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Panel on Crèches and Women's Economic Participation

Organised by



Initiative for What Works to Advance Women
and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE)

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF
PANEL ON
“IMPORTANCE OF CRÈCHES FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION”

Organised by
Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE)
8 December 2019, Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab

Barriers to maternal employment or unpaid care work for women is an important area of research to engage effectively in the productive economic activities and thus forms an important labour right for women. Evidence around women's unpaid work constitute almost 65% of all work performed by women, 10-12% of which include taking care of children and family members. It is an established argument that this kind of work binds women into the household and providing systematic support to reduce such work often results in greater participation of women in outside activities. It is in this context that the models of quality centre-based childcare and its impact on maternal employment has shown effective results for Nordic countries and also in certain Latin American countries (in studies conducted by IWWAGE) which have replicable practices for developing economies. In India, the discourse around creches has remained stunted at the level of providing such facilities at worksites. The National creche scheme of the government of India, rolled out by the MWCD, has been in place for more than 15 years now. However, neither has it been adequately resourced by the government, nor has there been a systematic evaluation of the program to provide inputs for its effective implementation. This panel attempts to present evidence on the positive impact of centre-based childcare on women's engagement in economic activities across the world as well as in the local context, potentials of centre-based childcare to reduce women's time for care activities as well as improve earning abilities of women with such systematic and quality support in childcare. The objective of the panel is to strengthen evidence around this topic to be able to reinforce the rights based discourse around women's fundamental labour right of being economically active.

PANEL PROCEEDINGS

At the outset, moderator introduced the panelists for the session and discussed the concept and importance of crèches for increasing female labour force participation. The session focused on the need for crèches for generating women employment. It is well documented that participation of women in different economic activities has been declining over the years and they end up spending most of their time in the household undertaking domestic and child care activities. Various rounds of National Sample Survey of India (NSSO) have reported a declining female labour force participation rate over the years and mentioned that women cannot participate in the labour market due to domestic and child care activities undertaken by them without getting any help in both the rural and urban India. The panel discussion focused on whether the crèches can generate more participation by women in the labor market. They identified children as one of the main constraints for women's inability to join the labor force as they spend much of their time in looking after them. The discussion revolves around the need and significance of crèches where the women could keep their children safely in order to participate in the labour market.

The first panel presentation was by **Monika Banerjee**, Research Fellow, Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), Delhi. She started her presentation by raising the question why crèches are critical when we discuss women participation in workforce. Mostly, women work in the unorganized sector. Within primary sector, women are engaged in the agricultural sector and farm activity. Within manufacturing sector, women work in low paid, casual, home based work or unpaid work. In the tertiary sector, more number of women work in retail trade, education-related work and paid domestic household work. Majority of them worked without dignity, social security and decent and timely wages. Patriarchal notion of 'what women should do' - at both the household as well as the policy level limits their education and skilling opportunity, employment opportunity, agency and mobility. Women internalizing their primary role as a care giver tend to make paid work choice which gives them flexibility to manage their unpaid and care responsibility along with the paid work.

Women are basically thought of as a primary care giver of the family and lead a very hectic life. The income of husband is not always sufficient to bring up the children and in this context,

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income of the women becomes very important to live a smooth life. The situation becomes very stressful for such women as they have to manage both the household and the outside work. In this context, women face many challenges such as finding flexible and consistent work, ad hoc payment of wages, unhygienic hazardous working conditions, inability to take leave and wage cut and harassment and abuse. Women also face problems in terms of water supply, toilet facility and drainage facility at their work place. They also don't have necessary document for ration and school admission. There is a need for institutional changes to address such issues. Full day crèches have positive effects on women's income as well as on child's health and education.

She suggested some strategies which could be adopted for women to balance between paid and unpaid such as to take work up flexible work, part time jobs, choose work near or inside home etc. According to her, there is a need to recognise and reorganise the work. She concluded by saying that there is a need for crèches which can take care of the children for the entire day to support their mothers to participate in the labour market. A documentary film titled "Left in the Lurch-Tales of women working in the informal sector in Delhi" showed in the session pointed out that 94% of the women in India are working in the informal sector without any social protection. Unpaid work, domestic and care activities are identified as women's work. Since they have to take care of their children along with the paid work, they prefer working in areas near or inside their home. They are basically engaged in low quality work as waste pickers, street vendors, domestic workers etc. The film suggested policy interventions like- provision of public services, improvement of child care facilities and some institutional changes.

The second presentation was given by **Sudeshna Sengupta**, Independent Researcher, formerly of Mobile crèches. According to her, crèches are looked as a provision for women workers. She discussed daily activities of women based on the survey of poor households. She discussed about how women are living their lives, balancing between paid and unpaid work and taking care of their children etc. She also talked about how women are employed as coolies and construction workers and how women have the informal contact with two options: women on the site with crèches and women without the crèche facility. When there is a crèche facility

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available, women can work from 8 am to 8 pm. In the household, husband helps them and at the work place, in most of the cases, women work as a helper to their husband. Further, women only interact with crèche and want crèches to be available at their work place or in their neighborhood. This needs to be incorporated into the policies. She concluded by saying that crèche should be entitled to every women worker.

The 3rd presentation was given by **Anoushaka Chandrashekar**, Project Manager, Financial Inclusion, LEAD at Krea University on the issue of affordable day care to empower India. She talked about the linkage between daycare and women empowerment. Her objective was to examine whether access to affordable day care affected women's economic opportunity. In this respect, a statistical analysis was undertaken which was Mid line and End line analysis of Intention to Treat (ITT) impact of offering to open a Balwadi. The mid line analysis results showed that about 40% mothers reported the use of Balwadi's, 5 days for 6 hours. It was observed from the overall analysis that about 95% of the women could not afford hired help for child care.

There is a need for expansion of Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) into a day care programme but access to public day care continues to remain a challenge due to insufficient hours of operation, poorly trained workers, staff absentees, sub- standard infrastructure. NGO's have tried to fill the need of public day care center. One such programme was Balwadi programme being running by an NGO in the Southern Rajasthan and operated by women for 7 hours while providing 3 meals per children. The main research question raised was whether access to affordable daycare affects women's economic opportunity and empowerment?

The study showed that nearly one-half of the mothers are using day care facilities, Balwadi programme decreased time spent on children by the mothers, a weak correlation was observed between the extent to which Balwadi were operated and their utilization by local residents and the provision of affordable community based day care showed potential for women's subjective well-being and economic standing. However there is suboptimal uptake of the programme. Efforts are needed to expand women's economic opportunities, which are likely to restrict the

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impact of daycare provision on women's labor force participation. Supply-side interventions, such as job training or employment targeting programs, also required to improve female labour force participation.

The discussant was **Susan Thomas**, National Health Coordinator, Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) Ahmedabad, Gujarat. She discussed what SEWA is and how it represents the voices of working women, changes in work schedules\ and changes in the choice of employment. She talked about SEWA's main goal. These are: full employment, work security, income security, food security, social security and self- reliance. Child care can affect the income of informal workers in several ways: changes in work schedule, changes in choice of employment and decreased productivity inside and outside home. This also impacts the income of informal women workers.

She also raised a question about what makes a good child centre and pointed out that a good child care centre should have opening hours, participation in governance and good communication, including a health service, provision of nutritious food, basic infrastructure and adequate staff along with education as a component free or heavily subsidized. She also discussed SEWA's co-operative crèche SANGINI registered in 1984, operating child care centres to empower women and educate children in the age group of 0 to 6 years, where mothers are the shareholders and board members.. She stated that full day childcare has positive effects on women's income and it has been observed that the income of the women gets doubled by provision of such childcares especially in the urban areas. It also enhanced the workforce participation and economic empowerment of the women. Question was also raised whether public policy or NGO should open crèches? Social network and family are also significant for child care. Finally, she concluded by addressing the need of crèches for economic participation of the women. She also said that the child care centres cannot be the only solution for women to participate in the job market because many of them do not want to send their children to the day care due to various reasons. Consequently, along with the day care facilities, government intervention is also needed to help them join the labour force.

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Janine Rodgers, Visiting Sr. Fellow, Institute for Human Development, Delhi shared that in 1960, both Brazil and India had the same female labour force participation. After 40 years, female labour force participation in Brazil has increased manifold due to availability of public services.

Dipa Sinha, Assistant Professor, School of Liberal Studies, Ambedkar University, Delhi raised few questions about the study conducted on affordable daycare to empower India including a question about the role of community in terms of functioning and monitoring the programme. It was suggested to present the demographic characteristic of the children and improve the time use survey tools to incorporate time spending on exclusive child care. Whether crèches are a child's right or worker's right? At the end, it was concluded that government needs to take the responsibility to establish crèches. Child care should be considered as a public good.

A number of perspectives emerged in the general discussion. Some questioned whether they are looking for public policies for crèches while others questioned whether crèches came across as a right of the child or the right of the workers. Another one opined that crèche is critical as it is a place for child care responsibilities so proper nutrition is needed. She also supported the movement of SEWA and Mobile crèches. The intervention of state is needed to take responsibility of child care centres. They opined that these crèches are not only the alone right of the child or the worker, these are the rights of both the workers and the children. They concluded the session mentioning some of the policies to be adopted through public –private partnership to improve the day care facilities, provision of community based programme and women organizations to empower the women economically.

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PANEL AGENDA

Moderators

Ruchika Chaudhary, Senior Research Fellow, Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy, (IWWAGE); LEAD at Krea University

Kanika Kingra, Senior Policy and Advocacy Manager, Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy, (IWWAGE); LEAD at Krea University

Panelists

Anoushaka Chandrashekar, Project Manager, Financial Inclusion, LEAD at Krea University

Monika Banerjee, Research Fellow, Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), Delhi

Sudeshna Sengupta, Independent Researcher, Formerly of Mobile crèches

Discussant

Susan Thomas, National Health Coordinator, Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)
Ahmedabad, Gujarat

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PHOTOPGRAPHS



PREPARED

BY

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