

Book Review

# “Women Work and Health: Current Concerns”

Monday 31 May 2010, by [OJHA Ruby](#) (Date first published: 28 May 2010).

## Book Review

Name of the Book : *Women Work and Health: Current Concerns*

Edited by : Amita Sahaya and Sunita Kaistha

Published by : The Women Press, New Delhi-110007

in association with

Women Work and health Initiatives (WWHI), New Delhi, India

Reviewed by : Dr. Ruby Ojha, Associate Professor,

Department of Economics, PGSR,

SNDT Women's University, Mumbai

The book under review “Women Work and Health: Current Concerns” is a collection of selected papers presented in IV International Congress on Women Work and Health held in 2005, edited by Amita Sahaya and Sunita Kaistha. This is an endeavour to discuss the emerging trends in the issues of women, work and health in today's globalized world. Over 400 papers were presented during the course of the Congress but only a few could be showcased in this particular publication because of space and logistical constraints. The selected papers range from academics to case studies and policy making. The book is divided into three parts:

- i) Gender Mainstreaming at Home and at Work
- ii) The Changing World of Work
- iii) The Scientific Practice of Health and Development.

Out of five papers selected for the first theme, i.e, **“Gender Mainstreaming at Home and at Work”**, the first one is “Capacity Building as a Strategy for Empowerment in the Context of Women Construction Workers” by Vaijayanta Anand. She raised the issues of workers engaged in construction industry which is the second largest employer, next only to agriculture and absorbs maximum number of migrant labour force, out of which about 30% comprise of women. This paper focuses on the empowerment and capacity building in the lives of these women by Nirman, an NGO, working with construction workers in Mumbai. The NGO tried to develop their personal capacities by giving them literacy classes combined with skill oriented components, forming self-help groups, skill upgradation in construction work, midwives training etc. Sunita Kaistha's paper “Informal Economy and Women Workers” also is regarding the working conditions of women in informal sector, who are exposed to occupational exploitation, health problems and other social pressures. The writer adds that there is an immediate need for a better organized and more comprehensive coverage of this sector through education and awareness activities, provision of health care and access to government welfare schemes. This may change the voicelessness and the bleak survival pattern of the women workers in informal sector, who otherwise have no bargaining power, no social

security and are vulnerable to various types of exploitation.

Paper entitled “Children and Adults in the Division of Domestic Labour in Disadvantaged Communities in the Outskirts of Beirut” is written by Rima R. Habib, Cynthia Myntti, Iman Nuwayhid and Mirvat Merhi. After giving the theoretical background about housework in Beirut, Lebanon, the authors described the division of housework by age and sex by measuring the extent to which children and adult household members are involved in performing 28 different types of tasks. The result of this descriptive study confirms a finding that housework is segregated by sex, and that women continue to do most of it.

A study of Finland on lengthening of working hours and its impact growing work related stress and time pressure is presented by Anna-Maija Lehto in “Overlong Working Hours and Women’s Work in Finland”. The results show that time pressure, especially instances of doing unpaid overtime work have increased during the last decade in cases of both men and women but it has become slightly more typical among women. This creates the work-life balance problem for Finnish women.

Dr. Vibhuti Patel’s paper is on “Gender Audits of Budgets with Respect to Women’s Health in India”. After giving historical development of the issue plan-wise, she has analyzed gender audit of macro policies. In her analysis she has narrated how increasingly the realization has come that without engendering, development is endangered. She concluded that budget is an important tool in the hands of state for affirmative action for improvement of gender relations through reduction of gender gap in the development process.

Second part of the book, which is on the **Changing World of Work**, consists of six papers recording challenges facing the women in the world of work in a variety of ways. Authors in this section are Carina Bildt, Lena Karlqvist and Eva Vingard, Christiane Kreitlow, Amita Sahaya, Tuire Toivanen, Zainah Ahmed Zamani and Fatimah Yusoooff. Their papers discuss the issues like association between psychosocial conditions, psychological distress and neck/shoulder pain symptoms, self-rated good health in low-educated, gainfully employed, elderly women, moral and sexual harassment of women in the workplace, rehabilitation of tortured people and workplace stress and physical health in different occupations and in different countries. A common point in these studies is that women suffered more often than men and in most countries women are the favourite target of harassment. More or less all the studies suggest that the working environment rules should not only facilitate globalization but moral laws are also required to give birth to a more human world. Collective voices raised in protest could create better working lives for those less empowered. The stress management programmes widely used may help to relieve stress symptoms and promote psychological well-being.

The third section of this book that is on **The Scientific Practice of Health and Development** includes six innovative papers relating to different parts of the world. The paper entitled “Health Implications for the Swedish Gender Equality Policy”, written by Sisko Bergendorff and Claudia Gardberg Moner, reveals that in Sweden women and men have very similar living and working conditions. But, the traditional gender patterns in the family as well as in the labour market prevail. As a result, women and men face different health hazards at work and different work loads in the family, which contributes to women’s ill health and work incapacity. Similar results are also found in the study, “Professional Career Development According to Gender among Health Care Workers in 10 European Countries” that analyses gender, marital status, work-family balance and other demographic factors, which play a major role in career development of health care workers in different countries.

“Gender Work and Health” by Ulf Lundberg and Gunilla Krantz focuses on the total workload (paid plus unpaid work) of women and men who have chosen to combine an occupational career with

family responsibilities. The paper concludes that there is still a need for more gender equality in terms of responsibility for unpaid work at home in order to improve women's health and occupational career opportunities.

There is a need to emphasize safe practices against health impacts and hazards in pesticides handling and garment manufacturing in different parts of the world. This is suggested by Florence Temael Mununa and Elikana Eliona Lekei in their paper "Pesticides Retailers and Associated Possible Health Risks" and by Piia Tint and Karin Reinhold in their paper "Safety and Health through Redesign of Garment Workers'. The papers concluded that initial investment in good design including physical layout of the workplace, temperature, noise, lighting and ventilation pays for itself in increased efficiency, worker satisfaction and loyalty.

The paper entitled "Ensuring Effective Knowledge Dissemination" by Anshu Dogra, is regarding occupational safety and health of women, which has been weighed down all over the world by the nature of women's work which is primarily unorganized, home based, domestic and hence invisible. This is mainly due to the fact that even the basic professional data collection on occupational health hazards, accidents and diseases of women has been deficient. She asserts that for women's development, the use of new tools that facilitate the flow, dissemination and appropriation of information and knowledge should be used by the stakeholders to ensure that knowledge goes into the interiors where it is desperately needed.

"Women Work and Health: Current Concerns", with a variety of papers on new and unexplored dimensions, can prove to be a good piece in collection of some one interested in national and international gender and health issues.

---