

Women Empowerment among Beedi Workers of Samserganj Block: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

Beedi making is a traditional agro-forest based industries and it provide large employments opportunities to household workers especially for women and children. It is a labour-intensive unorganised manual manufacturing work and Women are major source of labour in that industry. The beedi industry ranks as the top most employer in the unorganised household industries. Workers of this industry were working till now with suffering some challenges and problems creating out of this work. Beedi rolling work promoting the women empowerment through economic freedom but also creating health problems.

The study made a humble attempt to explore the socio-economic status and problems faced by the female beedi workers as well as measure women empowerment who are living in Samserganj block of Murshidabad district, West Bengal. Primary data are collected from 100 female beedi rollers through face-to-face conversation in the research area. Data are collected on the basis of structure questionnaire. Samserganj block of Murshidabad district, West Bengal is high congested area for beedi workers and for that reason this area is selected for study. Convenient sampling method is used to select the respondents and different statistical tolls like ratio, pie chart and bar diagram etc. are used to analysed the data.

The study is classified into six sections. Relevant literature review and identification of research gap are highlighted in section 2, objectives of the study and the methodologies are discussed in section 3 and 4 respectively. While section 5 deals with the analysis and discussion, the last section stated the finding and suggestions.

In the study, female beedi workers in the research area are facing many challenges and risk till now. The main challenges arise from payment cut, health hazard, lack of medication infrastructure, lack of employment opportunities and lack of skill. Appropriate steps to address the problems are suggested which will have a positive impact on the socio-economic conditions of these workers. Female beedi workers are found to play big role in family decision making be in the form of housemaker or parent or herself due to economic independence through beedi rolling.

Keywords: Beedi, Beedi workers, Un-organized Sector, Women Empowerment, Welfare Scheme, Employment.

I. Introduction

A Beedi is a one type of unfiltered, hand rolled slim cigarette filled with tobacco flake and folded in a tendu leaf tagged with a colourful yarn at one end. The bidi industry is a major part of the tobacco industry and it provide higher employment opportunities in the unorganised sector. Most of the Indian state such as Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Utter Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujrat, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Kerala and Karnataka are involved to manufacturing bidi. In past, beedi manufacturing organisations have tried to making beedi through machine and equipment but failed every time. Because hand rolled beedi have more finishing and more taste as compared to machine made beedi. so, till now beedi are making fully by manual work. Beedi making is organized in five following systems.

- a. Factory based system
- b. Beedi rolling through company
- c. Middle men-oriented system
- d. Buyer- seller system and
- e. Co-operative system

At the beginning of beedi industry, bidi rolling work carried out on factory-based system but now this factory-based system has converted to home-based system where contractor and sub-contractor actively involved. As per the central government report, more than 1000 beedi brands are producing beedi and marketing in huge quantities. The All-India Bidi, Cigar and

Tobacco Workers Federation estimate women comprise 90-95% of total employment in beedi manufacture. Nearly all the beedi making work is done on homebased, temporary and piece rate system. According to union minister of state for labour and employment, there are 49.82 lakh registered beedi workers in the country out of which 36.25 lakh are women. According to Sarkar and Barman (2022), West Bengal is the highest number of female bidi workers state in India and Murshidabad is the largest beedi producing district in West Bengal. At present bidi industry is the big employment source followed by agriculture, cotton textile and construction industries (Sardar, 2019).

So, it can be said that though the size of the beedi industries is big but the situations of the beedi workers are not well till now and they are facing some challenges for their work.

II. Review of Literatures

The review of literatures plays an important role to build knowledge and gain concept on the topic and helps to identifies the research gap. So, relevant literatures are reviewed below in chronologically.

Year	Author	Study area	Essence of study
2014	Mukherjee et. Al.	Murshidabad district of West Bengal	Explore the professional health hazard due to working with harmful tobacco dust for a long time. Most of the respondents are women, illiterate and economically weak.
2015	Ansari and Raj	Bundelkhand region of Utter Pradesh	Important objectives of the study are to explored the socio-economic status, living and working conditions, exploitation faced by female beedi workers through primary data. The study concluded that most of the respondents are dissatisfaction with their job and they want to move another new job if available.
2015	Biswas and Laha	Jangipur sub-division of Murshidabad district, West Bengal.	Explained the socio-economic as well as health status of beedi workers and it has found that female workers are more working than male workers in beedi rolling because male workers are working in another unorganised sector.
2015	Selvi and	Tirunelvi	Highlighted the impact of beedi sector on women

	Srnadevi	district of Tamil Nadu	empowerment and the problems of work and economic upliftment. This study revealed that the act and legislation related with beedi work are not implemented properly and beedi rollers were facing many problems.
2018	Hoque	Malda district of West Bengal	Primary as well as secondary data are collected and analysed for Highlighted the housing conditions and health related issue of beedi rollers. The study concluded that beedi workers are facing serious health problem due to unhealthy work condition, unsafe drinking water, inadequate health facilities, long durations of working etc.
2018	Iti	Murshidabad district of West Bengal	The main objectives of the paper are to understand the nature and problems of beedi industry, analyse the socio-economic conditions of beedi workers on the basis of primary as well as secondary data. The study concluded that the demonetization of currency and heavy tax rate adversely affected the beedi industry.
2020	Arora et. Al.	India	Focussed on the trend in employment and wage differential in the Indian bidi industries through secondary data. They concluded that earning capacity of bidi rollers are much less than workers of other manufacturing industries and immediately take action to register the beedi industry.
2020	Lakshman et. Al.	Nanguneri block of Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu	Highlighted the socio-economic status of women beedi workers, the income and expenditure pattern, problems of beedi workers through primary data. The beedi workers are deprived from their basic right and exploited by the contractors due to welfare schemes are not properly implemented.

From the above literatures reviewed, it has seen that small number of studies were found on women empowerment but no any work found in Samserganj block on the topic of women empowerment but this area is highly concentrated of beedi workers specially for women and child. So, literatures gap is existed in Samserganj block in that topic. The present work ‘women empowerment among beedi workers of Samserganj bock’ has tried to fill the research gap.

III. Objective of the Study

On the basis of research gap identified in the above, researchers have tried to explore the women empowerment and challenges faced by female beedi workers of Samserganj block and provide suggestions or recommendations for development in the research area. General objectives of the study are as follows:

- (i) To highlight the process involved in beedi production in the Samserganj block.
- (ii) To explore the socio-economic conditions and challenges faced by female beedi workers in the Samserganj block.
- (iii) To identify the reasons to choose beedi work in the Samserganj block.
- (iv) To assess the level of women empowerment among the female beedi workers of the Samserganj block.

IV. Methodology

- (i) **Sampling design:** Primary data are collected from 100 female beedi worker through face-to-face conversion in the time period of 2021-22. Convenient sampling method are used to collect data because schedule data of beedi workers are unavailable.
- (ii) **Area of study:** Samserganj block of Murshidabad district, West Bengal (major concentration of beedi industry).
- (iii) **Data collection:** Both primary and secondary data were used to collect the data in this study. Primary data were collected through structure questionnaire and secondary data are collected from different government report, published journal and literature, official website and online resource etc.

(iv) **Analytical tools:** Descriptive statistics were used to analyse and presentation of collected data.

V. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Researchers have collected required data from the respondents through a well structure questionnaire in which 37 numbers questions are included. At first primary data were collected from 25 numbers respondents for pilot survey and the value of Cronbach alpha were found satisfactory. The collected data were analysed and interpreted as follows.

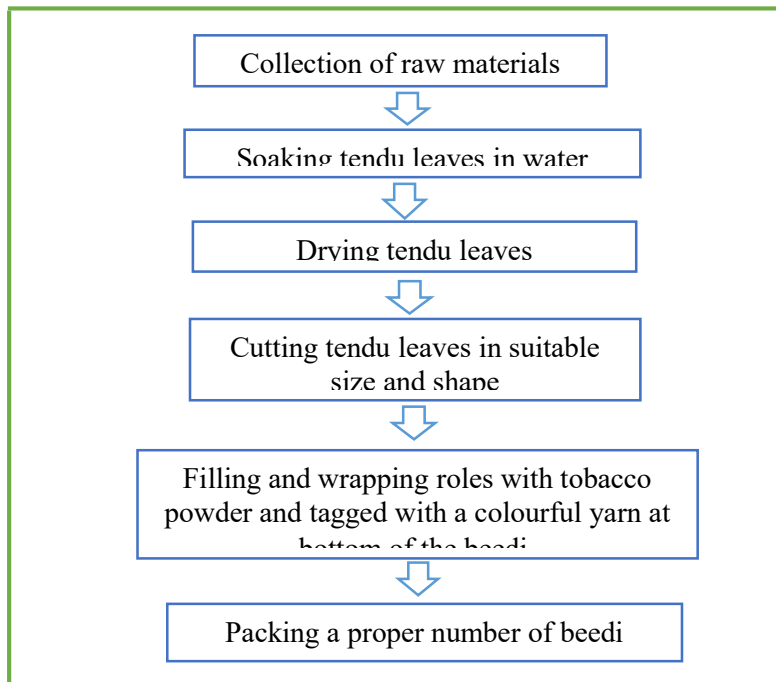
V.I. Process of beedi production

The rolling procedure of beedi is simple but requires a lot of skill, chart 1 has been highlighted the procedure of beedi rolling. Beedi rolling procedure has been done with the help of following raw material and equipment, these are

1. Tendu leaves,
2. Tobacco,
3. Yarn,
4. Scissors,
5. Small Knife,
6. Tray,
7. Water,
8. Mold (shape).

Bidi worker collect 500-gram tendu leave, 250-gram tobacco and a colourful yarn from a contractor or middle man to producing 1000 pieces bidi. After collecting raw materials workers rinsed the leaves to get smooth, cut the leaves in to a size with a chhnach. After the Tendu leaves are cut to a certain size, they are placed inside a cotton cloth and water is sprinkled on top to keep the leaves soft. Then, rolled the sizeable tendu leaves with tobacco mixture and bind it with a colourful yarn at one end, closed the upper and lower part of the rolling leaves with the help of a stick called khuchi or gozol. Generally, 25 pieces of Beedis are united to form a bundle known locally as muttha. It required normally 24 hours to roll out 1000 pieces bidi.

Chart 1: Steps involve in Beedi rolling

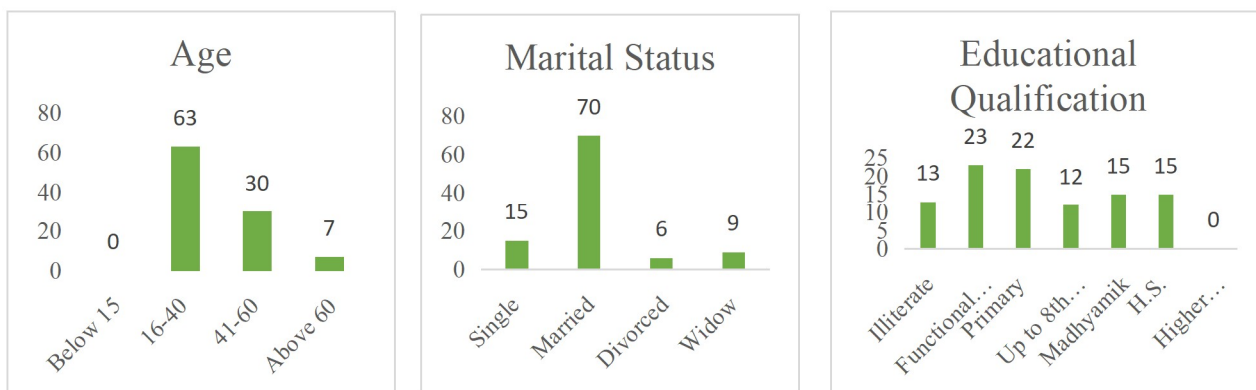


Source: Authors' Comilation

V.II. Socio Economic Condition of Beedi workers in the Samserganj block

The following chart-2 revealed that only 7% respondents have old age (more than 60 years) and most of them are young and married. Young ages have capabilities to work another job but they have no option to do any other job. Respondent have mixed profile in case of educational measurement. There is no any individual who have higher qualification but 30% respondents have qualifications at secondary and higher secondary level combinedly. 13% respondents are illiterate and 23% respondents able to signature but not having any valid educational qualifications. Almost all the respondents are lived in an owned house but only 26% are pucca house.

Chart 2: Demographic Profile of Sample Respondents



Source: Field survey by the authors

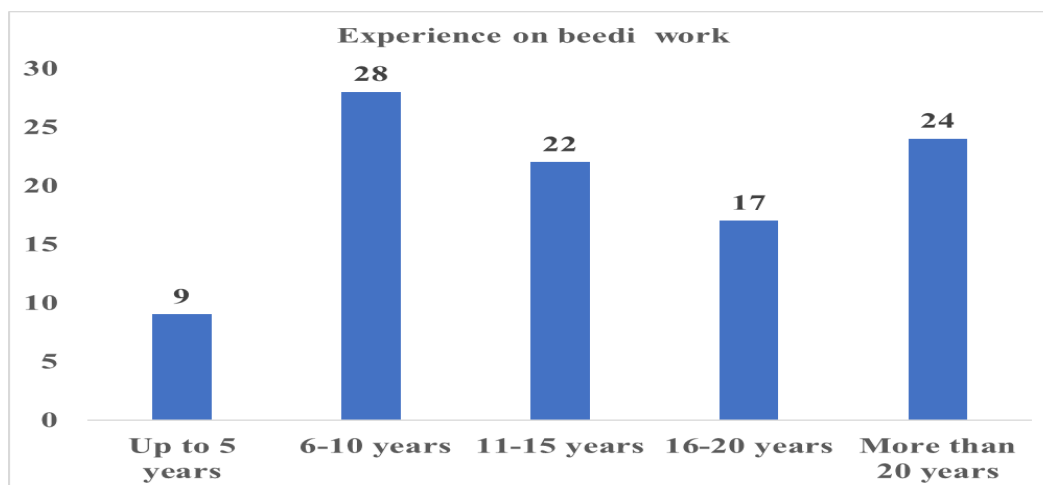
Chart 3: Analysis of Employment Category



Source: Field survey by the authors

It has been seen in chart-3 that most of the beedi producing work are carried out by the informal or unorganised workers and only 39 percentage beedi workers having beedi identity card. So, most of the respondents are not enjoying basic facilities which are provided by the government organisations.

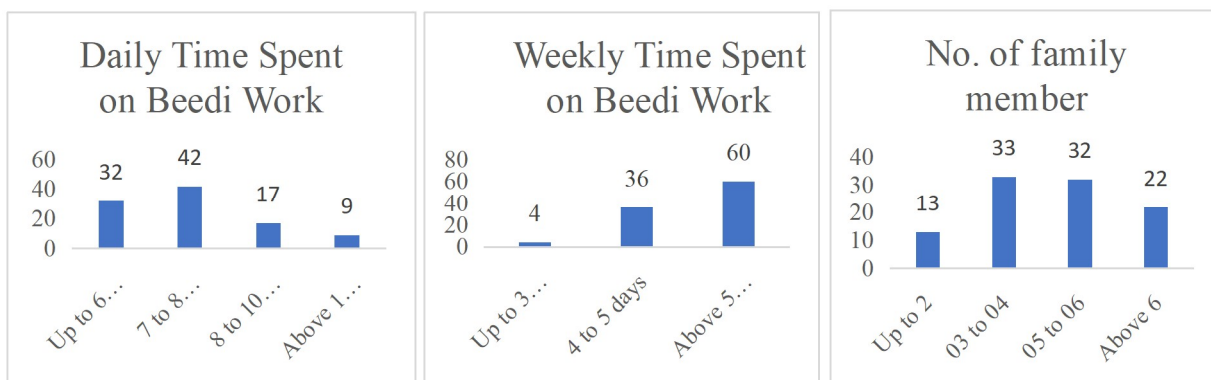
Chart 4: Analysis of Work Experience



Source: Field survey by the authors

In chart-4 most of the respondents were working more than 10 years and only 9 percentage respondents have experience less than 5 years. So, it can be said that respondents were starting beedi rolling activities from early age and it have increased rate of drop out students.

Chart 5: Analysis of Time Spent on Beedi Making

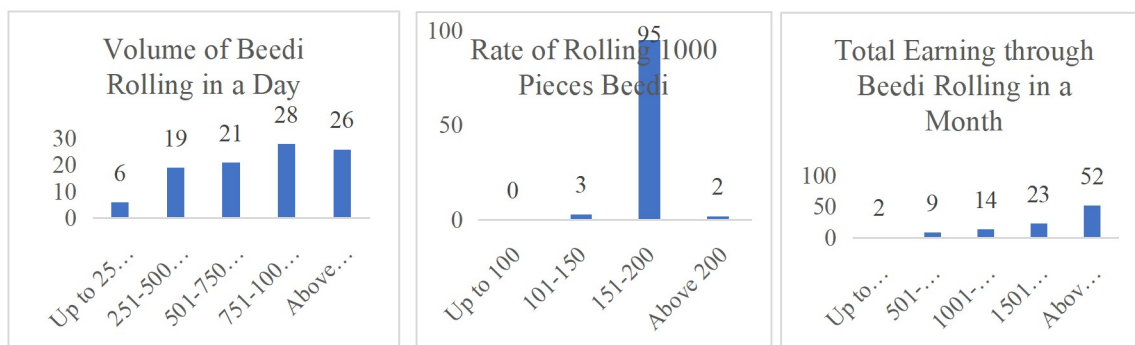


Source: Field survey by the authors

It is revealed in the paper that only beedi industry provide employment option in the Samsorganj

block because it has found that most of the respondents involve in beedi rolling more than 5 days in a week and more than 6 hours in a daily basis. 87% respondents reported that more than two members in their family engaged in beedi rolling. So, it can be said that beedi rolling activities at present converted as a family-oriented activities. Child workers and also male members who are working another work outside the home they also helped in beedi work to increase volume of production and as a result their earnings also increased.

Chart 6: Analysis of Production and Earning from Beedi Making



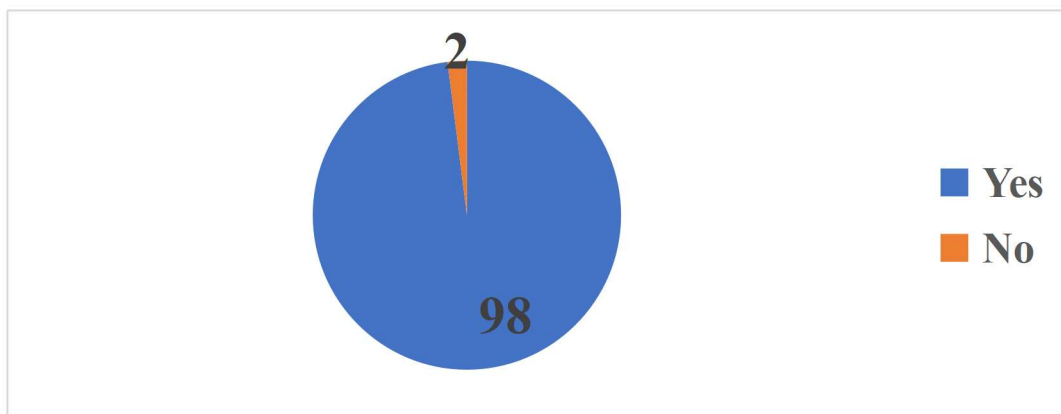
Source: Field survey by the authors

75% respondents reported that they are produced more than 500 pieces beedi in a day and it has depended on the engaging of family members in the beedi rolling activities. If more family members are engaged then they will produce more volume of beedi. 95% respondents said that employer paid remuneration @Rs.151- Rs.200 per 1000 beedi and only 2% told that they received more than Rs. 200 for rolling 1000 beedi. In most of the cases employer paid remuneration on weekly basis. On the ground of monthly earnings, 48% respondents earned less than Rs.2000 in a month. So, picture are not good but respondent are working in this sector due to not available of employment opportunities in the research area.

V.III. Challenges Faced by Beedi Workers

It has known from the respondents through face-to-face conversion that they are facing some challenges/problems in this profession. These challenges for nature of work and challenges occurred in two from i.e. health disorder and payment cut. All the respondents excepting two respondents are agreed with that point i.e. contractors/middle men paid the remuneration after deducting some charges. These charges are locally known as muththi.

Chart 7: Analysis of Opinion on Payment Cut (Mutthi)



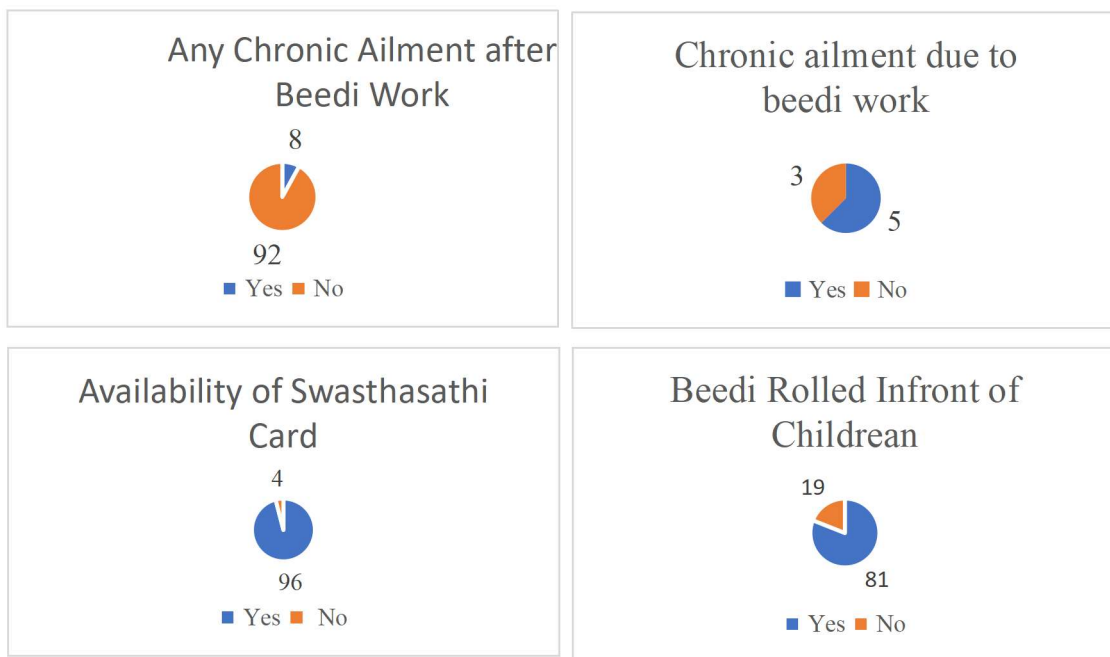
Source: Field survey by the authors

We know that if any work will perform on seating position in long time, then some common problems will arise definitely. Beedi rolling activities are such types of work where long time in seating position are required to perform the work. More two problems are associated with this work namely tobacco dust and congested working place without ventilation. But the data were not matched with the general norms. Only 8% respondents reported that they are suffered different health related disorder i.e. heart diseases, respiratory problems etc. approximately 60% of these 8% agreed that these health problems occurred due to their

nature of work. It has also known from the research area that the if beedi workers have facing any health problems then they taking medicine from a local medicine shop or a ‘Quack doctor’ instead of authorised doctor. So, there are actual reasons of health problems are not found and workers misconception are created that the beedi work are not the cause of health hazard.

96% respondents have swathasathi card and this card is used in the private hospital where operations are needed. It also known that 81% respondents are rolling beedi in front of their children and sometimes children also help to rolling beedi. As a result, children are not concentrated in their studies and most of the Gurdial are not aware about education system due to their illiteracy.

Chart 8: Analysis of Health Hazards among Beedi Workers



Source: Field survey by the authors

V.IV. Major reason to choosing Beedi related work

According to some NGO- 90% female of Samsrganj block are involved in beedi rolling work. These high percentage of female are engaged in this work for the several reasons. The reasons are depicted through below table.

Table 1: Analysis the main reason for choosing beedi rolling

Sl. No.	Reasons	No. of respondents	Total Score	Rank
1	Lack of other employment	100	416	2
2	Lack of skill		387	3
3	Children education		343	5
4	Children marriage		366	4
5	Assets creation		334	6
6	Loan repayment		326	7
7	Regular income		459	1

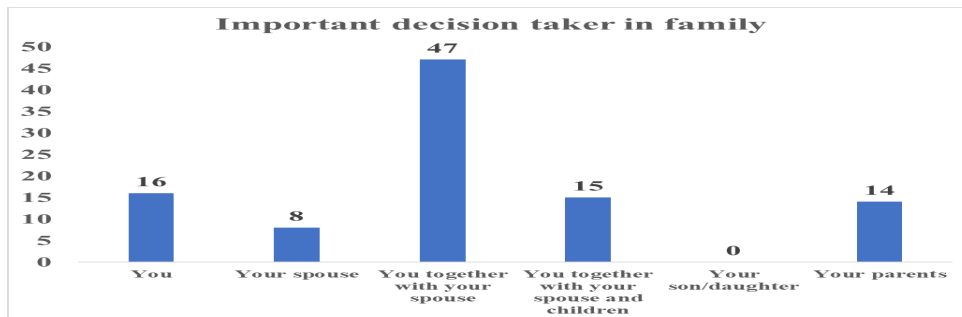
(Source: Field survey by the authors)

In table-1 we found that most of the female respondents engaged in beedi rolling activities to create regular oncome (Sl. No.-7 and rank-1) and unavailability of alternative employment sources (Sl. No-1 and rank-2) forces to rolling beedi work. Respondents acquired the skills to rolling beedi work from their family and they are not trying to gain knowledge/skills for any other work. So, lack of skills (Sl. No-2 and rank-3) also compels them to choose beedi work as a source of regular income.

V.V. The Role of Beedi Making in Women Empowerment

Women empowerment can be defined as a process by which female person gain power to take decision as per own choice and also control over their families' decisions. Here different parameters are selected to understand the level and extent of women empowerment. These parameters are- power of decisions making in families, availability of own bank account and giving female educational opportunities. In the following chart only 8% females relying on her spouse for taking important decision in her family and remaining 92% female actively involved in taking important decisions. An interesting fact revealed in this chart that 16% female alone took important decisions in family. So, it can be said that female beedi workers play a significant role in taking family decisions.

Chart 9: Analysis of Women empowerment

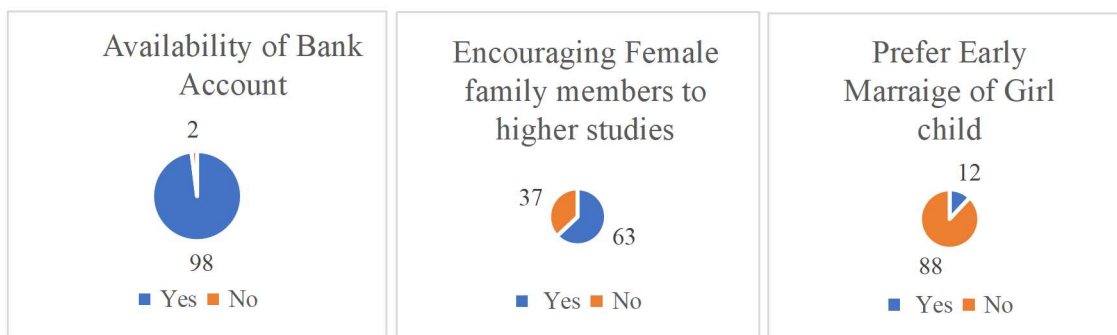


Source: Field survey by the authors

In chart-10, 98% respondents are bank account holder of her own name and remaining only 2% are not holder of bank account. In the case of girl students' higher studies, most of the respondents (63%) were agree to give higher studies to female members and 37% were not agree to give higher studies, most of them who are not agree to girls' higher studies are uneducated or semi-literate. 70% of uninterested respondents also reported that they are not agree to girls' higher studies because they have no financial strengthen to give higher studies and 30% of them felt that higher education have no value in her life. So, they are not giving importance in girls higher studies.

One important point of women empowerment is to assess the tendency of respondents in case of girl child's marriage. According to chart-10, 88% respondents are not preferred the early marriage of girl child but 12% respondents prefer the early marriage and these 12% respondents are also not interested in their education. So, it can be said that where respondents are illiterate or semi-literate, there are chance to deprive the female members. This data provides the negative mindset of illiterate respondent in favour of education. Hence education and awareness play a significant role to changes the mindset.

Chart 10: Analysis of Women empowerment



Source: Field survey by the authors

VI. Summary of Findings and Suggestions

After careful analysing and interpreting the collected data, the following major findings are obtained.

- ❖ The majority of the respondents who are rolling beedi are from the young age group i.e. 16 to 40 years and belongs to unorganised sector. This age group are vital to creating career of the respondents.
- ❖ The respondents have working experience in mixed pattern but majorities (more than 60% of the respondents) have experience for more than 10 years. Because most of the respondents started rolling beedi from childhood.
- ❖ Majority of respondents engaged in beedi rolling activities more than 6 hours in a day and above 5 days in a week but total earnings are not good because only 2% respondents reported that they get wages more than Rs. 200 for making 1000 pieces beedi. But the government has fixed the rate Rs.217 for producing 1000 pieces beedi.
- ❖ Generally, contractor/middlemen paid remuneration on weekly basis and all contractor pay remuneration after deducting some payment cut (muththi) at fixed percentages. Sometimes contractor reduces the remuneration by rejecting beedi treated as not good.
- ❖ Only 8 respondents out of 100 reported that they were suffering different health problem from long time and 75% out of 8 respondents think that they are facing these problems after chosen beedi rolling activities.
- ❖ Respondents of Samserganj block chosen beedi work for crating 'regular source of income' and 'lack of skills' and 'lack of alternatives employment opportunities' compel them to choose beedi work as an employment.
- ❖ In creation of women empowerment beedi rolling work play an important role because beedi rolling work provide income opportunities to female members and these female members established as a self-dependent woman. In the paper, data also provided that women strongly involved in family's decision making, have bank account in her own name, motivated girl child in higher studies and also reluctant to early marriage of girl child. So, it can be said that beedi rolling work provide women empowerment in the studies area.

On the basis of above findings, the following suggestions will be taken to improve the socio-economic as well as women empowerment in the research area:

- ❖ The government should provide alternative employment opportunities for workers in the Samsorganj block to develop the employability of the respondents.
- ❖ Government or non-government organisation can take initiative to implement government rules, regulation and provisions related to beedi industries.
- ❖ Government must be fixed the minimum remuneration rate and take necessary steps for implementing the minimum rate and also take strong action if any payment cut and malpractice would be found.
- ❖ Bidi identity card and benefit (scholarship, health facilities) of this card were given before times but at present these facilities are not implemented. So, proper Bidi identity card with benefit should be stated as soon as possible.
- ❖ There should be urgently required to aware the beedi workers about the benefit and provisions of provident fund and pension schemes. Most of the time contractors and middle men misguide the beedi workers and influence to withdraw the provident fund before to provide monthly pensions. So, attempts should be provided to motivated the stake holders and employers to register for provident fund, pension facilities and also health facilities.
- ❖ Government or social service provider must be taken a plan of housing or such type schemes and implement toward the beedi workers because most of the beedi workers have lived in kachcha house.
- ❖ Consistent awareness programmes for higher education should be arranged in the beedi rolling area and take the remedial action for dropout students.

VII. Concluding Observations

In fine, we seen that beedi industries have been increasing day by day and also increased employment opportunities day by day. Only beedi rolling work provided employment option to unskilled women in the unorganised sector of Samsorganj block. In Samsorganj block, livelihood and economic activities are solely depend on beedi work and for that reason beedi work at present converted as a family-oriented work where all family members including children involved in work. So, beedi industry has an important role in development of socio-

economic conditions of the workers and also increased the empowerment of women at a high level. But the workers of beedi industry have facing some common problems and not enjoying the welfare and primary facilities due to unorganised sector. Hence, it is necessary to take appropriate steps by the government to promoting the basic facilities as well as economic empowerment.

VIII. Limitation of the Study

The paper has the following limitations:

- Result of this study can't be generalized because the respondents are selected on the basis of purposive sampling (non-probabilistic) technique. So, the paper could be given some another result if the respondents are selected on the probabilistic techniques.
- In this paper only 100 respondents are selected for data analysis. If sample size is increased then it can be provided good results.
- In this paper, only female respondents are taken as a sample.

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