

IMPACT OF CONSTRUCTS OF QUALITY OF WORK LIFE IN RELATION TO WOMEN LABORERS UNDER MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT(MGNREGA): AN ANALYTICAL STUDY.

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ABSTRACT: Human resource is one of the fundamental factors influencing the development of a nation. The socio-economic and political position of a nation is very much dependent on how it recruits, motivates and retains its workforce? In present scenario it is very essential to keep in mind the importance of Quality of Work Life for employees while drafting the various national schemes which intend to provide quality of life to people. This is because QWL is an integral part of quality of life. The present study aims at identifying the various constructs of QWL responsible in affecting the QWL of employees particularly in the case of women workers in rural area. The constructs of QWL discussed in the present study include safe work environment, equitable wages, equal employment opportunities and opportunities for advancement. (Mirvis and Lawler,1984). The whole study has been framed from the perspective of women workers employed under MGNREGA. Further, the study attempts to find out how far they have been taken into consideration by the policy drafters of MGNREGA particularly for women employees and suggests the measures for improving QWL among MGNREGA employees particularly in the case of women. The study concludes that the important constructs of QWL have been taken into consideration while drafting MGNREGA but there is still much that must be done to strengthen womens' situation in rural areas .The suggestions for the same have been enumerated and the implications of the study discussed.

Keywords: *Quality of Work Life; MGNREGA's Women employees; Mirvis and Lawler's four factor.*

1. Introduction:

Defining the variable QWL; explaining its meaning and discussing its various constructs taken into consideration in the present study.

“QWL is a process of work organization which enables its members at all levels to participate actively and effectively in shaping the organization's environment, methods and outcomes. It is a value based process which is aimed towards meeting the twin goals of enhanced effectiveness of the organization and improved quality of life at work for the employees.”

QWL influences the productivity of the employees. Researchers have proved that good QWL leads to psychologically and physically healthier employees with positive feelings. To summarize, QWL is the degree to which employees of an organization are able to satisfy their personal needs through experience

in the organization. Its main aim is to create a work environment where employees work in cooperation with each other and contribute to organizational objectives.

2. Origin of QWL:

The evolution of QWL began in late 1960s emphasizing the human dimensions of work that was focused on the quality of the relationship between the worker and the working environment (Rose et al. 2006).

QWL is a concept of behavioral science and the term was first introduced by Davis at the Forty-Third American Assembly on the Changing World of Work at Columbia University's Arden House. The selected participants assembled there concluded in their final remarks that “improving the place, the organization and the nature of work can lead to better work performance and a better quality of life in the society” (Gadon 1984, Wyatt & Wah 2001, Sadique 2003, Rose et al. 2006, Islam & Siengthai 2009). Since the phrase was found the method of defining QWL varied and encompassed several different perspectives (Loscocco & Roschelle 1991).

Robbins (1989) defined QWL as "a process by which an organization responds to employee needs by developing mechanisms to allow them to share fully in making the decisions that design their lives at work”.

According to Feuer (1989), QWL can be described as the way an individual perceives and evaluates the characteristics intrinsic to his/ her past experience, education, race and culture. Lau and Bruce (1998) defined QWL as the workplace strategies, operations and environment that promote and maintain employee satisfaction with an aim to improving working conditions for employees and organizational effectiveness. (European Journal of Business and Management)

The BNET business dictionary defines Quality of Work Life as the extent to which employees can enhance their personal life through their work and their environment.

3. Constructs of QWL:

Mirvis and Lawler (1984) suggested that Quality of Work Life was associated with satisfaction with wages, hours and working conditions, describing the “basic elements of a good quality of work life” as:

- safe work environment,
- equitable wages,
- equal employment opportunities and
- Opportunities for advancement.

The aim of QWL is to identify and implement alternative programmes to improve the quality of professional as well as personal life of an organization’s employees.

The four constructs (*Mirvis and Lawler*) are explained below:

3.1 Safe work environment:

Health and well-being of QWL refer to physical and psychological aspects of an individual in any working environment. Since 1950, the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have shared a common definition of occupational health.

The definition reads: "Occupational health should aim at: the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations; the prevention amongst workers of departures from health caused by their working conditions; the protection of workers in their employment from risks resulting from factors adverse to health; the placing and maintenance of the worker in an occupational environment adapted to his physiological and psychological capabilities; and, to summarize, the adaptation of work to man and of each man to his job."

The main focus in occupational health is on three different objectives: (i) the maintenance and promotion of workers' health and working capacity; (ii) the improvement of working environment and work to become conducive to safety and health and (iii) development of work organizations and working cultures in a direction which supports health and safety at work and in doing so also promotes a positive social climate and smooth operation and may enhance productivity of the undertakings. The concept of working culture is intended in this context to mean a reflection of the essential value systems adopted by the undertaking concerned. Such a culture is reflected in practice in the managerial systems, personnel policy, principles for participation, training policies and quality management of the undertaking."

Reasons for occupational health and safety:

- Moral: duty of reasonable care; unacceptability of putting health and safety of people at risk; society's attitude to moral obligations; making the moral case to senior management
- Legal: the preventive (enforcement), punitive (through criminal sanctions), and compensatory effects of law
- Economic: direct and indirect costs associated with incidents and/or unhealthy workplaces and their impact on the organization (includes insured and un-insured costs).

Employer responsibilities with health and safety:

Organizations should realize that their true wealth lies in their employees and so providing a healthy work environment for employees should be their primary objective. Occupational health and safety procedures must be implemented wherever the work is being conducted in an office, factory, construction site or home.

One should develop and have in place an occupational health and safety policy to meet the following standards:

- ensure that the way work is done is safe and does not affect employees' health
- ensure that tools, equipment and machinery are safe and are kept safe
- ensure that ways of storing, transporting or working with dangerous substances is safe and does not damage employees' health
- provide employees with the information, instruction and training they need to do their job safely and without damaging their health
- consult with employees about health and safety in the workplace, and
- monitor the work place regularly and keep a record of what is found during the checks.

Policies should be developed in consultation with all employees. In some instances it may be necessary to organize support persons or interpreters for employees with disability so that all employees may participate in the consultation process.

Employees with disability:

Employees with disability have the same rights and responsibilities as employees without disability when it comes to creating and maintaining a safe work environment.

Reasonable adjustments:

Employees with disability may require reasonable adjustments to ensure safety in the workplace, such as changes to work processes or equipment, or adjusting work schedules.

The law states that, whenever it is necessary, possible and reasonable, as an employer, you should take into account a person's disability and make appropriate adjustment to the work environment to accommodate that person.

Reasonable adjustments enable an employee with disability to:

- perform the inherent or essential requirements of their job safely in the workplace
- have equal employment opportunities such as recruitment processes, promotion and training opportunities
- enjoy equal terms and conditions of employment.

3.2 Equitable Wages: Principle of equitable wages refers to the Principle of non-discrimination in compensation for work. It states that pay should be based on the kind and quality of work done and not according to the age, race, sex, religion, political association, ethnic origin, or any other individual or group characteristic unrelated to ability, performance and qualification. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. The economic interests of people drive them to work at a job and employee satisfaction depends, at least partially, on the compensation offered. Pay should be fixed on the basis of the work done, responsibilities undertaken, individual skills, performance and accomplishments. The principle of equitable wages helps to develop employees' motivation for work.

3.3 Equal employment Opportunities (EEO):

Equal Employment Opportunity refers to a policy statement that equal consideration for a job is applicable to all individuals and that the employer does not discriminate based on race, color, religion, age, marital status, national origin, disability or sex. This is a sensitive area of legal concern that employers must comply with.

3.4 Opportunities for advancement: Merriam-Webster defines 'opportunity' as: a favorable juncture of circumstances; a good chance for advancement or progress. An organization should provide employees with opportunities for personal/ professional development and growth and to prepare them to accept responsibilities at higher levels.

4. Purpose of study:

- (a) To identify the major factors that influences the QWL of employees particularly in the case of women workers in rural area.
- (b) To find out how far they have been taken into consideration by the policy drafters of MGNREGA particularly for women employees.
- (c) To suggest the measures for improving QWL among MGNREGA employees particularly in the case of women.

5. Hypothesis:

It was hypothesized that the important constructs of QWL of workers would have been taken into consideration while drafting guidelines for MGNREGA particularly in the case of women workers.

6. Rational of study:

An Organization is a social unit of people, systematically structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals on continuing basis. A country is the most important and super-most organization comprising of a huge mass of people which in different ways work together to achieve a collective goal of national development.

Employee satisfaction is supremely important in an organization because it is what productivity depends on. If the employees are satisfied they would produce superior quality performance in optimal time and lead to growing profits. Satisfied employees are also more likely to be creative and innovative and come up with breakthroughs that allow an organization to grow and change positively with time and changing market conditions.

In the same way, employee development is crucial for the growth and prosperity of a country, as it is the determining factors on which the productivity of a nation depends.

The present study is an effort to examine whether the national schemes are drafted by the policy-makers keeping in mind the most imperative factor affecting the human resource of the country i.e. the QWL.

7. MGNREGA:

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (hereafter NREGA) is a law whereby any adult who applies for employment in rural areas has to be given work on local public works within 15 days. If employment is not given, an unemployment allowance has to be paid. The employment guarantee is subject to a limit of 100 days per household per year. It is to be noted that NREGA is a law and not just a scheme.

The main objective of MGNREGA is to protect rural households from poverty and hunger. MGNREGA can also serve other objectives: generating productive assets, protecting the environment, empowering women, reducing rural-urban migration and fostering social equity among others. Thus, MGNREGA is not just an employment scheme: it is a tool of economic and social development in rural areas.

One of the distinctive features of MGNREGA is that it has not been subjected to arbitrary modification or changes at an easy will of the State. For instance, one can reiterate what the Directive Principles in this regard says and how this is being well substantiated in the EGA as the Directive

Principles upholds “*The State shall in particular direct its policy towards securing ... that the citizens, men and women equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood*”. If MGNREGA is properly implemented with further scope of extending in terms of number of employment days, it can lead to a strong convergence of non-judiciable ethos of Directive Principles to judiciable ones and a sustainable deepening citizenry.

Enlisting the MGNREGA guidelines and the provisions laid down for women workers:

The MGNREGA is unique in the sense that it is sensitive to working conditions of workers, especially women as it advocates for providing accessible worksite (within five kilometer of the workers residence), crèches etc for women with children below six, at least one third of work opportunities must go to women and gender parity of wages, etc. Besides this, there are strong provisions to pre-empt corruption, regular and transparent maintenance of all MGNREGA documents especially muster rolls, job cards, utilization certificate, etc and their display at the respective Panchayat Offices. The Act further requires the maintenance of employment and wage details in the workers’ job cards, to enable workers to monitor and verify their employment records themselves. Contractors are banned too in the whole implementation of the MGNREGA. To implement this wage equity, the workers are entitled to the statutory minimum wage in each state. In the case of employment not being given within the job application by the rural citizens within 15 days of the receipt of the application for work, the state government would be answerable to give unemployment allowance against such a failure. Under MGNREGA, rural laborers have a legal entitlement not only to work on demand but also to minimum wages.

All adults in a household are eligible to work. If the worksite is not within five kilometers from the applicant’s residence then the applicant is eligible for an additional 10% of the wage. A holistic look at the contents of the Act opens up a wide spectrum of possibilities as EGA can become a big boost for nomadic tribal communities since locally domiciled but migrant population is also eligible for employment. To put the objective of the Act in a perspective, MGNREGA is about;

- Ensuring minimum 100 days of work in a year.
- Strictly implementing men-women wage parity and focus on disadvantaged communities.
- Creating community assets; rural connectivity, water conservation and harvesting, drought proofing etc.

8. How far MGNREGA guidelines have been drafted keeping in mind the importance of QWL- A Perspective:

In this study, we will analyze the above guidelines under the following headings which are the four factors affecting QWL (Mirvis & Lawler).

8.1 Safe Work Environment:

The MGNREGA is committed to ensure a workplace conducive to productivity and workers’ welfare. With this in mind, MGNREGA funds have been allocated for the provision of safe drinking water, shade for periods of rest, first aid and child care facilities at the worksite. The last of these, in particular, is significant in order to make MGNREGA work a viable option for women with young children who cannot be left alone at home.

8.2 Equitable Wages:

The act stipulates that wages will be equal for men and women. In this way it helps to curb the inequality between men and women on the economic front.

8.3 Equal Employment Opportunities:

“Priority” should be given to women in the allocation of work “in such a way that at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women”. [Schedule II, Para 6, NREGA]

The act is also committed to ensuring that at least 33% of the workers shall be women. By generating employment for women at fair wages in the village, MGNREGA can play a substantial role in economically empowering women and laying the basis for greater independence and self-esteem.

Government figures indicate an impressive participation of women in the MGNREGA. It is above 33 per cent in 15 states. Tamil Nadu, with 82 per cent shows the highest participation with Kerala and Rajasthan also showing impressive figures.

Table 1: Women's participation in NREGA (women workers as a percentage of all NREGA workers)

States	2008 – 09 (%)
Tamil Nadu	82.01
Kerala	71.39
Rajasthan	69.00
Andhra Pradesh	57.75
Karnataka	49.77
Gujarat	46.54
Tripura	44.51
Uttaranchal	42.77
Chattisgarh	42.05
Madhya Pradesh	41.67
Maharashtra	39.99
Sikkim	36.73
Orissa	36.39
Haryana	34.44
Mizoram	33.62
Manipur	32.80
Meghalaya	30.87
Assam	30.85
Himachal Pradesh	30.11
Arunachal Pradesh	29.58
Nagaland	29.36
Jharkhand	27.17
Bihar	26.62
West Bengal	16.99
Punjab	16.29
Uttar Pradesh	14.53
Jammu & Kashmir	1.08
All India	49.33

Source: Official data (for the first four months of the financial year 2008-09) available at www.nrega.nic.in as on 17th July 2008.

8.4 Opportunities for advancement:

By putting cash incomes into their hands, MGNREGA is beginning to create a greater degree of economic independence among women. As mentioned, this was one of MGNREGA's main aims: with the increased participation of women in household income-generation a positive contribution to gender relations can be made.

Women workers are becoming more confident about their roles as contributors to family expenditure and their work decisions, and that they are also becoming more assertive about their space in the public sphere.

The act contributes to the generation of awareness regarding operational guidelines, household registration, the job card distribution process, work applications and entitlements such as worksite facilities and unemployment allowance. Thus, the act promotes greater self esteem, awareness, realization of rights and helps to build up self- confidence among women.

MGNREGA is designed to be largely implemented through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) – at least 50 per cent of all sanctioned works are to be implemented by the Gram Panchayats. The Gram Sabha is to play a crucial role in the selection of works and the conduct of social audits. Participation of people at large and women in particular in these institutions and assemblies is crucial for realizing the full potential of the act. . There is reservation of one third of all seats in local elected bodies for women (under the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts)

Thus, the act provides greater opportunities for women to play significant role in the effective implementation of MGNREGA by planning the shelf of projects and conducting social audits at MGNREGA works. Priority issues like water availability, sanitation, health, education etc.

9. CONCLUSION:

The first objective of the study for identifying the major factors that influence the QWL of employees particularly in the case of women workers in rural area has been achieved. The constructs of QWL given by Mirvis & Lawler have been identified as the best ones affecting the QWL of women workers in MGNREGA. They have been explained in detail in the present study.

The second objective of the study was to find out how far they have been taken into consideration by the policy drafters of MGNREGA particularly for women employees.

As a result of the above analysis it can be concluded that in the wider perspective MGNREGA contributes to the goal of developing awareness and assertion of womens' identity in terms of economic status and participation in social sphere.

The various constructs of QWL of employees have been taken into consideration while drafting MGNREGA but there is still much scope for further improvements in the act by making provisions more conducive particularly for women workers. Some suggestions will also be enumerated below which shall lead to the attainment of our third objective.

10. Measure to improve QWL among MGNREGA workers particularly women:

Following measures should be considered-

- I. Providing a training session to new workers on all safety procedures, including evacuation and other emergency procedures. Safe working practices should also be reviewed and emphasized with all employees on a regular and ongoing basis.
- II. Ensuring that the way work is done is safe and does not affect workers' health.
- III. Ensuring that tools, equipment and machinery are safe and are kept safe.
- IV. Ensuring that ways of storing, transporting or working with dangerous substances is safe and does not damage workers' health.
- V. Monitoring the work place regularly and keep a record of what is found during the checks.
- VI. Awareness programmes should be conducted to make women workers aware about their rights. These programmes should also perform the crucial task of fostering greater participation of women in Gram Sabhas and Gram Panchayats.
- VII. Timely payments must be ensured.
- VIII. There should be arrangements for the extension of the time-period of work; as demanded by the workers.
- IX. A Complaint Committee should be set up for considering the complaints of the workers for various issues like sexual harassment and unbiased decisions should be ensured.

11. Implications of the present study:

The study identifies some aspects of QWL affecting the workers belonging to rural setting particularly women. Studying QWL for such population is a relatively less researched topic as of date. It studies MGNREGA from a normative perspective which is undoubtedly a different perspective making the study; a unique one in this field. The study implies that the government schemes regarding the provision of employment should be drafted; keeping in mind the important constructs of QWL. Hence, it is of significant use in administrative set ups.

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