

AN AFFAIR WITH ECONOMICS



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*Celebrating 25 years of Economics
@
Sacred Heart College, Chalakudy*

Edited by

**Dr. Chacko Jose P
Dr. Shirley Jose K
Mr. Nijil Jacobi**



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*Celebrating 25 Years of Economics @ Sacred Heart College,
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INDEX

SL. NO.	TITLE OF RESEARCH PAPER/ARTICLE	NAME/S OF AUTHOR/S	PAGE NO.
1	GENDER, EDUCATION AND WORK: DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN KERALA	ALICE SEBASTIAN	1 - 24
2	ECONOMICS EDUCATION IN A GLOBALISING WORLD – PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES	Dr. CHACKO JOSE P	25 - 30
3	THE DYNAMICS OF CASTE INDUCED DEPRIVATION IN INDIA	Dr. FRANCO T. FRANCIS JOBIN MATHEW	31 - 37
4	ECONOMIC ASPECT OF URBANISATION IN INDIA	GLADY PAUL	38 - 48
5	MICRO FINANCE AND THE NEW MODI GOVERNMENT	JINI THOMAS	49 - 56
6	ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM IN NORTH CAROLINA – SEES GREEN LIGHT ON	LATHA N.K	57 - 63
7	WOMEN WORKERS IN INFORMAL SECTOR; WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TEXTILE SHOPS IN KERALA	LIJI MALIAKKEL	64 - 72
8	A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF RBI POLICY RATES ON INFLATION UNDER DR. RAGHURAM G RAJAN'S TENURE	NIJIL JACOBI	73 - 80
9	WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN RETAIL TRADE-A SECTOR-SPECIFIC STUDY OF KOCHI CITY	Dr. SHIRLEY JOSE K	81 - 107
10	INTEGRATED RICE-FISH FARMING - A VIABLE OPTION FOR SUSTAINABILITY	SMIJI A.J	108 - 132
11	VALUE CHAINS AS A METHOD TO STUDY BIOTRADE	SUMA SUNNY	133 - 139

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WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN RETAIL TRADE-A SECTOR-SPECIFIC STUDY OF KOCHI CITY

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Abstract

The present paper is a sector specific study pertaining to women employees in trade and commerce in Kochi city. In Kerala, the trade and commerce sector is the only accessible resort for the white-collar job seekers. In Ernakulam district women are mainly engaged as service workers, shop and sales workers. Males are employed in diversified occupations while this is not the case with females. A number of studies conducted in different regions across the globe revealed that there exists both occupational segregation and wage discrimination in this sector. Existing labor laws pertaining to social security, welfare and working conditions are violated. In a situation where unemployment is high and alternative job opportunities are few, any attempt to bargain for better conditions would lead to retrenchment. In this context, it is important to study the conditions of women employees in this sector.

Keywords: *Casual employment, feminization of workforce, Social networks, Unorganized labour, Women*

1. Introduction

Women are ready to work for any wage and this has led to greater demand for them in the urban labor market. In a state like Kerala, the high degree of commercialization of agriculture, strong rural-urban linkages, increase in the proportion of marginal landholdings, the flow of remittances to rural areas and growing level of literacy have contributed to the growth of non-farm employment opportunities. This coupled with aversion to manual work seems to be the reason why the less educated seem to be more concentrated in trade and commerce and social/personal services as sales persons, shop assistants and related workers. Moreover, the temporary women workers are almost three times that of permanent workers.. The quality of jobs among women workers has come down as more laborers have joined the army of casual, seasonal and part-time employees (Patrick, 2012). The supply of labor in this

sector is mostly new entrants in the labor market, migrant or young persons, especially women. The examination of the socio-economic background of the women employees in this sector revealed that a majority come from economically, educationally and occupationally weak backgrounds. Moreover, it is also evident that most of them come from families where income was irregular and discontinuous. A definite shift in the occupational pattern of these women migrants also supports the fact that they prefer jobs in this sector. In the trade and commerce sector, the focus is on retail trade. Retailing consists of the sale of goods from a fixed location, such as a department store, boutique or kiosk, or by post, in small or individual lots for direct consumption by the purchaser. Modern retailing has opened up employment opportunities for women who are considered to be more suitable for certain jobs in this sector. Kochi, being the epicentre of retail trade provides such openings especially for young, unmarried migrant women. It was therefore, considered necessary to enquire into the working conditions of these women employees in the retail shops and business units in different areas of Kochi.

2. Objectives of the study

1. To study the problems faced by women employees in the retail trade sector.
2. To analyse the working conditions and environment

3. Methodology and Design

The study is based on a primary survey of women employees in the retail trade sector. Kochi was selected as the area of study because it is the commercial capital as well as the largest urban agglomeration in Kerala. The major retail ventures in Kochi are in gold, textiles, cosmetics, furniture, home accessories and industrial activities. This created a retail boom which resulted in a demand for workers. It is therefore an attractive destination for workers from nearby villages for trade and employment. Retail trade was selected as the sector for study because the workforce categorization reveals that 22.3% in Kochi corporation area is engaged in trade and commerce (Kochi CDP 2010).

The shopping areas selected were MG Road, Panampilly Nagar, Convent Junction and Pallimmukku after discussions with the concerned officials. A list of registered shops in the four identified areas were obtained from the District Labour Office. 4% of the 6067 shops, that is 243 shops were selected after discussions and deliberations with the officials. The shops were then divided into three strata, namely, Big, Medium and Small based on the Kerala Shops and Establishments Amendment Act, 2014. The numbers of shops in each of

these strata were selected using the non-proportionate random sampling technique. Thus among the 243 shops selected, 12.3 percent, 48.6 percent and 39 percent belong to big medium and small category respectively. Since a separate list of women employees is not available with the District Labour Office, the respondents were selected using the purposive sampling techniques. 303 respondents constitute the sample of the study.

4. Data Collection

The data was collected using a structured interview schedule which was administered to the employees. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to collect data. Direct personal interviews were conducted to ensure greater accuracy.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Working conditions

An attempt is made to analyse the working conditions and environment of women migrant employees in retail trade in this section.

Working conditions and environment were analysed by collecting both quantitative data from the employees on salary, years of experience, type of employment, leisure time, additional benefits, punishment/harassment and qualitative responses regarding their opinions on working conditions. Many studies find that despite the fact that human resource is an important part of the retail sector; women are discriminated against in wages and occupation. This has been attributed to the fact that they can be paid a lower wage packet compared to men.

A look at the working conditions will also aid in understanding if enterprises in this sector conform to minimum labour standards.

1. Classification of shops on the basis of sub sectors of retail trade

The division of retail establishments according to the sub sectors selected¹⁰ is presented in Table 1

The table reveals that 59.3 per cent of shops deal in readymade garments. 17.3 per cent are department stores while 13.6 per cent are shops selling perfumes and cosmetics. Jewellery, footwear and medical shops constitute only 2.8 per cent, 4.9 per cent and 2.1 per cent respectively of the shops. During the process of data collection it was found that women dominated as employees in readymade garments, department stores and cosmetic shops. This might be the reason why there is a greater representation of these shops.

¹⁰ Refer section 1.8.3 in page 7 (Chapter 1)

Table 1 Classification of shops on the basis of sub sectors

Type of Retail shop	Percentage
Department Store	17.3
Readymade Garments	59.3
Jewellery & Imitation Jewellery	2.8
Perfumery and Cosmetics	13.6
Footwear	4.9
Medical Shop	2.1
Total	100

Source: Primary Survey

2. Classification of enterprises

For a selection of the sample, big, medium and small shops were included in the sample.

Table 2 Classification of sample according to size of shop

Size of shop	Frequency	Percentage
Big	122	40
Medium	106	35
Small	75	25
Total	303	100

Source: Survey data

Table 2 shows that 40 percent of respondents were from big shops while 35 per cent were employed in medium sized shops. Employees in small shops constituted only 25 percent. This is a natural corollary of the fact that big shops employed more women compared to medium and small shops.

Table 3 Classification according to age group and sized of shop (percent)

Age Group	Size of shop		
	Big	Medium	Small
18-25	31.5	36.1	32.4
26-35	13.5	41.6	44.9
36-45	11.1	59.7	29.2
46 & above	11.7	55.9	32.4

Source: Primary Survey

Table 3 presents the classification of the sample according to age group and size of shop. This will help in shedding light on the preference of women employees with respect to the size of shop.

From the table it is clear that as compared to the older age groups 36 and above, 31.5 percent in the age group 18-25 are employed in big shops. On the other hand, just 11.1 percent and 11.7 percent belonging to the age group 36-45 and 46 and above respectively work in big shops. From in-depth interviews with the respondents, it was understood that women in the 18-25 age group seem to prefer the big shops because of the better salary package. Though, on an average, working hours were longer in these shops, food and accommodation were free which helped them to save enough money to remit home. In many cases, the income of these girls was the mainstay because the other family members did not enjoy a regular, continuous income. Another important observation is that 59.7 percent and 55.9 percent of women in the age group 36-45 and the 46 above are employed in medium sized shops.

3. Salary

Table 4 Classification of retail enterprises according to size of shop and salary (percent)

Size of shop	Salary						
	4000-6000	6000-8000	8000-10000	10000-12000	12000-14000	14000-16000	16000 & above
Big			22.13	48.4	9.8	7.4	12.3
Medium		70.7	8.5	3.8	0.9		16.03
Small		68	22.7	1.3	1.3	4	2.7

Source: Primary Survey

From the table it is clear that 48.4 percent of employees who worked in big shops where the salaries ranged from 10000-12000. There are no big enterprises where salaries range from 4000-8000. However, in medium and small shops salary ranges between 6000-8000. 70.7 percent and 68 percent of sampling units are employed in these shops. It can also be observed that 16.03 percent are earning above 16000 in medium-sized shops. These shops, are, however entirely government owned enterprises like Khadi, Kairali etc. Most of the married respondents with families were employed in medium size shops. In these shops, 90 per cent of the respondents expressed the opinion that though salary was lower in these shops, the working atmosphere was safer, more flexible and relaxed. Employer-employee relationship

was also much closer and the employees say that though other shops promise them higher salary, loyalty to their employer prevented them from taking up those jobs. The 75 respondents who work in small shops also supported the above opinion except for a few who felt that they just could not afford to stay on at such a low salary and are in favour of moving to better jobs. This seems to support the fact that there seems to be a strong preference for a 'job' as opposed to a 'work' even if it implies a lower level of earnings. The accent seems to be on regularity of income, social status and work environment, especially in the older age groups.

Table 5 Classification according to size of shop and average salary (Rs)

Size of shop	Average Salary
Big	10375
Medium	9550
Small	4295

Source: Primary Survey

As per Table 5 the highest average salary is in the big shops (Rs 10375). The lowest average salary is in the small shops (4295 Rs). It can be seen that the difference between average salary in the big and medium shops is only Rs 825. The average salary across shops in this sector is around Rs 8000 pm.

The shops covered include 4 categories of shops viz private, government, mill stores and franchisees. The percentage of women employed in these shops is presented in table 6.6.

Table 6 Percentage of women employees in different categories of shops

Category of shop	Percentage
Private	71.3
Government owned	21.7
Mill stores	4.7
Franchisee shops	2.3

Source: Primary Survey

From table 6 it is clear that 71.3 percent of women work in private shops. Women who work in government owned enterprises constitute 21.7 per cent. In this category salaries range from 4000 for packing staff to 50000 in the case of managers. The salary of permanent sales staff in these enterprises range from 19000 to 32000, whereas the salary of temporary sales women is only 6000. In private shops, however, maximum salary of managerial staff range from

20000 to 35000. Salaries of sales women range from 5000 to 15000. In mill stores which has a representation of just 4.7 per cent range from 6000 to 11500. In franchisee shops the range is from 6500 to 10000.

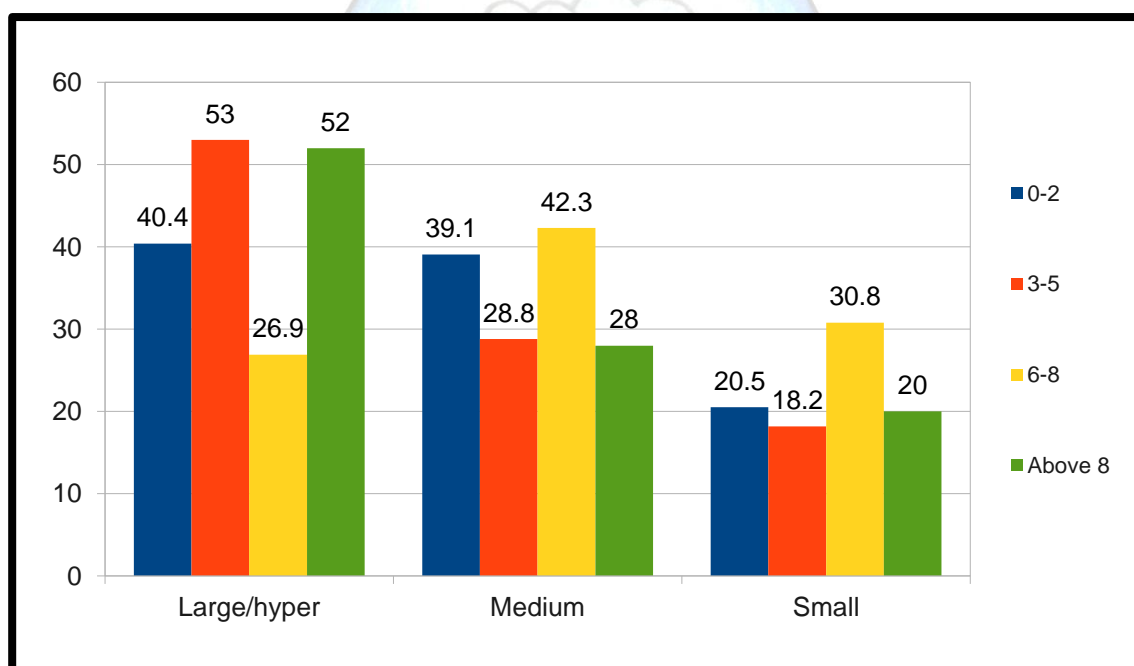
4. Years of experience

Table 7 Distribution of respondents according to size of shop and years of experience (percentage)

Size of shop	Years of Experience				Total
	0-2	3-5	6-8	Above 8	
Big	40.4	53	26.9	52	40
Medium	39.1	28.8	42.3	28	35
Small	20.5	18.2	30.8	20	25

Source: Primary Survey

Figure1. Distribution according to size of shop and years of experience



1993 - 2018
Source: Primary Survey

Among the 122 respondents working in big establishments, 83.4 percent have experience of less than 5 years. 52 percent have an experience of more than 8 years. A good proportion of these employees are either working in the government, quasi-government or mill franchisee shops. A look at the years of experience of the respondents working in medium-sized shops reveal that a majority possess 3 to 8 years of experience in this field. In the small

shops, however, an almost equal percentage (20%), have less than two years and greater than eight years of experience. From this it can be deduced that employees in large establishments do not work for long durations. This could be because these shops are dominated by young, unmarried girls. On the other hand, the medium shops have employees with more years of service because their average age is 34. The older employees prefer to continue because of factors like loyalty, regularity of income and flexibility in work timings. Small-sized shops, however, present a mixed picture. Loyalty and freedom in working environment were cited as reasons why 30.8 per cent of employees in such shops continue to work even after 5 years. Lower salary in the current establishment is not a motivation to seek a new job- especially for the older age group because by nature, women are less mobile than men. In some shops, women with more experience are paid a higher salary but in a few shops, pay does not increase with length of service.

The distribution of respondents on the basis of size of shop and years of experience is presented in table 8.

Table 8 Distribution of respondents according to size of shop and average years of experience

Size of shop	Average years of experience
Big	3-5
Medium	6-8
Small	2-8

Source: Primary Survey

5. Type of employment

All the selected shops are registered under the Shops and Establishments Act, 1967, Kerala¹¹. However, as revealed from the type of employment of the sampling units casual labour accounted for 87.1 percent. These women employees can be categorized as ‘unorganised labour’ if a scientific criterion is adopted for defining the unorganized sector. The term ‘unorganized labour’ signifies those who are active in the labour market but not entitled to get minimum wages and other benefits like provident fund etc. Using this criterion, women employees working in these shops can be said to belong to the category of unorganized labour.

¹¹ The Kerala Shops and Establishments Act, 1967 postulates that

Table 9 presents information on whether employment is permanent, casual or contractual.

Table 9 Percentage distribution of respondents according to type of employment

Type of employment	Percentage
Permanent	7.6
Casual	87.1
Contract	5.3
Total	100

Source: Primary Survey

This reveals the peculiar nature of employment in the trade and commerce sector. Though the retail enterprises come under the organised sector, most of the labour is employed on a casual basis. Just 7.6 per cent are permanent employees and inevitably all these women are working in government owned shops. This corroborates with the evidence that casual employment accounts for 60 per cent of employment in secondary and tertiary activities in Kerala. Absence of unionisation and the sex-based division of labour fostered by economic restructuring and trade liberalization has led to increasing feminization of the workforce. This supports Hugo's argument that employers are more in favour of employing female migrant workers because of the general perception that they are cheaper and more docile than men.

The social and economic constraints as revealed in the background profile make women increasingly vulnerable to poverty and exploitation. The few studies conducted in this sector have reported that high unemployment rate coupled with low employment opportunities forces women labourers to find jobs in this low-paid sector.

6. Working Hours

Table 10 Distribution of shops according to working hours (percentage)

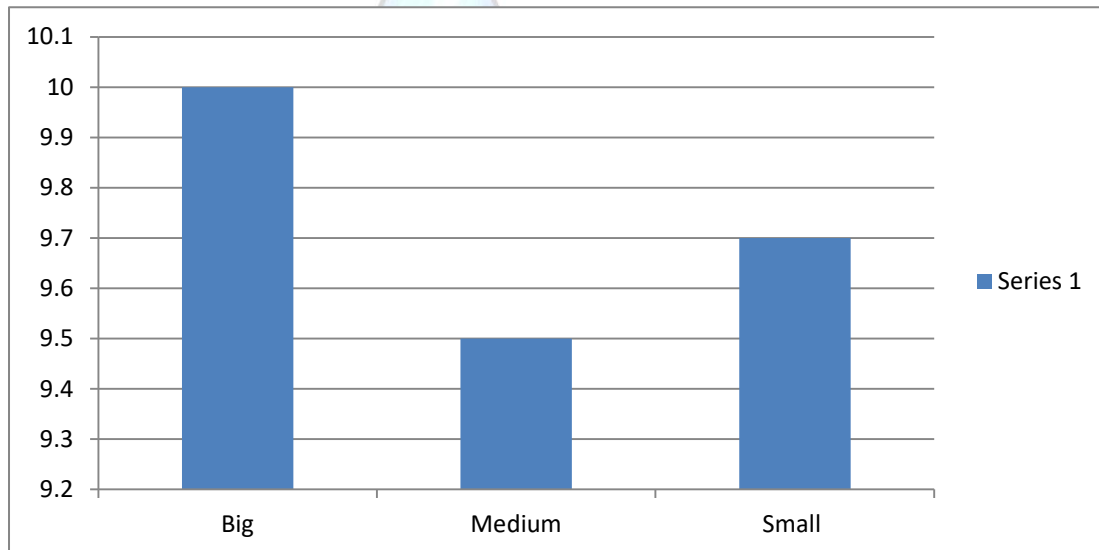
Working hours	Percentage
8	30.4
10	50.2
12	19.5

Source: Primary Survey

It is clear from the above table that working time is 10 hours per day in 50.2 per cent of the shops. 19.5 per cent of respondents reported 12 hours as their working time. This goes against

the provisions of the Shops and Establishments Act and Labour Act. The average hours of work across the different categories of shops is shown in figure 5.2.

Figure 2 Average hours of work across shop



Source: Primary Survey

The average hour of work across shops is 9.7 hours. Though the respondents working in the big shops were not happy with the long working hours they have no other alternative. Some of the respondents are of the opinion that since customers frequent shops in the evenings they have to be open at least till 9 pm. During the festive reason especially Onam, Christmas and Ramzan, working time may extend even up to 14 hours. Many of the respondents working in big establishments reported that the festival season was a nightmare for them. They could not leave the shop (especially those staying in hostels), until they fold back the garments and arrange them back in the shelves. The off-season discount sales in July-August presents an even worse scenario in terms of working hours, leisure time and work burden. Employees working in the small and medium shops, however, generally do not face such problems. These employees have to attend a number of customers at the same time. They hardly get time to have their food or attend to their primary needs. Hence there is a preference for jobs with low but regular income and lesser working hours.

7. Leisure time

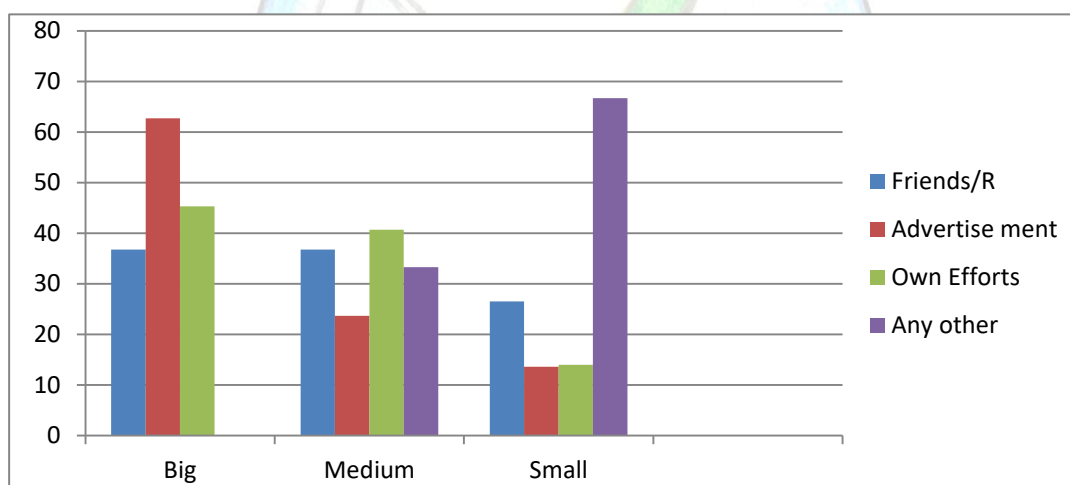
In almost all the establishments though there is provision of 30-45 minutes for lunch break, this time varies according to the rush of customers coming to the shops every day. 84.2 per cent of respondents reported that their break ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. 9.2 per cent reported 45 minutes while 4 per cent reported one hour. This applied mainly to small shops

where this timing was flexible and customers were limited. Only 2.6 per cent of employees reported less than half an hour, especially in some large shops in the high sales seasons. The average leisure time across shops is 45 minutes.

8. Source of information (Social Networks)

Support provided by social networks¹² is found to play a vital role during the process of migration of women and their families and in employment. Migration process is often strategized by the active negotiation of social networks to establish the route of migration, especially of single women. This networking is often based on gender and ethnic identities. Networks are formed among women who are neighbours, relatives etc. at an informal level. Support is extended to the migrant women either by kith and kin or even by people from the same village. Relatives and friends who have already moved to Kochi are the major source of networking among sales women. Thus the researcher collected information on how the respondents knew about their job to understand if friends/relatives/neighbours networking played a role in their movement to Kochi.

Figure 3. Distribution of respondents according to knowledge of present job based on size of shop.



Source: Primary Survey

It is evident from figure 5.3 that 36.8 per cent each of respondents employed in big and medium shops came to know about their job through friends/ relatives/ neighbours. 62.7 per cent, 23.7 per cent and 13.6 per cent of respondents working in big, medium and small shops were informed about their jobs through advertisements. From this it can be inferred that a greater percentage of women working in big shops place lesser reliance on social networks

¹²Migrant social networks are interpersonal ties linking kin, friends and community members in their places of origin and destination

compared to the women employed in the medium and small enterprises. This establishes to a certain extent the fact that social networking is important in the migration of women.

As far as employers in the shops are concerned, they feel that anyone could learn the job and become an expert within a short period of time. Qualities like loyalty, honesty, trustworthiness are considered more important while appointing sales women. Thus sales women are generally employed by taking into account the recommendations of friends, relatives etc. This might also be the reason why women employees who are loyal to the employer, continue to work in these shops, especially the small and medium ones, despite lower wages and lack of any benefits. Social networking is, therefore, important in migration of women for reasons other than marriage.

9. Employment status before coming to Kochi

Information regarding previous employment status was collected by the researcher to find out if it was the promise of better employment in Kochi which prompted women to migrate. 73 percent of respondents have worked as paid employees, while 24.4 percent of them reported that their current job was their first job. The proportion of self-employed constituted only 2.6 percent of the sample.

10. Income before migration

The classification of income before getting a job in Kochi may help in explaining if it is the promise of higher expected income which attracted these women to Kochi. This is depicted in table 11.

Table 11 Employment status before coming to Kochi & classification of income while leaving previous job

Among the 229 respondents who were previously employed, 221 had worked as paid employees while eight were self-employed. Of these 221 respondents, 86 respondents earned an income ranging between 2500 to 5000; 46 women earned an income ranging between 7500-10000. Only 27 and 19 respondents earned a salary below 2500 and above 10000 respectively. This supports the findings of case studies that families migrate in response to female economic opportunity and they are the primary or equal earners, male employment often being irregular and uncertain. The earnings of females may be low but crucial for family survival. In the NSSO surveys only one reason is asked to be stated and therefore, women's employment oriented migration is underestimated in national surveys. Here the fact

that is often forgotten is that females do work at the place of origin and also work at the place of destination. Migration tends to increase labour force participation of women.

Employment status before coming to Kochi	Classification of previous income						Total
	New entrants	Less than 2500	2501-5000	2501-7500	7501-10000	Above 10000	
Paid employee		27 (96.3)	86 (95.6)	44 (97.8)	46 (95.8)	17 (89.5)	221
Self-employed		1 (3.7)	3 (3.3)	1 (2.2)	1 (2.1)	2 (10.5)	8
Any other	73 (97.4)		1 (1.3)		1 (1.3)		74
Total	73	28	90	45	48	19	303

Source: Primary Survey (Figures in brackets indicate percentages)

11. Social Security Measures

Social security measures are facilities like PF, bonus, increment, insurance etc. Along with salary these extra benefits are an important yardstick in measuring the welfare of labour in any organisation. When all these facilities are offered to the employees, they are given 5 points. Those with 3 schemes, 2 schemes, 1 scheme and no scheme are respectively given 4, 3, 2 and 1 point each. The respondents receiving the corresponding package of social security measures are given the respective points. Table 12 presents the scores given to the respondents according to the benefits they receive.

Table 12 Percentage distribution of respondents according to social security measures received

Scale	Percentage
1	7.26
2	26.41
3	43.89
4	7.59
5	14.85

Source: Computed from Primary data

It is obvious from the above table that almost 44 percent of respondents received only two benefits (viz) increment and bonus. This is the case in most small and medium shops. 26.41 percent of respondents, majority of whom worked in small shops just received one benefit (viz) bonus. 14.85 percent who were offered at least four benefit schemes either worked in government establishment or in the big shops.

12. Punishment/Harassment

Casualisation of employment is a prominent feature of the trade and commerce sector in Kerala. Salary is cut for every leave taken irrespective of national holiday or festivals. 44.9 percent of respondents reported that their wages are cut if they avail more leave than the leave allowed to them every month/year. However, 55.1 percent reported that no such action was taken against them. A majority of respondents in this category were those who earned Rs 5000-10000 per month.

13. Health Issues of Employees

The common health problems found among employees in this sector is fatigue, leg and back pain, shoulder pain etc. In big shops, the use of air-conditioning has also led to lung and breathing disorders etc. Among the 303 respondents 58.4 percent reported that they suffered from either of these health disorders, while 41.6 percent who predominantly consisted of the younger age group did not face any such health problems. Only 10 percent of respondents employed in big private shops reported that their management sponsored regular medical checkups for them. In the case of all other employees, medical needs are to be met by self.

14. Working Environment

Since the study pertains to the women employees in Trade and Commerce, it was considered necessary to analyse the working environment. This would also help in identifying the problems faced by women migrants, if any, at their workplace. The satisfaction level of the employees with respect to the working environment has an important bearing on their performance in this sector. An attempt is made to analyze working environment in terms of their qualitative responses regarding working hours, physical comfort, safety, fairness and competitiveness of wages, work burden, attitude of managerial and supervisory staff and co-workers.

The workplace environment was subjectively defined as the degree to which the respondent has made subjective evaluation of her environment. Eight statements relating to working time, physical environment, safety, the fairness and competitiveness of the salary of the

respondent, the work burden, the attitude of managers and co-workers were given. The respondent was asked to tick how much they agree or disagree with a statement. The Likert-type scale which is used to measure attitudes or opinions has been used on a five-point scale (ie) strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree. The satisfaction on the part of the respondents w.r.t benefits is also measured using this scale. Measurement was done by asking a single statement with the following multiple responses. (a) Extremely satisfied (b) moderately satisfied (c) Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (d) Moderately dissatisfied (g) extremely dissatisfied. Scores were given in descending order beginning from five to one.

15. Wages

Wages are the most important variable in working conditions and employment at the enterprise level. It is a cost to the employer but a main source of income for the worker (www.ilo.org) referred on 20-12-2014. Wages are a determinant factor in employer well-being. Considering their important role, employees are asked to indicate their satisfaction levels w.r.t the monthly wages they draw. The results are reported in the following table.

Table 13 Distribution of Respondents by agreement on satisfactory wages drawn based on social group (percentage)

Social group Status	I am paid fairly for the work I do					Total
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
SC		2 (5.1)		9 (4.9)	3 (4.5)	14 (4.6)
ST		1 (2.6)	1(9.1)	5(2.7)	4 (6.1)	11 (3.6)
OBC	2(100)	28 (71.8)	9(81.8)	112(60.5)	38(57.6)	189(62.4)
General		8(20.5)	1(9.1)	59(31.9)	21(31.8)	89(129.4)
Total	2	39	11	185	66	303

Source: Primary Survey (Figures in brackets indicate percentages)

Generally all the employees are satisfied with the wages offered to them. Almost 83 percent have either agreed or strongly disagreed that they are paid fairly for the work they do an examination according to social group status shows that among the OBCS which constituted 62.4 percent of the sample, almost 60 percent are satisfied with the salary they receive. Only 13.5 percent of the respondents in the sample were dissatisfied with the wages. OBC category of employees formed 76.9 percent of this 13.5 percent. Among the general category 20.5

percent expressed dissatisfaction, while 63.9 percent expressed satisfaction. The respondents say they are satisfied with their wages since they feel it is not realistic to expect more with their minimum level of educational qualification. This is to be expected because a majority of respondents are drawing a salary of Rs 6000 and above. The variation in wages depends on the size of the shop. Satisfaction with wages makes them continue in service especially in the case of respondents with more than five years of service.

Table 14 records the qualitative responses of the women migrant employees with regard to the fairness of the wages they receive on the basis of social group.

Table 14 Average scores for different social groups based on agreement regarding fairness of wages earned

Social Group	Scale						
	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total score	Average score
SC	0	4	0	36	15	55	3.9
ST	0	2	3	20	20	45	4.1
OBC	2	56	27	448	190	723	3.8
General	0	16	3	236	105	360	4
Total	2	78	33	740	330	1183	3.9

Source: Computed from primary data

SD = strongly disagree D = Disagree N = Neutral A = Agree SA = strongly agree

It is clear from the table that the average scores for all the social groups are close to the response 'Agree'. Moreover, it can also be seen that the average score across all social groups is 3.9 which means that women employees are generally satisfied with the wages drawn by them.

The distribution of employees by agreement on the competitiveness of the salaries drawn by them on the basis of social categories is given in table 15

Table 15 Percentage distribution of employees by agreement on competitiveness of wages drawn according to social group

Among the ST migrants 81.8 percent disagree, while 9.1 percent disagree. 9.1 percent did not express any opinion. 75.6 percent of OBC respondents expressed agreement while 20.1 percent disagreed, 0.04 percent remained neutral. Among the employees in the general category,

which constituted 29.4 percent of the sample, 80.9 percent agreed that their salary is competitive and 19.1 percent disagreed.

Social Group	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
SC		2(3.6)		11(6)	1(1.9)	14(4.6)
ST		1(1.8)	1(10)	5(2.7)	4(7.5)	11(3.6)
OBC	2 (100)	36(65.5)	8(80)	112(1.2)	31(58.5)	189(62.4)
General		16(29.1)	1(10)	55(30.1)	17(32.1)	89(29.4)
Total	2	55	10	183	53	303

Source: Primary Survey (Figures in brackets indicate percentages)

Table 16 Average scores for different social groups based on agreement regarding competitiveness of wages drawn

Social Group	Scale						Total Score	Average Score
	SD	D	N	A	SA			
SC	0	4	0	44	5	53	3.8	
ST	0	2	3	20	20	45	4.1	
OBC	2	72	24	448	155	701	3.71	
General	0	32	3	220	85	340	3.8	
Total	2	110	30	732	265	1139	3.75	

Source: Primary Survey

The table reveals that there is agreement on the competitiveness on wages drawn across all social groups since the average score is 3.75 which is close to the response 'Agree'.

16. Working time

The working hours of an employee also determines a labourer's efficiency, productivity and welfare. Responses of the respondents were, therefore recorded with regard to their satisfaction in this aspect. The responses are presented in table 17.

Table 17 Percentage distribution of Respondents by agreement that working time is satisfactory according to social group

It is already reported that working hours varied from 8 to 12 hours in the different shops included in the sample.

Social group	My working time is satisfactory					Total
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
SC	1(20)	3(7.7)	1(14.3)	5(3.1)	4(4.5)	14(4.6)
ST		2(5.1)	1(14.3)	3(1.8)	5(5.6)	11(3.6)
OBC	4(80)	21(53.8)	4(57.1)	99(60.7)	61(68.5)	189(62.4)
General		13(33.3)	1(14.3)	56(34.4)	19(21.3)	89(29.4)
Total	5	39	7	163	89	303

Source: Primary Survey (Figures in brackets indicate percentages)

The employees were asked to rate their satisfaction about the working hours. Generally, employees are satisfied with their working time. 83 percent of respondents expressed their satisfaction. All of them, however, agreed that they would be happy if their working hours were reduced. 14.5 percent of employees were not very happy with their hours of work. This was especially in the case of married employees with families. The respondents were of the opinion that the nature of retail trade itself requires that shops remain open up to 9 pm. In five percent of the shops there is a shift system where male employees replace female employees from 6 to 9 pm. Among the OBC category of respondents 84.7 per cent agree that their working time is satisfactory 13.2 percent are dissatisfied with the working hours. In the general category, 84.3 percent are satisfied while 73 percent of ST and 64.3 percent of SC employees were satisfied with the time schedule.

Table 18 Average scores for different social groups based on agreement regarding satisfaction levels (working time)

Social Group	Scale					Total score	Average score
	SD	D	N	A	SA		
SC	1	6	3	20	20	50	3.6
ST	0	4	3	12	25	44	4
OBC	4	42	12	396	305	759	4
General	0	26	3	224	95	348	3.9
Total	5	78	21	652	445	1201	3.96

Source: Computed from primary data

The average scores for all social groups is 3.96 which is close to the value assigned to the response 'Agree' which means that there is general agreement that working time is satisfactory.

The cross-classification according to social group status reveals that among the OBC respondents, 91 percent agree that their work is not burdensome. Among the general category, 90 percent are satisfied with the volume of work. Nine percent alone are dissatisfied with the volume of work.

17. Burden of work

Along with salary and working hours, the 'volume of work' is also taken into account to analyse working conditions. 91.5 percent of employees do not consider their job to be burdensome. This is especially so in small and medium shops. In many of the shops, sales persons are paid extra commission depending on their sales, especially during the festive season. It is during such times that the sales girls have to work over and above their capacity. They get tired by the end of the day. When their pay does not match their efforts they become dissatisfied. In big shops, however, they are required to meet targets which help in earning extra wages.

The average scores for 'burden of work' of the women employees are presented in table 19.

Table 19 Average scores based on agreement about work burden

Work burden	Score		
	Responses	Frequency	Total Score
Strongly disagree	1	1	4.18
Disagree	20	40	
Neutral	5	15	
Agree	185	740	
Strongly agree	92	460	
Total	303	1267	

Source: Primary Survey

Table 19 makes it clear that the average score is 4.18 which mean that the respondents agree that their work is not burdensome. However from discussions with the employees especially in the big shops, it is evident that this is not the case always. Burden of work is rather high during festival and off-seasons when discount sales are common. Moreover, health problems due to standing throughout, arm and back pain are rather common. Cleaning staff in the big

shops, who predominantly belonged to the age group 36 and above complained of heavy work burden. These women were more open and vociferous in their complaints regarding working conditions, salary, social security measures, provision of basic facilities etc. Women employees in the age group (18-25) did not reveal any matters relating to exploitation possibly because of the fear of being punished or harassed in any manner. However all the respondents agreed that compared to agricultural and other kinds of casual work the present job was definitely less burdensome and did not involve exposure to harsh climatic conditions.

18. Physical Environment

The next factor considered was physical environment of the establishment. Physical conditions in 55 percent of shops included in the sample were very conducive. There is good lighting provision, proper ventilation, air- conditioned environment etc in the big establishments.

Table 20 presents the average scores with respect to the responses (physical environment).

Table 20 Average scores with respect to responses of women employees (Physical Environment)

Physical Environment	Scores		
Responses	Frequency	Total Score	Average Score
Strongly disagree	4	4	4.2
Agree	7	14	
Neutral	2	6	
Agree	198	792	
Strongly Agree	92	460	
Total	303	1276	

Source: Computed from primary data

From the average score in table 20 it can be inferred that women employees generally agree that their workplace is physically comfortable. As reported by the respondents, the major difficulty they face is that they have to keep standing throughout the working hours and no facility is provided to sit even during free time. This creates the problem of fatigue and monotony among the employees. This is, however, not the case in small and medium shops where employees are required to stand only when customers visit the shop. As observed earlier, women employees in the older age group complained that they were not provided even basic facilities like water in some of the big shops.

19. Safety in the workplace

Safety in the workplace is an important factor for women employees. Among the 303 female employees interviewed by the researcher, only 3 respondents reported that their workplace was unsafe. All others reported that one of the main reasons they continued to work was because of the safe working environment.

Table 21 Average score of respondents with regard to the agreement on safety of workplace

Safety of workplace Responses	Scores		
	Frequency	Total Score	Average Score
Strongly disagree	0	0	4.3
Disagree	3	6	
Neutral	0	0	
Agree	204	816	
Strongly agree	96	480	
Total	303	1302	

Source: Primary Survey

The inference from table 21 is that the workplace is very safe since the average score is 4.3 which means that women agree to the statement. This, however, does not provide any evidence of absence of sexual harassment or exploitation. Data was collected from these employees according to their convenience. The researcher met with extreme difficulty in contacting salesgirls, especially in the big enterprises. Fear of losing their job might have prevented these respondents from revealing any matters relating to such exploitation.

21. Attitude of manager/supervisor

The attitude of the manager/supervisor and co-workers is an important factor to be considered for analysing the satisfaction level of employees. The employees regard the attitude of the manager as very co-operative. They find the manager's attitude to be very approachable and comfortable irrespective of size of shop.

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Table 22 Average Score of employees with respect to attitude of manager/supervisor

Attitude of manager/supervisor	Scores		
	Responses	Frequency	Total Score
Strongly disagree	2	2	4.4
Disagree	3	6	
Neutral	3	9	
Agree	170	680	
Strongly Agree	125	625	
Total	303	1322	

Source: Primary Survey

As revealed in the table the average score (4.4) also supports this fact.

21. Attitude of co-workers

The attitude of co-workers in an organisation also influences the working environment. The respondents reported a similar response in the case of their co-workers also.

Table 23 Average Scores of employees with respect to attitude of co-workers

Attitude of co-workers	Score		
	Responses	Frequency	Total Score
Strongly disagree	3	3	4.4
Disagree	4	8	
Neutral	5	15	
Agree	150	600	
Strongly agree	141	705	
Total	303	1331	

Source: Primary Survey

The average score is 4.4 which show that women migrant employees agree that the attitude of their co-workers is very cooperative.

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Table 24 Consolidated scores of working environment

Working Environment	Average Scores	Consolidated average score
Fairness of wages	3.9	4.1
Competitiveness of wages	3.75	
Working time	3.96	
Burden of work	4.18	
Physical environment	4.2	
Safety in workplace	4.3	
Attitude of manager	4.4	
Attitude of co-workers	4.4	
Total	33.09	

Source: Computed from primary data

The consolidated average score of working environment is 4.1. From this it can be inferred that women employees generally agree that working environment is satisfactory.

23. Satisfaction level of employees with respect to working conditions

In addition to the responses collected about the eight variables discussed in the previous section, qualitative information regarding the satisfaction level of respondents with respect to employee benefits was also gathered. The procedure is as follows: Respondents were asked if they are satisfied with the employee benefits. The responses have been rated on a five-point scale by collecting responses to whether they are 'extremely satisfied', 'moderately satisfied' and 'extremely dissatisfied'.

Table 25 Satisfaction level of benefits according to social group

Social Group	Scale					Total	Average Score
	1	2	3	4	5		
SC	0	2	0	5	7	59	4.2
ST	0	2	0	5	4	44	4
OBC	3	16	14	94	62	760	4.02
General	1	4	0	47	37	382	4.3
Total	4	24	14	151	110	1248	4.1

Source: Computed from Primary data Total Score: Sum of (number of respondents * scale) Average Score: Total Score / No of responses

Scores are given in descending order starting from five to one. Number of respondents in each category is taken as the weight and multiplied with the respective scale. Social group-wise scores obtained for satisfaction level of benefits is presented in table 25.

The average score of 303 respondents for satisfaction level w.r.t benefits is 4.1 which is close to the choice variable 'moderately satisfied'. It can also be noted that the average scores for each social group status is close to this choice variable. Therefore it can be assumed that in general, employees are satisfied with their employee benefits.

24. Job Security

Job security is another factor considered under working conditions. The respondents were asked if they were secure in their jobs. The responses were rated on a five- point scale by collecting responses to whether they are 'highly secure', 'secure', 'marginally secure', 'marginally insecure' and 'highly insecure'. Scores are given in descending order starting from five to one. Employees in general, do not have any fears with respect to job tenure. Most of them are aware that they have been appointed on a casual basis. Casual employment, in itself does not guarantee job security. Despite this, 87 percent reported that they feel 'secure' in their job.

Table 26 Job security according to social group

Social Group	Scale					Total score	Average Score
	5	4	3	2	1		
SC	25	28	6	0	0	59	4.2
ST	25	16	3	2	0	46	4.2
OBC	275	416	57	14	4	766	4.1
General	145	220	12	2	0	379	4.3
Total	470	680	78	18	4	1250	4.1

Source: Computed from survey data

The average score of the 303 sampling units relating to job security is 4.1 which is close to the choice variable 'secure'. It can also be observed that the average scores for each social group is close to this choice variable. Thus, it can be understood that, in general, the women employees feel secure in their jobs.

25. Discrimination

Gender Discrimination in wages is also considered. Wage discrimination is the situation of different wage packet for the same type of job. A few male employees were informally

interviewed to enquire whether there is any wage or occupational discrimination. Wage discrimination is reported only by 4.9 percent of employees in this sector.

Studies point out that there is more occupational discrimination in this sector. Though there is no formal evidence to support this finding in the present study, interviews with 15 male employees revealed that among these 47 percent are managers, 20 percent are supervisors and 33.3 percent are sales staff. Female employees reported that they do not have much chance for promotion while male employees reported that have higher chances for promotion. Among female employees sampled 78.2 percent were sales staff. 8 per cent of women employees alone were working in managerial/ executive/ supervisory capacities. The rest either worked as designers, cleaning and packing staff etc.

Discrimination is also rated using a 5- point scale by collecting responses to whether respondents are 'Highly discriminated', 'Marginally discriminated', 'No change', 'Marginally in discriminated', 'Highly in discriminated'. The scores for the choice variables are given as 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively. The responses pertaining to gender discrimination is given in table.27.

Table 27 Average scores of respondents with respect to discrimination

Choice Variables	No. of Respondents	Score
Highly discriminated	4 (1.3)	4
Marginally discriminated	11 (3.6)	22
No change	17(5.6)	51
Marginally indiscriminated	5 (1.7)	20
Highly in discriminated	268(87.8)	1330
	303(100)	1427

Source: Computed from Primary data (Figures in brackets indicate percentages)

Table 27 shows that only 4 percent reported gender discrimination. The average score of 303 respondents is close to the value assigned to the choice variable. 'Highly in discriminated' as it is estimated at 4.71 and hence it can be inferred that there is no discrimination.

Though gender-based discrimination is not evident from the responses of the women employees, in-depth interviews uncovered a different story. The women from the older age groups, especially, the cleaning and packing staff in the big shops reported extreme discrimination in wages and other benefits. Salaries of these women range from Rs 5000 to Rs 6000. Moreover, they did not receive any other benefits. These women complained that

men were given tea, snacks and were allowed to use the escalators while moving between the different floors of the shop. Women were permitted to use only the stairs and were not even provided drinking water. Daily wages paid to packing staff was extremely low though their job was burdensome. Poorly ventilated environment, constant exposure to dust and carrying heavy packages was detrimental to the health and welfare of the women.

26. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis reveals that 31.5 percent of women belonging to the age group 18-25 are employed in big shops as compared to the older age group. Most of the married women were employed in medium-sized shops. These shops have employees with longer service. Younger employees prefer the big shops because of the better salary package. The highest average salary is in the big shops (Rs 10375), while the lowest average salary is Rs 4295. The average salary across shops is Rs 8000. 71.3 per cent of women work in private shops. Employment is largely on a 'casual' basis. The average working time is 9.7 hours whereas the average leisure time is 45 minutes. Social networking is important in the migration of these women. The consolidated average score for working environment is 4.1 which mean that women employees generally agree that working environment is conducive.

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