

# **UNDERSTANDING THE VULNERABILITY OF WEAKER SECTION OF LEATHER GOODS MANUFACTURING WORKERS OF KOLKATA**

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## **Abstract**

There are different household industries that are functioning within or around Kolkata. Among them leather and rubber goods manufacturing and processing industry is important one. This Industry is mainly concentrated in the eastern or mid-eastern part of Kolkata where maximum number of tanneries is situated. In the Park Circus region large number of families are living on this household industry where almost all family members are directly involved as the work force. In this locality concentration of Muslim population are largest. They are mainly engaged in manufacturing and processing of leather products. Workforce engaging in the above mentioned sectors is facing hazards due to detrimental work practices. Almost all the workers especially females and children are very much vulnerable to various physical and social hazards. So in this paper an effort has been made to study the various types of hazards they are facing every day and lastly some remedial measures have been suggested.

**Key words:** Hazards, household industry, workers.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

There are different household industries that are functioning within or around Kolkata. Among them leather goods manufacturing and processing industry is important one. The industry is mainly conducted by the head of the household and/or by the members of the household at home. Larger proportion of workers in this industry should consist of members of the household including the head. Usually all the members of the family especially females and teen agers, and in some cases children, are engaged largely in different activities for manufacturing or processing of the products. This Industry is mainly concentrated in the eastern or mid-eastern part of Kolkata where maximum number of tanneries is situated. In the Park Circus region large number of families are dependent on this household industry where almost all family members are directly involved as the work force. So this region of Kolkata i.e. Park Circus region has been selected as the study area. In this locality concentration of Muslim population is very high. They are mainly engaged in manufacturing and processing of leather

products like foot-ware (which include boots, shoes, sandals, and slippers), bags, wallets, belts, leather-covers for different materials, gloves, leather garments.

Workforce engaging in the above mentioned sectors is facing hazards due to detrimental work practices. Almost all the workers especially females and children are very much vulnerable to various physical and social hazards. So in this paper an effort has been made to study the various types of hazards they are facing, especially females and children, every day and lastly some remedial measures have been suggested.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS:**

The data have been used here are primary in nature. Information of physical hazards have been extracted from secondary sources. Primary data has been collected on the basis of sample survey based on schedule questionnaire. Then data have been arranged and presented by tables and charts.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:**

As discussed before it has been found from the field observation that the workers of this industry are as a whole and females and children are in particular are very much vulnerable to different types of hazards. The hazards they are facing every day have been categorized in this paper broadly in two types; 1. Physical hazards and 2. Social hazards. Let's have a look upon these.

### **1. Physical Hazards:**

Under this category workers are vulnerable to the following types of hazards and accidents.

**Health Hazards:** The main health hazards are toxic solvents, high atmospheric dust concentrations, ergonomic risks and noise from the machines. Organic solvents can cause acute and chronic effects on the central nervous system [1]. Dust produced at various stage of production causes various respiratory diseases. The major problem faced by the workers can be categorized as back pain, finger pain, elbow pain, neck pain due to long working hours and poor

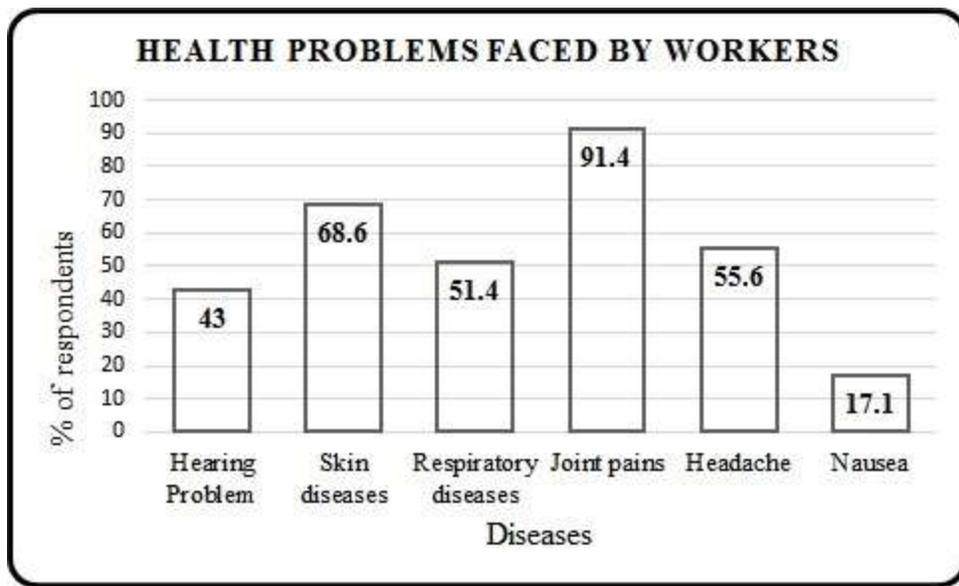


Fig -1  
Source: Primary survey

working condition. Apart from this headache, nausea are common diseases suffered by them. Various skin related problems like itching,

cracks etc. have also found as the workers are exposed to different types of chemicals during the various stages of manufacturing activities. Apart from this, as these units of this area are located close to tanneries, peoples engaging in leather good manufacturing units are exposed to the adverse environments of the tanneries on a regular basis. One study shows that People who work in and live near tanneries suffer too. Many die from cancer possibly caused by exposure to toxic chemicals used to process and dye the leather [2]. Workers are also facing problems due to noise caused by the increased and intensive use of machines and equipment. So hearing problem is another issue which is now they are facing.

From the primary survey it has been revealed that 43% of workers have hearing problem, 68.6% are suffering from skin diseases, 51.4% are patients of various respiratory diseases, lion's share of workers i.e. 91.4% have joint pains. 55.6% of respondents are suffering from frequent headache and to 17.1% of respondents nausea is very common (Table -1).

**Fire Hazards:** The intensive use of flammable liquids constitutes a considerable fire hazard. The solvents and sprays used in adhesives and finishing materials may be highly flammable [2]. Apart from this back to back hosing condition, narrow lanes, semi pukka houses and densely populated region aggravated the hazardous condition if the fire caught.

**Accidents:** Widespread use of presses and assembling machines has introduced an increased risk of mechanical accidents into this industry. Many of the operating parts of the machines present serious hazards, in particular presses, stampers, rollers and knives. The loose-knife cutters at stitching and revolving presses can cause serious injury [3].

**2. Social Hazards:**

Under this category workers are vulnerable to the following hazards which are also alarming for this society.

**Low level of education:** 59.0% female workers and 56% male workers are illiterate. Maximum of them studied up to VIII standard(Table -1). So in terms of literacy females are

	Literacy and Level of Education						
	Illiterates (in Percentage)	Literates (in Percentage)	Literates (in Percentage)				
			Up to IV	V - VIII	IX- X	XI- XII	Graduate
Male	56	44	13	55	28	3	---
Female	59	41	15	51	24	66	4

Table – 1

Source: Primary Survey

backward than the male counterpart.

Classes	Cumulative Percentage of drop outs
III- IV	11.90
V- VIII	52.10
IX -X	29.00
XI- XII	6.80
Total	100.00

Table – 2

Source: Primary survey

**Large number of school dropouts:** It has also found that approximately 25% teenagers of 6 to 16 years of age group had

dropped out from schools at various levels. Records of maximum number of drop out have been registered in the case of class V – VIII students (Table -2). One of the main reasons for this is to earn cash in hand.

**Child Labour:** Child labour and problem of drop out are very closely associated. It continues as one of the most serious problems in this industry. Almost in every house hold Children of the family are engaged in the family business which deprives their childhood. It affects their mentality by attractive them directly in the money earning process. This section of children is very much vulnerable.

**Income and long working hours specially females:** Average means income of females is as low as Rs 700 per month. It has also been recorded that 14% of females are not receiving money in hand as wage.16.3% have received less than Rs. 300 per month. 55.9% have received Rs. 300 to 1000 and 14% have received Rs. 1000 to 5000 per month. A large number of female workers i.e. 26% females have worked more than 8 hours per day.

Thus the female workers received very little money or in some cases they just only work for the family business but financially they are dependent on the male as they do not receive any salary for their contribution in business. They have to work in straining long hours in business and at the same time they are performing household chores. This causes the deterioration of their health. Thus this section of workers is very much vulnerable.

So lastly it can be stated that this types of hazardous situation can be reduced if proper preventive measures can be taken. To prevent various physical hazards ergonomic solutions are essential. Periodic medical examinations linked to occupational hazards are an effective factor for protection of workers health. Using of the lowest flash point solvents and using good general ventilation can prevent fire hazards. Public awareness regarding fire hazards should be increased. To prevent social hazards public awareness regarding expansion of education is essential. Spread of education is very important to eradicate or to reduce all other social hazards. Though different local organizations are working for the betterment of children education, female education and government initiatives are also encouraging children to go to school, still to reduce the dropout rates public awareness is essential. Government initiatives regarding execution of law should be strict to prevent child labour.

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