

# LEGAL AID CAMP : AWARENESS PROGRAMME ON LABOR RIGHTS OF WOMEN WORKERS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

Abstract:It has been rightly said by Friedrich Douglas – “ Knowledge makes a man unfit to be a slave”. India is a developing country and has made significant progress over the past few years however, we are facing various human rights challenges.The main issue that keeps us within the shackles is the lack of awareness about our rights and duties. Thus the main aim of the Legal Aid Center of SLSN this Human rights day was to spread awareness among the people on their rights and duties so that they are empowered to break their shackles themselves. This awareness programme was conducted by a para-legal volunteer among 60 female unorganized sector workers to understand the various problems faced by them and what could be the possible solutions for the same.

Conducted by  
Naysa Yadav  
(Para-Legal  
Volunteer, Legal  
Aid Center,  
Symbiosis Law  
School, NOIDA)

Under the  
guidance of Mr  
Ankur Sharma,  
Assistant  
Professor &  
Head - Legal Aid  
Center,  
Symbiosis Law  
School, NOIDA

# ***AWARENESS PROGRAMME ON LABOR RIGHTS OF WOMEN WORKERS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR***

## **1. CONCEPT NOTE**

The legal aid center at Symbiosis Law School NOIDA is moving forward in achieving its goals for the betterment of the society and fighting for human rights. The aforesaid program was part of endeavor of the center in furtherance of its 'aim and objectives'. Keeping its aim in mind, the programme was conducted and successfully culminated in to spread awareness among the unorganized sector workers.

According to National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER), women constitute the largest segment of India's unorganized workforce. More than 97% of women labor force is in the informal sector however, their pay is highly disproportionate, they face huge discrimination and are exploited in all sorts of manner making the environment horrendous to work in.

Women's work on most occasions goes unrecognized and the benefits hardly ever reach them. Instead of getting them subsistence, it has a crippling effect on their health. They are pushed into the sector due to unstable

financial conditions and are forced to do the contractor's bidding at a meager pay.

This concept to work as a supplementing force in the family has made them vulnerable to all sorts of discriminatory treatment and exploitation (physically, economically, socially and sexually) in the field of employment. But that's not all. Just like there is a 'wage gap' between men and women, there is also a 'leisure gap' between them as women are expected to attend to their 'second shift' at home soon after their first one at the workplace. They end up having a double burden of work and get stuck in this pernicious cycle throughout their lives.

Thus, this awareness programme was organized so that the women understand their rights and are aware about the various organizations and unions that they can approach in case of any problem.

## **2. OBJECTIVE**

The objectives of the visit were as follows:

- Provide legal awareness to the workers
- Get the necessary information regarding the problems faced by the workers at their workplace

- To make the workers aware of the various governmental schemes and organizations at their disposal.

### **3. PRELIMINARY PREPARATIONS**

To fulfill the objectives of the event, the following was done:

- Made Posters and Pamphlets that would attract attention of the workers
- Took pastels sheets and markers for conducting the activity
- Read up on the various rights of the workers that we need to make them aware of
- Prepared a short note on the various rights of women in the informal sector which were told to them during the visit.

### **4. CONDUCTING THE EVENT**

On the Human Rights Day ie 10th December, 2018, an awareness programme on labor rights for women workers was organized.

It was attended by 60 workers, working in the unorganized sector, mainly in construction, factory, masala mills or working as domestic workers, thread cutters, road makers etc.

After a general introduction of every worker, a brief discussion on the following topics was done:

- Sexual Harassment
- Maternity Benefits
- Minimum Wages
- Workmen's compensation
- Gender discrimination
- Registration of workers and

The workers were made aware of their rights regarding these issues. However, even when they understood their rights they did not know whom they could approach and how they could make their lives better. They were made aware of the various government schemes and organizations whom they could approach with their issues.

To make the discussion more interactive, we organized a small activity. The workers were divided in 6 groups and were asked to recognize what all problems they face at their workplace and according to them, what all can be done to improve their condition.

The women were highly responsive and all the groups presented their problems and suggestions to everyone.

## **5. INTERACTION WITH WOMEN WORKERS:**

The interaction took place with 66 women working in the informal sector in various industries. They were daily wage earners. The women were divided into 6 groups to discuss their problems and to suggest the solutions to the same.

After a hefty discussion on the same, the following issues came into light:

- Lack of sanitation and toilets at the workplace. Women face a lot of inconvenience due to this lack of facility.
- Women are not paid well with par to men. Even when they work arduously without any breaks unlike men, they are given excuses for lower pay. Men are paid a higher wage because they lift more weight however, it is not considered that women work full time without any 'bidi' breaks like men.
- Pregnant women are not allowed to work. According to them, even they need to earn a livelihood which is denied to them because they are pregnant.
- There are no facilities for children at the workplace. Aanganvadi's are situated far off from their homes so they can't always send their children over there. Women are placed with this burden of handling the children and taking care of the house as well. All this puts on extra burden on them.

- Work provided by NREGA is too far from their homes. They either have to walk long distances or spend large amount of money to reach the workplace.
- The contractor does not give them the amount agreed upon. If they had agreed on Rs 300, they are paid only Rs 250. They are made to do work that is worth more than they are paid.
- They are not given any holidays even when they are sick or if their family members or children become sick. No maternity benefit is given to them either.
- After a woman comes from work, they are beaten by their drunken husbands. They sometimes don't allow them to go to work as well. Extra pressure on top of it is too much for them sometimes.
- There is no guarantee of the work so provided to them. If there is no material at the workplace, they are sent back. They are not given any work for that day.
- They are sexually harassed whenever they go out of the house and even at the workplace. Younger women are taken somewhere else for the same work while the women who are above the middle age are not given the work at all.
- They were not paid their wages on the same day.
- Men and women are not paid equally. Men are paid Rs 500 for the same work that a woman is paid Rs 200.

- A woman's work is not valued by anyone. It is always considered menial to that of a man

After the activity was conducted, each group came and presented their view on the problems. Apart from that, the workers came up with some suggestions as well, which are mentioned in the following section.

## **6. SUGGESTIONS**

- Proper toilets should be made available.
- A woman's work should be valued and the pay should be equal for both the genders.
- Crèche facilities should be provided at the workplace so that women don't have to worry about their children
- Pregnant and aged women should be given work and allowed to be employed.
- It is not their fault that material is not available at the workplace, so there should be a guarantee of work that should be provided to them.
- Pay should be given every day without any breaks.
- Water and shelter facilities should be provided at their workplace.
- Atleast 1 hour rest time should be given to women in the 8 hour day.
- They should get sick leaves or holidays in case of emergency without their contract being terminated,

- The contractor should be made responsible for any lack of facility and the lack of work. The government must ensure that the women are not sent back without any work being assigned to them due to the carelessness of the contractor.
- If the women are travelling from a far off place, travel allowance should also be given to them.

## **7. FUTURE PLAN OF ACTION**

Such visits will also be conducted in the near future and the information gathered subsequently would be conveyed to DLSA so that the shortcomings observed can be rectified.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

The interaction with the women revealed their lack of awareness of the situation and the solutions at hand. They did not know about any of the issues and everything was new for them. They did not know about the maternity benefits and emphasized on the fact that they should be allowed to work even when they are pregnant to provide for the house and their subsistence. This highlighted the issue that the condition of workers in India is so degraded that they can't go without work even for a day even if it took a toll on their health otherwise their own subsistence would be threatened.

It was an eye-opener even as the women came to realize that they first had to empower themselves through knowledge and only then could they take on the rest of the world. In all, it was a great event in which we all were able to reciprocate the knowledge that we all have. This program was necessary because no nation can develop by using just 50% of its resources.

(The photos of the programme have been attached as annexure)





