



# AWARENESS OF LEGAL RIGHTS AND LABOUR LEGISLATION AMONG UNORGANISED WORKERS IN GUNTUR CITY, ANDHRA PRADESH

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## ABSTRACT

Workers in the *unorganised sector* such as construction labourers, domestic workers, and daily wage workers form the backbone of India's informal economy, but they continue to be systematically kept out of legal protections owing to extremely low levels of awareness of applicable labour laws. This article studies holistic legal awareness — relating to the Code on Social Security 2020, Minimum Wages Act, Payment of Wages Act and Workmen's Compensation Act— among 150 unorganised workers in Guntur city of Andhra Pradesh. Raw data was gathered by carrying out structured questionnaires interviews with purposive and snowball technique from October through December 2024. Descriptive frequency analysis and chi-square test were applied to analyze the data. The result shows that 68% of the participants are ill-informed or unaware of the Code on Social Security, 2020; 61.3% of the participant do not know about minimum wage provisions and 74% are unaware of the provisions relating to workmen's compensation. Chi-square test reveals a significant correlation between education and awareness ( $\chi^2=28.46$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and worker type and degree of awareness ( $\chi^2=24.18$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). The findings of the study highlight the dire necessity of legal literacy drives, labour department interventions and mechanisms of institutionalising that would enable the unorganised labourers in Guntur city to really avail their legally prescribed rights and safeguards.

**KEYWORDS:** Legal Awareness, Unorganised Workers, Code on Social Security, Minimum Wages Act, Workmen's Compensation, Labour Rights, Guntur City, Informal Labour, Andhra Pradesh

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Retaining all critical terms and numbers: 1 Background Information India is a country where 93% of its labour force work in the unorganised sector, so it is the most prevalent mode of employment. The Economic Survey 2023-24 pegs the number of workers involved in informal employment, mostly without the cover of labour laws, at over 500 million. Unorganised sector workers in India are yet to be aware of the four Labour Codes — the Code on Wages, 2019; Industrial Relations Code, 2020; Code on Social Security, 2020 and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 and their implementation far from reach. Over 85percent of the labour force in Andhra Pradesh is involved in informal sector activities and nearly 1.84 crore workers moving under different welfare boards (AP Socio-economic Survey 2022-23). Despite this, awareness of legal recourse and access to statutory welfare benefits under the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board and the Domestic Workers Welfare Board is poor. Guntur city (with a population of 7,43,354 (Census 2011) is developing rapidly in terms of its infrastructure, thousands in the city have been working in building and other informal jobs. According to Directorate of Economics and Statistics, GoAP.(2022-23), Guntur district has about 2.8 lakh unorganised labourers constantly subjected to exploitative labour-conditions in the form of wage theft, hazardous work environments, denial of compensation, and discriminatory social shielding, indicating an challenge to improving legal awareness.

## 2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Despite having a comprehensive labour law regime, the enforcement on the ground is weak and unorganized labour continues to be inadequately protected in India. Minimum wages, timely payment, compensation for occupational injury, and social security benefits are at least provided under the Minimum Wages Act, Payment of Wages Act, Employees' Compensation Act and the Code on Social Security, 2020. Nevertheless, a widespread violation of the law exists in the sector of small contractors and households in which domestic workers employed, and enforcement is constrained by limited administrative capacity. Illiteracy, language barriers, and reliance on employers also dissuade workers from taking legal recourse. Rapid urbanisation, Investment in Smart City, Guntur has created high demand for building and construction and domestic labour, placing these already marginalised groups at risk of continuing rights infringements.

## 3. PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

Guntur city, Andhra Pradesh's Guntur District HQ, lies on the National Highway-16, at a distance of 60 km from Vijayawada. Guntur Municipal Corporation controls it, The city is divided into 57 wards over 168.49 sq. km area and its population stands at 7,43,354 with 82.75% of literacy according to (Census 2011). "The 'Chilli Capital of India,' the city makes around ₹2,400 crore annually from chilli



trade. Demand for construction and domestic labour has been driven by rapid urbanisation, Smart City projects and a growing middle class households. As per the Directorate of Economics and Statistics (2022–23), the informal sector employs about 2.8 lakh workers, of which an estimated 12,000–15,000 are domestic workers.

#### **4. IMPORTANCE OF UNORGANISED LABOUR SECTOR IN GUNTUR CITY**

The economy of Guntur city is mainly dependent on the unorganised labour sector. Construction workers provide the foundation of infrastructure and housing as domestic workers and day labourers support urban homes and key services. The AP Socio-Economic Survey (2022–23) states that the informal sector accounts for 45-50% of the output in Guntur District and the AP Economic Census (2022–23) reveals that about 78% of the working population is engaged in the unorganised sector. The same holds true for day labourers, invisible yet essential to global agriculture and infrastructure: They suffer wage theft, exposure to toxic pesticides and dangerous machinery, and exclusion from social protection. Improving legal consciousness would contribute to social justice, productivity, and local economic growth.

#### **5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Sankaran (2007) drew attention to the gap between labour laws on paper and practice in reality observing that the rights are meaningless for unorganised workers if they are not aware of them. Papola (2013) explained that the vulnerability of workers in the informal system to low pay, insecurity and wage theft as they are unaware about the minimum wage entitlement. Neetha (2009) documented a high level of non-availability of right to information among domestic work population which resulted overtime, weekly rest and compensation for injuries sustained at work denied. Breman (2010) revealed the construction contractors take advantage of labourers' lack of knowledge about compensation policies. Srivastava (2016) emphasized on mandatory registration and awareness drives for ensuring effective coverage of social security and identified education, gender and rural-urban gaps as predictors of legal awareness in Andhra Pradesh. Soundararajan (2019) Revealed poor implementation of minimum wages in building construction. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of empirical studies focusing on tier-II cities like Guntur. The paper fills this gap by drawing on primary data collected from 150 unorganised workers from three occupational categories.

#### **6. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND NEED FOR THE STUDY**

Construction workers, home-based workers and daily wage labourers at Guntur city are often denied the wages, compensation and social security benefits as per the law, on account of low knowledge levels of labour laws. Low legal literacy also means the employees fail to assert claims to rights, remedies, and welfare schemes afforded by labour laws and welfare boards. Reliable data to inform awareness differentials by occupation and law area for a city are still limited. One such critical area of evidence is that needed for orienting and conducting targeted legal literacy interventions for the roll-out of the Code on Social Security, 2020, alongside labour welfare activities under the Smart City Mission. To the best of our knowledge, the present study is the first in examining the factors contributing to legal literacy among the heterogeneous unorganised workers in the tier-II cities of India.

#### **7. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- 1: To know the awareness regarding Code on Social Security 2020, Minimum Wages Act, Payment of Wages Act and Workmen's Compensation Act among the unorganised workers in the city of Guntur.
- 2: To analyse the relationship of socio-demographic characteristics and legal awareness among the unorganised workers with the application of chi-square test in the city of Guntur.

#### **8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a descriptive research design based on primary data collected from 150 unorganised workers in Guntur city during the third quarter of 2024. Using purposive and snowball sampling, 60 construction workers, 50 domestic workers, and 40 daily wage earners were selected from different wards of the Guntur Municipal Corporation. Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews in Telugu using a structured questionnaire. Awareness regarding four labour legislations was measured on a three-point scale: well aware, somewhat aware, and not aware. Frequency distributions and percentages were used to analyse awareness levels, while chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) tests examined associations between literacy status, worker category, and legal awareness, with statistical significance set at the 5% level.



**9. RESULTS**

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=150)**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Worker Category	Construction labourers	60	40.0%
	Domestic workers	50	33.3%
	Daily wage earners	40	26.7%
Gender	Male	92	61.3%
	Female	58	38.7%
Age	18–25 years	28	18.7%
	26–35 years	46	30.7%
	36–45 years	48	32.0%
	Above 45 years	28	18.7%
Education	Illiterate	22	14.7%
	Primary (up to 5th)	38	25.3%
	Upper Primary (6th–10th)	62	41.3%
	Intermediate & above	28	18.7%
Monthly Income	Below ₹8,000	34	22.7%
	₹8,001–₹12,000	58	38.7%
	₹12,001–₹18,000	44	29.3%
	Above ₹18,000	14	9.3%
Years of Experience	Less than 2 years	32	21.3%
	2–5 years	56	37.3%
	5–10 years	42	28.0%
	Above 10 years	20	13.3%

Source: Primary data

The socio-demographic characteristics indicate that the workers are older, mostly male, and less educated than those who work in gig jobs. The distribution of age indicates that 50.7% of the people are 36 years and above which implies that the unorganised labour is a long term means of living not a seasonal employment. Gender distribution indicates 38.7% are female workers who are mostly in the domestic category. The educational background of the group is worrying as 14.7% are illiterate and 25.3% have only cleaned up to primary education which means that 40% of the respondents are having education below upper-primary, this directly affects their ability to get information through legal means in form of documents. The median income figure shows 61.3% of respondents are making less than ₹12,000 which is close to or less than the minimum wage levels prescribed by the AP Government for construction (₹638.39 daily = ₹16,598 monthly for 26 working days) which indicates severe violation of minimum wages among the surveyed labourers.

**Table 2: Legal Awareness Profile Across Legislation Categories (n=150)**

Legislation	Well Aware	Somewhat Aware	Not Aware
Code on Social Security 2020	18 (12.0%)	30 (20.0%)	102 (68.0%)
Minimum Wages Act 1948	22 (14.7%)	36 (24.0%)	92 (61.3%)
Payment of Wages Act 1936	16 (10.7%)	38 (25.3%)	96 (64.0%)
Workmen's Compensation Act	12 (8.0%)	27 (18.0%)	111 (74.0%)
AP Welfare Board Schemes	24 (16.0%)	32 (21.3%)	94 (62.7%)
Grievance Redressal Mechanisms	8 (5.3%)	22 (14.7%)	120 (80.0%)

Source: Primary data

The results indicate a very low level of legal awareness in all the legislative domains among the unorganised labourers in Guntur. There is a great deal of ignorance about the Employees' Compensation Act, with 74% not knowing they have a right to be compensated for injuries sustained at work, which leads to the acceptance of poor settlements of an informal nature. 68% are also unaware of the Code on Social Security, 2020, since they are the prospective beneficiaries. Nearly 61.3% of them are ignorant of the minimum wages, which leads them to have an income less than what is fixed by the government. Most frightening is that 80% of the farmers do not know about the grievance redressal mechanism, be it labour court, welfare board or AP Labour Department which goes to show that even the aware are not aware of institutional pathway for enforcement of rights for them.



**Table 3: Chi-Square Test — Educational Qualification and Overall Legal Awareness**

Education Level	High Awareness	Low Awareness	Total
Illiterate + Primary (n=60)	8	52	60
Upper Primary 6th–10th (n=62)	24	38	62
Intermediate & above (n=28)	18	10	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>150</b>

$\chi^2 = 28.46$  |  $df = 2$  |  $p\text{-value} < 0.001$  | **Result: Highly Significant**

Source: Primary data

Formula:  $\chi^2 = \sum[(O-E)^2/E]$

There was a statistically significant relationship between education and legal awareness ( $\chi^2 = 28.46$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). 64.3% of the Intermediate and above educated workers showed high legal awareness as against only 13.3% of the illiterate and up to primary educated workers, indicating that education is an important factor to have legal knowledge. Those having upper primary education were moderately aware (38.7% high awareness), which shows a trend of increasing awareness with increasing level of education. Because almost 40 percent of the sample were low-literacy workers, who are the most vulnerable to being taken advantage of, traditional written forms and digital modes of information distribution have proven inadequate. Hence, oral, visual and community-based legal literacy camps will have to be organised to raise legal awareness among the poor sections of the state's unorganised labour force in Guntur.

**Table 4: Chi-Square Test — Worker Category and Awareness of Workmen's Compensation Act**

Worker Category	Aware	Not Aware	Total
Construction labourers (n=60)	22	38	60
Domestic workers (n=50)	8	42	50
Daily wage earners (n=40)	9	31	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>150</b>

$\chi^2 = 24.18$  |  $df = 2$  |  $p\text{-value} < 0.001$  | **Result: Highly Significant**

Source: Primary data

There was a significant relationship between type of worker and knowledge of the Employees' Compensation Act ( $\chi^2 = 24.18$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Awareness among construction workers was higher (36.7%) as compared to daily wage earners (22.5%) and domestic workers (16%) and this probably represents more contact with unions, contractors and peer networks. The shockingly low levels of awareness among domestic workers are especially alarming considering how prone they are to occupational injuries and how secluded they are within private household. The above results call for occupation specific legal literacy interventions in the form of home-based outreach for domestic workers and awareness raising at construction site for building labourers. **10. Discussion**

The result is that even in rural areas, awareness of the law among unorganised labourers at Guntur is extremely low, which acted as an impediment to claiming of rights. The levels of awareness vary significantly according to gender, education and type of worker, with illiterate and domestic workers being the most disadvantaged. The prevailing ignorance about mechanisms of grievance redressal acts as another barrier in accessing justice. Hence, the show d be on the substantive as well as procedural rights and remedies and d such promotional activities would have d more impact when they are oral, visual and community based rather than the usual d and Guntur is d home to a large, semi-literate unorganised workforce.

## 11. CONCLUSION

The present study was conducted to know the level of knowledge among 150 unorganised workers of Guntur city with regard to the Code on Social Security, 2020, MWA (Payment of Wages) Act and ECA. D Islah, 2021 The results showed profound deficits in legal knowledge with 68% unaware of the Code on Social Security, 74% unaware of their rights to compensation and 80% unfamiliar with mechanisms for grievance redressal, further continuing workers' exploitation. From the Chi-squared test a significant difference was found between the level of education and the category of worker in the legal awareness, domestic workers and low literacy workers were the most unaware. Study findings suggests location-specific awareness raising Telugu (local language) oral- visual-community-based legal literacy interventions at worksites / labour markets / residential colonies in order to convert statutory rights into de facto rights for unorganised workers in Guntur.

## 12. MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Needs worthy legal literacy among the unorganised workers in guntur; 68% of the respondents do not know the Code on Social Security, 2020.
2. Knowledge about the Employees' Compensation Act is the lowest with 74% unaware that they are entitled to compensation for injuries suffered at work.
3. Ignorance About Wage Entitlement and Contributory role in Wage Violations Among them, 61.3% were unaware of the entitlement to minimum wage.



4. Nearly 80% of them do not have the knowledge of the grievance redressal system with labour courts, welfare boards and the AP Labour Department.
5. Level of education is a strong determinant of knowledge ( $\chi^2=28.46$ ,  $p<0.001$ ); educated workers are much more aware.
6. Type of employment is also a significant determinant of knowledge of compensation ( $\chi^2=24.18$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), with domestic workers having the least knowledge (16%).
7. Female domestic workers are further disadvantaged by being structurally isolated.
8. Knowledge of AP Welfare Board scheme continues to be dismally low at 16%.

### 13. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

- 1: The AP Labour Department has to carry out a systematic ward-level legal literacy campaign in Guntur city with the help of Telugu-language oral and visual media — street plays, audio vans, visual charts — that are contextualised for construction and domestic workers, who are largely illiterate, at worksites and labour congregation points.
- 2: Guntur Municipal Corporation should set up specialised Labour Rights Help Centres at prominent construction sites and residential colony entrances that would offer free legal aid, assistance in registration with the welfare board and facilitation for lodging complaints regarding minimum wage to unorganised labourers in Telugu.
- 3: AP Government should require legal awareness sessions for all registered construction contractors and domestic worker placement agencies in guntur for THEIR workers, by the employers themselves, and as a condition for contract renewal & agency registration, under AP labour Dept supervision.

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