to spend 14 rupees towards the bus fare. Almost all the women in the textile sale sector are residing in the periphery of the city. They have to depend the heavy rushed vehicle for their journey. Their homes are far away from the bus stops. So they have to walk at least 2 kilometers everyday. In some cases it even goes up to 5 kilometers. They will not get houses for cheap rent in these areas. They have to stay in the city to do the job. This also increases their vulnerability.

If some customers had gone without buying anything from the shop that blame will also fall upon the woman in charge. If the business is going very well no credit is given to her. She is never considered as a potential worker.

### **Insensitivity of trade unions:**

Trade unions are inactive and insensitive in this sector. No trade unions are interested to form trade unions in this sector. When some problems arise regarding the rights of the workers trade unions came as a mediator from the side of the employer. This is because of the gender of the section. They all belong to women of the lower class and also they are all otherwise vote banks, but not by profession. More over women in this sector are not getting chance to get organized or even to communicate their problems to any one. Whenever a problem arises the owner himself is the only decision maker. He himself will decide the future of the woman. In almost all cases the decision will be the removal of the working woman from the job. No other incident is reported. The woman also finds it difficult to survive with a difference of opinion. In no way women working in this sector are conscious of their rights. This also is because of their unorganized nature. They are all having the opinion that organization in any form will result to the lose of their job. They also think that it is not needed. If it is put in another form they think that it is not possible to them to get organized. This is because of their lack of confidence. They have internalized the perception of their employer and in the other hand they have the fear of losing the existing job by getting organized. They have not any experience in interference of any social institutions or any organization on their behalf. So they are the prisoners of this mindset. No women in this study are having any

previous experience or knowledge of solving the problems with the help of any existing social institutions. For example they are not well aware of the Women's Commission. Many of them think that it is a forum for the solution of marital problems. They have not attended any women's right meeting or heard of that type of meetings. And also they have not read about it. They think they have nothing to do with that. Or it is not meant for people like them. They are placing them in a no rights situation. They are not having any social space at all, whether it is in the family or any where in the society. They are just working and getting the wages and giving to the family for their survival. Even then their role is not identified as that of a bread winner even though they are doing it. Their status is also pathetic. No one is ready to recognize their contribution to the society. The family members are sharing the society's perception that because of their fault only they are getting tortured by others. One girl complained about her brother who used to scold her due to her late arrivals. She can not come early since the bus to that place come only at that time. He also is aware of that but even then he is persisting with the scolding. The present value system does not allow the girls to travel in the late evenings even when she has to go for bread even in the late evenings. If the workforce is an organized one, the clash between the system and the workforce will be minimized. The social stigma can also be changed if this workforce is organized. The women who got many years service are not getting any advantage such as yearly increment and other service benefits enjoyed by the organized sector and the law permits. Now laws related to this sector are not being enforced well.

### **Knowledge about institutions:**

Only 10% of women in the sample have the knowledge about Kerala Women's Commission. Among the 10% only 6.6% think that it is meant to handle the cases of dowry killing. The 3.4% think that it is a kind of women police. All of them knows that Smt. Sugatha Kumari is the chair person of the commission.

### **Health Issues:**

90% of the women in the field complained about pain in the legs and also back pain. They seems to be very pale and unhealthy. They are not taking food properly. They are not getting enough time to take food. They are not provided with any space for taking food. They have to manage it on their own. 98% women in the sample are not provided with toilet facilities. Hence many of the women complained about urinary troubles. None of the women had approached Doctor for back pain and back pain but 40% women approached Doctor for urinary complaints.



## **4. CASE STUDIES**

### **CASE STUDY-I**

Vasantha is very fair and attractive. She is third among five children. In five children 4 are girls. After doing Pre Degree she had to discontinue her studies. She was not good in the study since she was not getting much time to attend to that. When she was writing the Pre Degree University Examination her elder sister gave birth to a child. Vasantha's mother being a chronic Asthma patient and hence unable to care for the delivered woman and the baby, that responsibility fell on Vasantha. Although she had done fairly well in her first year exams she failed in the Second Year exams.

After the failure in the Pre degree examinations she quit the studies. Her younger brother and sister were at that time studying in school classes. They were not good in the studies. After quitting the studies she was searching for jobs. One of her elder sister who got married was separated due to economic reasons. She came back to her home with two of her kids. At the time of marriage they had promised to give her five sovereigns of gold , but they were able to give 3½ sovereigns only. Now her sister-in-law was going to get married and they were demanding for the remaining sovereigns for her marriage. 1½ sovereigns was needed for Vasantha's sister to go back to her husband's house.

Vasantha's father had abandoned her mother some 10 years back. Her mother used to work as a domestic worker in four houses. Two in the morning and two in the afternoon. She has to work hard to support the family. Her husband, who left her was a lottery ticket seller with a

fairly good income. He had some vices .He used to take alcoholic drinks in fairly large amounts and he also had relationship with many women. But he used to scold Vasantha's mother accusing her of having illicit relationship with some men. Vasantha's mother was fed up with this kind of behavior. Earlier she was very submissive, but after the children grew up she felt it was very humiliating and started to react. Then he left her and started living with another woman with whom he already had a relationship. He had helped Vasantha's mother in getting married their daughters but he was not supporting the family in other matters. Vasantha believes that it is not needed also because he was staying with another woman and he was not having any emotional attachment with her family.

Vasantha grew up in this situation. Her mother's Asthma worsened with the growing problems. She is not able to do any work in their house as she has work to do in other houses. She gets Rs.1600/- as monthly earnings. They have to pay Rs.600/- They were having barely Rs.1000/- for their living.

Vasantha after quitting her studies, started job hunting. One of her neighbors was working in a textile shop and earning Rs.1200/- Vasantha contacted her and enquired about getting a job there. She helped Vasantha to get a job in another shop as her shop was having many conditions in appointing a new recruit. She could earn Rs.1000/- p. m. for 10 hours hard work per day. Even then she was very happy. Now she is going out and something and getting some money doing something and getting some money. All her colleagues convinced her that she was lucky to get Rs.1000/- p.m. in starting itself. She found the job very exciting – customers coming, selecting, purchasing.

The manager of the shop showed some special interest towards her. She also got attracted to the good looking guy. He made her believe he is a close relative of the owner and thus became the manager. Their attraction grew into an affair. Now, Vasantha lost interest in the job. She got fed up with the daylong work and standing all the day in the shop. She also did not like the control and comments of the senior female staff. She got irritated all the time.

During the festival seasons she had to work up to 9.30 in the night. Some days she even missed the last bus and had to walk all alone 2 ½ kilometers in the late night. Her mother and elder sister and even her brother who was younger to her, scolded her for her late arrivals. But she had no other option. She got more and more depressed. The only good thing she had was the relationship with the manager. Whenever they got a chance they exchanged some words. Finding some time of their own, they went for small trips during the holidays. Even though their relationship became a matter of gossiping in the shop, Vasantha was very firm. Almost all other staff became estranged to her. She became lonely in the shop. In her home, her sister's husband asked her to put an end to her relationship with the boy. He was warning her that it will spoil her name and it will become difficult to find a decent marriage. In home also she made clear that she wanted to work and live, nothing more and nothing less. She was surprised to see others find something wrong in doing so.

In a very short time every thing turned upside down. The shop owner had seen his manager along with the salesgirl in some public places in the city. He got very upset as he was of the opinion that both of them being familiar to the customers, that will affect the reputation of the

shop. He decided to throw Vasantha out, but not the manager. According to him it was the fault of Vasantha only. She should have been cautious doing such things. The next day when Vasantha went to the shop, the manager was not in the shop. Instead the owner was in his seat. He asked Vasantha to leave immediately. Vasantha did not get even a chance to say goodbye to her colleagues. She was very upset. What can she do? She went back home saying she is having headache. Next day her mother, sister and all came to understand that she lost her job. She thought that the manager will come to her to console her and also she will get some monetary benefits since she had worked for 18 months in the shop. But both were not to happen. Her attempt to contact the manager over phone also failed. Later she came to know that the manager was afraid of losing his job due to this incident and hence he was not contacting her.

I had met Ms Sreekumari, one of her colleagues. She found nothing wrong in sending Vasantha out because she went around with a guy in some public places in the city that is not at all proper for a woman in the textile sales sector. She also added that the purity of the character of the sales women is an asset for the shop owner. All the women have to keep this aspect in their mind. She stressed that the women should be subservient and also keep restraint. Every woman in the textile sales sector has to impress the owner of the shop, male colleagues, neighbors and even the family members by their modesty. Sreekumari even refused to reveal more details about Vasantha. She saw Vasantha as a bad omen. Let her meet her doom she has in store for the future because she deserves it having crossed line of limit.

It was only after a tedious effort I could find out Vasantha. She had lost all confidence and charm. I saw fear in her eyes. She was trying to learn stitching. She got hold of an old sewing machine from one of her relatives. She was very reluctant to speak. But her married sister staying with them was full of words. She described how stitching at home will enable Vasantha to support her family and how convenient it is for her. She need not go out so that it will protect her from false allegations and slander. I spent half a day there. Vasantha was silent for all the time.

She revealed her story during the focus group discussion. After short interval of 4 months she joined in another shop. There also she suffered due to the bad reputation she already had. She tried her best to stay there but owner of the shop came to hear of the whispering campaign. He warned her not to repeat such things in there. She felt it an insult and left the job. Then she took the job of a sales girl in a watch shop and she is now feeling comfortable there. She sees the difference in customers as a major thing that reduces her work, and time of work. She finds her colleagues as of quite good personalities. In her words, she feels as 'employed' now. She wanted to forget the entire past as a sales woman in the textile sector.

The shop owner and the staff are as members of a family sharing same perception. Nobody was there to support Vasantha. She was totally detached. Because of that she lost her chance to seek clarification about her removal not only that she lost whatever small money she had earned. She could not even ask for it as she understand that she had no right even to ask for it. She is totally alienated from the mainstream because of the incident. If anybody had given a support to her she should have asked at least for the salary she had worked for. Even that was denied to her.

When it was asked particularly to the shop owner about the incident he said that some body might have to do such things as they do not want their women in the shop to be seen without morals. But denial of the salary was not as bad as ‘immorality’- of going out with a man. Now he says that if Vasantha had approached asking for salary definitely she should have given it. But she could not – that was the situation.

### **CASE STUDY-11**

One day I met Rachana in a small textile shop run by a woman owner. She was eating her lunch by sitting in a small space behind the counter. She was sitting on the floor. We met some four five days back when she was in another shop. But this time Rachana was not ready to disclose our acquaintance. She had not even looked at me. But I waited for her to finish her lunch. Within two three minutes she finished her lunch and came to me. The shop was almost empty. Even then she was not willing to talk to me. She had not even looked at me. When some of her colleagues shown much interest in me, I bought some small things just as an excuse. I was very anxious about Rachana. I had met her four times previously from various places. Once in her house, once from her bus stop and traveled along with her. Third time I met her in a near by temple with her friend and last time in the shop where she worked lastly. Then I came to know from her friends that she had left the shop and joined in a woman’s shop in another shopping complex.. Actually I wanted to enquire why she left the other shop. She was quite friendly to me when we traveled together. She is from a Tamil family. Her father was a head load worker. Now after long years of strenuous work he became weak to do any kind of work.. More over he became a rheumatic

patient with swellings in his legs. Sometimes he could not even get down from his bed without help for his primary needs. Rachana is the eldest of his children. She has to look after all her three sisters, all going to school. Rachana's father was not getting any pension from any where. He had not received any kind of assistance from any where. They didn't know whom they have to approach. When he was working he was an ardent union worker. when he became sick he lost all his connections and rapport. Rachana's mother is an asthma patient. She can not work hard. Rachana has to do all the major domestic work such as taking water from the far away tap, washing, cleaning, etc.

I waited for Rachana in the bus stop in one late evening. She was very anxious whether I was annoyed on her avoiding me while in the shop. She told me that she lost her job in the other shop because of taking leave for two consecutive days. It was because of her parents' illness. She had informed the matter to the owner over phone. But when she went the third day she was told that her service is no more needed in the shop. She was the senior most among the female staff. She was very smart also. No leave was permissible in that shop and they will cut the salary if any body is absent on any day. Even then she was sent out. She felt very bad about the entire thing. She was getting Rs.1500/- every month and even that was not sufficient for their family. Now, that too is blocked. Two three days she tried for a job through her friends in various shops. But there was no vacancy. Then one idea came to her mind. She had earlier worked for one north Indian lady for one year. She will give only below Rs1000 /- which will not be adequate to her. Her idea is to shift to a more suitable shop and until then to work some where to get in touch with the shops and people. Other wise she will not get any job.

She was very insecure that if she lost this job, she will be losing every thing. So she was very anxious in not to commit any kind of mistake. That is why she was avoiding me.

### **CASE STUDY-111**

Sreedevi is the third daughter of her parents. She was good in her studies. When his father died in an accident she was forced to discontinue her studies. She had to support her two brothers who were younger to her, studying in school. It was of more priority than her study. Her sisters were married off and were living with their husbands in nearby places with small jobs. At first she started attending tailoring classes and tried to continue her studies in school. But she could not do it together. So she gave up her studies. She was good in tailoring which she had learned in her school days. She was an asset to the tailoring institute. Their reputation increased and got very good offers from various corners and also a lot of students came to study. Sreedevi was principal of the institution. The institute was owned by a woman, wife of an advocate. She projected the institution as a charity work for poor girls. Even though they got many orders and good business the owner refused to enhance the pay. Sreedevi lost her interest in working hard. She was knowing that the owner woman was getting good profit. At last Sreedevi through one of her clients found out a job with better earnings as a sales woman in a big textile shop. She was of the idea that if she was going for this job she could stitch in her free time and in holidays. By that way she could earn more. But when she started to work in the textile shop she realized it was difficult to manage the time. Gradually she gave up her tailoring.



She used to get Rs.750/- from the tailoring shop. Now from the new shop she is getting Rs.1500/-. But she has to travel quite a distance from her place .By that time one of her brothers had discontinued the studies. The other one was studying in tenth standard. Both of them became hostile in their attitude towards her. They didn't want their sister to work in a textile shop in the city. They disapproved of her shifting job from the tailoring school to city textile shop. So quarrel was common. Boys became so sharp in their comments. Her mother also stood with them sharing the common feeling of the society. The money she was getting was spent for the family. No doubt every body of the family had staked claim on it. Sreedevi tried to save some money by depositing in a local chitty group with which one her brother in law was associated. Sreedevi's family was forced to move to a little more far away place because the tenant had raised the rent of their house. Now Sreedevi has to walk for three kilometers to catch a bus. That became problem to her. When she return from work it will be 8 o'clock and then she has to walk three kilometers, that too along the lonely streets. Her brothers who was not liking her working as a sales girl was not ready to help her. Many days she faced threats from scoundrels who came by motor cycles They tried to harass her on her way back to home. She requested her employer to let her leave the shop a little early. He allowed it for a few days but then disallowed it. The return after work became a headache to Sreedevi. So she planned to start a tailoring shop of her own in a near by place to her house. She was planning to do it with her savings she had with the chitti. But her brother in law who was one among the managers of the chitti was not willing to give back her savings. His argument is that he will give the money only during her marriage. She was fed up with all these .The only way to escape was to give up the job in the city. So she

gave up the job and joined the tailoring school again with the same salary of Rs.750/- !

In the above case studies reveals the attitude of the society and the family towards the women working in the textile sale sector. They have no rights of leave of absence [with remuneration or without it], time schedule for working, personal freedom and even the right to claim the wages for which they have already worked. Their families are also sharing the mainstream feeling. They are also not understanding the real situation they are facing. They are not supporting women in the textile sale sector. At the same time the money they earn has a main roll in the survival of their family. During a crisis they have nowhere to go for help. They are loosing even the wages they have hard earned. Supporting a woman working in textile sales sector itself will be a problem causing trouble to even others. Therefore, none of her colleagues and family members are ready to support them.

## 5. PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOCIETY ON SALES WOMEN

### Some Reactions From A Residential area:

- People of low income group will not be residing in this area!
- Only educated people are residing in this area.
- Oh that black girl, use to go, but I don't know to textile shop or where ever.
- Oh sister of Kochukuttan... She used to go to a shop.
- Oh a fair skinned girl? fat? What is her mother? You have her House number? Is she married?
- What you want from them? They do not know anything.
- In our place it is difficult to find a sales girl!
- Some girls are going somewhere. We don't know where they are going.
- Tell her fathers name, job, or brothers name.
- Can you have the house number?
- Are you having anything other than her name, job; other than any girl? Oh she...!
- What for that girl? Nobody is having a good opinion about her. Then why you want to meet her?
- What for to meet her? What benefit you get? And to her?
- Oh .. daughter of that lame man?

- Ask my wife. She may be knowing, she is having affection for poor people
- Oh don't you have any other work? Going with these useless women having many men's company

**Responses from the relatives and the family:**

- She may be going or some times not going to the job. What do you want then?
- What benefit we will get out of your work
- Oh to get her out of her from whatever little job she has.
- Please let them live with whatever little job they have.
- No I don't have any sister working in the textile shop.
- She is working just to avoid of the situation of getting bored by sitting idle at home.
- She has to support her entire family of about 10 members. what she can do other than this.?
- I don't know where she is working? There is no need for her to do such type of work.
- Oh you are enquiring about that poor girl ?.Can you do some thing to help her?
- She is the only breadwinner of the whole big family she is suffering very much to support her aged ailing father.

These are major feelings about sales women from their area and also from their family. We can understand how comfortable they are in their homes and in their locality. Society as well as their family members are

sharing the same feeling of unworthiness about their work and even about their existence. Women working in the textile sale sector also are sharing the same feeling. So they are compelled to survive with low self esteem. That affects their confidence and in turn, their life. Dominant feeling of the residential area is that the specific area is not meant for the sales women. They are even unhappy over that they are being enquired of them. Many are sharing a feeling that a woman who is working in the textile sale sector is not residing there. Some are having the impression that the women working in the textile sector are less educated and of low income group. Even then these women are main breadwinners of their family. They are identified with their male kin. Their role as bread winners is seldom recognized, that too by some of their women members or relatives of their family. They are asking about any probability of getting any help from them. Many of the area describe these women as 'bad women' without specific reference. Their comments gave enough room to suspect the character of these women. But after closely reacting with them I came to understand that they are paying more attention to make others see that they are good women. The society is very cruel in not allowing any space to them. And also they become more vulnerable due to their social and economic status. Their locality of living is also complementary to this .It is the extended portion of a residential area, or in other words it is a marginalized area. Beyond that, there is the marshy land or any area where human inhabitation is not possible. The bus services are rare and also in most cases it is at the last stop from where they have to start walking

**Attitudes of the owners:**

Owners of textile shops think that they are giving girls some money by giving some small work. They are preferring girls because they are obedient and creating less problems. Regarding the low wages, they can not give higher wages because if they do, they will have to suffer losses, and after all this is not a big job. They are getting money with out much work .So this wage is enough for the work they are doing. if they are not coming for the work they will get bored in their homes. They see it as a time pass for the girls .80 % of the owners have no idea of exploitation in the field. While 20% said some a very small percentage of the customers will some times behave improperly. Owners themselves will take up these instances and will avoid further up comings.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Women in the textile sales sector is working with very low wages. It is lower than the minimum wage fixed. They are not getting any service benefits such as increment, leave, pension P.F, insurance. They are being exploited in many ways. They are all coming from the lower class family of the city suburbs. The majority are having the education of S.S.L.C They are the breadwinners of their family but it is not recognized even by the family. They are very much unorganized. No trade union is working in this field. Women in the textile sale sector are very insecure and they are being exploited very much. Their future in the field is also very bleak. They have to quit the job after a certain age. After that they are not getting any other job. The government department related to them is not at all helpful to them. They have no other forum to react. They are ignorant about any of such existing systems. Society imposing its rigid value system upon them which naturally becomes a burden to them. It has to be changed. We have to identify them as a major labour force. In the future more women will join in this field. So we have to ensure them better service and living conditions. For that organizing them is a vital necessity. But conventional male dominated union is not an answer to this problem. An organization like SEWA will be more useful to them. At the same time the law enforcing machinery has to become more effective also. Otherwise the insecurity will not disappear.

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