MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was undertaken in Dindigul District in Tamil Nadu among women workers in Spinning Mills. After a detailed analysis and interpretation of the primary data, this chapter presents the major research findings of the study in line with the objectives of the study. Based on the findings, the researcher has suggested some measures for the welfare of the women workers in spinning mills in particular and Tamil Nadu in general.

5.1 Major Findings

5.1.1 Social Characteristics

The majority of the women workers are living in rural areas with 31% having had exposure to urban areas before their marriage; three-fourths are Hindus; 59% are non-SC/ST; the majority (85%) have studied up to 6-10 standard; 79% belong to nuclear families; 43% are aged 30 or less; 30% are unmarried; 59% are married; 11% are widowed/separated/divorced; two-thirds of the married workers have been married for 10 or less years, 45% have a family size of 4 members or less; 32% of the married women have 2 or more number of living children; 33% have a family income of less than Rs. 12,000/- per annum and 72% have a medium or low standard of living.

5.1.2 Standard of living

The results show that the standard of living of the women workers has improved after joining the mill. Their economic status in terms of the use of telephone/mobile phone, savings, water tap connection, toilet
facilities, jewellery and LPG connection are enhanced because of their participation in the work force. One-third of the women workers (35 %) are working in spinning units; 45 % have 5 to 15 years of service; 55 % had worked for 2-5 years in other factories earlier to this; less than half (45 %) are in regular service and about 55 % are on daily wages or on contract basis.

5.1.3 Leave facilities

The findings show that there is a low level of awareness about provisions for leave facilities for workers in the mill. Maternity leave without salary and termination from service have been reported by a high proportion of 71 % of the women workers.

5.1.4 Infrastructure and welfare facilities

The major benefits given to the workers are festival advance and overtime wages and for those coming from a distance, company bus; Facilities like bank, crèche and access to ESI hospital are lacking in the spinning mills; social security schemes such as accident scheme (96 %) and insurance scheme (80 %) are made available to the women workers; but schemes such as appointment on compassion are ground (27 %), medical benefits (28 %), GPF (17 %) and gratuity (12 %) are not yet extended to the majority of the women workers.

5.1.5 Knowledge of Labour Acts

47 percent of the women workers are aware of the Industrial Act, 95% of the Minimum Working Hours Act, 79 % of the Equal Remuneration Act. But there is less knowledge about the Bonus Act (56 %), Maternity Benefit Act (31 %), Trade Union Act (25 %), Labour Welfare Act (22 %) and Leave Provision Act (18 %).
5.1.6 Security to women workers

The results reveal that, except those who live in hostels, the majority of the women workers are accompanied by a co-worker or others; only 8% go alone and 5% return alone; 43% face problems during travel in the form of gossiping by co-workers and misbehaviour of drivers/ conductors/ supervisors with women workers. The women workers very frequently undergo sexual harassment in different forms. The male co-workers indulge either passing comments on the dress of women or mock at girls by quoting statements from films or TV serials, gossiping vulgarly or denigrating women. Compulsion to use mill bus facilitates provides circumstances for sexual harassment of this type. 27% of the women workers personally experienced such sexual harassment during travel, eve-teasing, physical contact and advances with wrong motive, use of sexually coloured remarks, verbal and non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature. About three-fourths of the women workers worked in the night shift and about 71% of them reported satisfactory safety arrangements in the night shift for women, while the remaining felt that it was not safe for women in the night shift, particularly for reasons such as sexual harassment and ill-treatment, passing sexual comments, eve-teasing and physical contact and advances apart from the problem of lack of medical/first aid facility, lack of supervision/entertainment, non-hospitalisation of injured workers in time and compulsion to work in night shifts; 22% of the women who work in the night shift experienced problems such as overtime leading to health problems, inability to take care of family members and unable to attend family functions, missing transport to reach the workplace and facing sexually explicit language. Women who work in the night shift come out
with the following suggestions: minimizing the number of women workers, providing entertainment facility, increasing wages, providing medical facility, frequent supervision to rectify problems, arranging additional transport to return home, avoiding favourtism in assigning work, activating Labour Welfare Act and orienting women in different Labour Acts and arranging yoga/meditation courses for workers.

5.1.7 Trade Union Activities of women workers

Only 27% of the women workers are members of trade unions; 78% of them have more than 10 years of experience in trade unions; 33% of them are in different positions of leadership. So far these women unionists have performed the role of bringing issues to the notice of the management for solution, strengthening worker's unity, motivating workers to attend union meetings, imparting knowledge of activities of trade unions, promoting cordial relationship between workers and the management, reviewing meetings, fighting against wage exploitation and overtime work and motivating workers to enroll as members etc. Women have joined trade unions for several reasons: leadership and decision making capacity (94%), safety and recognition (63%), maintaining status among workers (42%), to become leaders (31%), to attend trade union conferences (30%), to ensure welfare of workers through solving problems (96%), fighting against discrimination by the management (93%), creating unity and solidarity among workers (89%), getting bonus on time (80%), to maintain good rapport with co-workers and union office bearers (72%), to strengthen trade union activities (61%), to know more about trade union activities (56%) and to share ideas and learn new ideas (51%). 47% of the women workers have frequently participated in trade union meetings. The majority
(90 %) of the members of trade unions desire to continue as members for several reasons such as job security, moral support of union, solving family problems through union, getting job for relatives through union, getting rapport with leaders, status, improving leadership quality and personality traits, getting wider contact and contesting in local body elections.

Trade unions have represented several issues of workers including gender related ones such as use of alcohol by male supervisors/ workers during night shift, molestation/ sexual harassment in and outside the mill, warned the management against compelling women workers to join the hostel (to be misused by the management), warned officials/ supervisors/contractors against giving trouble to women workers, urged time bound promotion for workers, avoiding favourtism in assigning night shift work and fought against supervisor’s superiority complex.

Among women who are members in trade unions, 90 % report that issues of women are taken to the notice of trade unions. But some issues are not brought to the notice of trade unions because only senior workers’ are considered, trade unions do not find only permanent solutions to problems, fear of reporting issues, union’s favourtism towards the management Sometimes issues are reported directly to the management and remedied.

5.1.8 Wage for workers

The analysis reveals that wage difference between male and female workers exists (63 %) even though they are doing the same type of work. Men workers get more wages because of their rich experience, hard work, permanent posting, not changing mill often and conscientiousness with full
attendance compared to women. Contractors pay salary to women (38 %) and deduct a certain amount towards advance paid and as per agreement made before joining the mill. Nearly half of the women (48 %) are doing overtime work and 29 % of them are getting more than Rs.400/- per month for it.

5.1.9 Experience of workers

55 % of the women workers had gained experience from different working premises before enrolling in the present mill such as farm sector, spinning/ match industries, medical store, grocery store, ornament centre, textile shop, cosmetics center, construction work, NGOs, noon meal centre, tailoring and garment centers. The majority of them stated that they earned less than Rs.1000/- as income per month in those places. Reasons for joining the present mill were poverty, lack of agricultural work, availability of regular income, fixed hours of work, access to mill in terms of transport and distance, improved economic status and gaining technical skills and general knowledge. About two-thirds of the women workers (65 %) are willing to continue the present work because of improved economic status, enhanced status in society, security of job, gaining leadership quality, support of trade union for settling worker’s problems and their welfare. Reasons for not willing to continue in the present work are low wages (85 %), temporary work (81 %), less promotional avenues (68 %), health problems (60 %), night shift exposing them to immoral behaviour, inability to work after delivery, torture at workplace and compulsion to join the hostel.

5.1.10 Violence against women workers

37 % of the women workers perceive that domestic violence can be reported to others. 55 % of the married women workers have undergone battering and it was more among rural residents (62 %) than urban ones.
(38 %). Frequency of wife battering remained the same between rural and urban residents. Suspicion of wife’s behaviour because of late arrival home, free social movement, misunderstanding, lack of caring for family members and financial problems are the important reasons wifes being battering by husbands.

Seventy-six percent of the women workers get co-operation from male workers and the remaining do not in terms of protection from sexual abuse, untoward incidents and social stigma; 64 % do not interact with male workers during leisure hours due to separate rest rooms, to avoid sexual comments, inferiority complex, fear of social stigma and inorder to avoid being ridiculed by others. Colleagues are involved in sexual harassment such as non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature (47 %), sexually coloured remarks (44 %), request for sexual contact (32 %), ridiculing females (28 %) and physical contact (25 %). Male workers who have consumed alcohol indulge in such activities. It is happening in the night shift, during travel, during training programmes and while transporting raw materials.

Negative personality traits such as harsh words, status consciousness, and groupism are not predominant (less than 31 %) among both supervisors and managers; 20 % of the women workers experience mental torture in terms of unjustified complaints, sexual harassment, tiring work, being bossed over by supervisors, partiality in work assignment etc. Lack of awareness of rights, social security, contract work, retaliation for complaints made by workers, low wages, lack of co-ordination among workers, stress at home and not achieving target due to continuous work are the reasons for mental torture.
Female workers report problems related to co-workers (48 %), supervisors (34 %), trade union leaders (29 %), and the management (27 %). The management has not taken any action in 53 % of cases but some culprits have been disciplined and made to realise their error and have left the job. Workplace campaign, guidance and counseling regarding violence against women and building confidence and support among workers have been initiated in some cases.

Women are not reporting violence against women workers to others due to their silent acceptance (27 %), inability to report (35 %), fear of reporting (22 %) and feeling ashamed to report (16 %).

Women suggest to adhere to 8 hours of work, frequent visits by supervisors, work with homogeneous group, first aid facility, enough protection, action against culprits, improvement of infrastructure facility, moral support of trade union, solving problems on the spot and mutual understanding between workers and supervisors for the safety of women workers in the mill.

Working both at home and in the mill creates stress as reported by 64 % of the women workers. Stress situations like poor working conditions and less promotional avenues (65 %), lack of action against offenders (57 %), extracting more work with less wages (53 %), ridiculing women (50 %), partiality in assigning work (45 %), compulsion to work both day and night shifts continuously (43 %), dust/heat/sleepless work affecting health (42 %) and management not considering women worker’s views have been reported by women workers.
5.1.11 Hosteller's Complaints

The complaints of hosteller's are: night shift work is assigned to hostellers regularly rather than non-hostellers (97%); the mills create noise pollution which causes mental stress and sleeplessness to the labourers because the hostel is located within the premises of the mill (93%); lack of medical facilities (90%); use of dormitories and common toilet leads to communicable diseases (87%); poor sanitation in the dining hall and kitchen (84%); and poor quality of food despite the high mess fees and less quantity of food being served, inadequate ventilation in the bed room (each 80%).

5.1.12 Illness

Women suffered illness for less than 10 days (68%), 11-20 days (57%), 21-30 days (36%) and 31 or more days (23%). They received treatment for their illness mostly in Government Hospital (86%), ESI hospital (31%), private clinic (69%), primary health centre (54%), Siddha hospital (47%) and maternity hospital (37%). The illness was cured in 86% of the cases. They spent Rs.1000/- on an average for the treatment of their illness.

5.2 Conclusions

The study of the problems of women workers in spinning mills in Dindigul District brings to light the various problems encountered by the women workers (both domestic and in the work place). It also reveals the impact of the women workers working in such spinning mills. There is a general opinion that the spinning mills provide employment chances to a large number of people living in the local area and this in turn helps in improving the standard of living of the people. Further the status of these working women was also improved. The findings of this study also prove this trend with the fact that the women working in these spinning mills have improved their economic status, of course with a large number of difficulties and problems.
Years back, Dindigul District, particularly, Dindigul town was famous for its lock industries; then came the tanneries which also gained popularity for this town. In those days there were only a few spinning mills, that too with frequent lock-outs because of various reasons. But, as years rolled on, the industrial climate started changing and the town witnessed the mushroom growth of spinning mills. This paved the way for the womenfolk of rural areas to get employment chances and to increase their family income.

In these circumstances the study of the problems of women workers in spinning mills in Dindigul District was carried out with a view to understanding the problems faced by these women. The study reveals that the majority of the women workers are from large families with a poor socio-economic background. Though they are literate with minimum level schooling, they are ignorant of the various industrial Acts related to their employment. Their poor economic condition and the rapid growth of these spinning mills attracted the women workers to join as labourers, but most of them are either temporary workers or on daily wage basis. This is an advantage to the mill owners but these women workers happen to forego a number of their rights including increased wages and other monetary benefits. Similarly, the wages are paid mostly through contractors who in turn swindle a portion of their wages. The mill owners, it is felt, may avoid the contractors and pay the wages directly. Further these women workers have reported headache, back pain, tuberculosis and stomach pain as the major health problems for which they undergo treatment mostly in government hospitals and in some cases in ESI hospitals.

The study has brought out a number of other problems also. Gender related issues like sexual harassment, including eve-teasing, sexual verbal abuse, poor transport facilities, disparity of wages for men and women for
the same work, etc. are a few to be quoted. These problems can be looked into by the mill owners as well as by the government by enforcing the industrial labour laws effectively. The major problem faced by these women workers is the work during night shift. Usually the mills follow a shift system where the labourers are assigned duties on shift basis both during day and night. But the problem here is that, since the majority of these women workers are ignorant, working on temporary basis, they are assigned more night shift duties and the women workers can not avoid it because of fear of job insecurity. During travel for the night shifts, the male labourers engage in sexual harassment physically as well as verbally. This creates suspicion of the wives by the husbands and misunderstanding between them. Because of the night shift work, the women workers are not able to care for their family members and can not attend to domestic work. Since these women workers have to work both in the mill (to earn) and in domestic activities, they get mental torture. In this regard, it is good that a number of mills have appointed women supervisors and are implementing social welfare measures for the women workers. But this should be followed by all the mills thereby providing security to the women workers. Regarding the role of trade unions, only a minimum number of women workers have enrolled as members in the trade unions but they do not take active part in the trade union activities. These women workers are not aware of many provisions of the various labour laws and this helps the employers to exploit them both physically and financially. So, these women workers should be made aware of all the provisions of such laws. For this, the government and the mill administration may arrange periodical orientation courses to them. The Inspector of Factories as well as the Labour Inspector need to make surprise visits more frequently to the work spots, enquire of the workers about the working conditions and take action against the erring mill administration.
The mill administration, on their part can give preference to the women workers in the day shift and reduce night shift work, arrange adequate and proper transport facilities and implement welfare measures for the women workers like good lighting, recreational facilities, proper medical facilities maternity leave with wages, etc.

In spite of all these problems, it is a good sign that the women workers have expressed their willingness to continue to work in the same mill because of the improvement in their economic status, status in the society, security of job (in some cases), support of the trade unions and their awareness about their rights. So, it is concluded that despite all the problems mentioned above, there is improvement in the status of women after joining the mill in terms of economic independence, social value within and outside the family, self development in knowledge and leadership. Both the standard of living of the working women and their status have improved significantly. On the whole it is suggested that the government and the mill authorities should join hands in taking efforts to safeguard the welfare of the women workers by enforcing the available judicial provisions and also by initiating new provisions and schemes.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions have been offered to safeguard the welfare of the working women in the spinning mills.

1. Strengthening the existing industrial laws aiming at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women workers in the industrial sector.
2. Creating comprehensive support systems in terms of labour legislation, social security and providing support services to the workers.

3. Taking appropriate measures to enable women workers to work during night shifts in the spinning mill and this should be accompanied by proper support services for their security, adequate transportation etc.

4. Arranging separate transport facilities with adequate number for women workers to avoid sexual harassment.

5. Women worker-friendly personnel policies will also have to be drawn up to encourage women workers and for their effective participation.

6. Enforce with vigour the Equal Remuneration Act in the industrial sector.

7. The existing laws can be reviewed and new labour laws can be enacted to ensure justice and to provide security to women workers from sexual harassment and other forms of violence.

8. The Inspector of Factories and the Labour Inspector will have to make surprise as well as frequent visits to the mills to ensure proper enforcement of labour laws.

9. The government and the mill owners can arrange orientation training programmes to the women workers and the training curriculum should include the various provisions / advantages meant for the women workers, their rights, safety measures, gender sensitive issues to avoid gender discrimination as well as sexual harassment.
10. The family members of the women workers can also be given counselling regarding the available facilities to the workers, the mode of transport, the nature of work etc, so that there will be no misunderstanding among them.

11. Provision of support services to the women workers in the spinning mills including child care facilities and crèches.

12. Provision of equal access to women workers for health care, career and vocational guidance, occupational health and safety as well as social security measures etc.

13. Establishing a separate cell in the mill premises to prevent sexual harassment and also to enquire into reports regarding the sexual harassment during working hours in the mill and in the hostel.

14. The contract system and the scheme system of recruitment of women workers should be abolished because these systems prevent the workers from getting permanent employment.

15. The government may take adequate measures to control the growing price of yarn due to cotton export. For this, the government may subsidize the cost of yarn. Similarly, new avenues for marketing the products manufactured by the spinning mills may be created and for this a permanent convention center can be constructed at the district headquarters. This in turn will benefit the workers to get higher wages.

16. The mills should take appropriate steps to provide all the minimum basic facilities to the workers and this will motivate the workers to work hard.
5.4 Avenues for Further Research

- A Study on Family burden of Women Workers in Spinning Industries
- Impact of Quality of life among the Women Workers in the Spinning Industries
- A Study on the Role of Managerial Personnel and Women Workers in the Spinning Industries for Sustainable Development.
- An assessment of relative deprivation between management and Women Workers in the Spinning Industries