

An analytical study into environmental hazards at construction sites for female labourers

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Women labourers are primarily employed as merely helpers to men but bear the equal or even more burn of occupational hazards at construction sites. Since environmental hazards impact their health and well being more, these were examined in detail in the present study. Main objectives were to know the environmental conditions, environmental risk factors and environmental hazards faced. Eighty such women were interviewed using pre structured interview schedule and data analysed using appropriate statistical tools. Results of study revealed that most of them belonged to the age group of 21-30 years, were married and lived in nuclear family setup. Observed temperature (43.5°C) and humidity (75.6 %) at construction site were deviated from normal value (15-17°C and 80 %, respectively). Even noise level (65.78 db) was much higher than recommended. Major environmental risk factors perceived by respondents were 'air full of dust and smells' (3.53-3.40 mean score), 'disturbing noise' (3.30 mean score), 'polluted water' (3.73 mean score), and the 'unhygienic, stinking and garbage filled surroundings'. The most prominent environmental hazards in this industry were identified (by respondents) as; sun burns, sun stroke, dehydration due to heat/physical stress, respiratory diseases, skin allergies, boils in feet, headache due to vibration/noise and mistakes due to vibration/noise/weather. The findings are indicative of immediate remedial measures to be taken by government and employers for ensuring health and well being of such women at large.

■ **KEY WORDS** : Environmental hazards, Construction industry, Risk factors, Physical stress

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Environmental hazard is a generic term for any situation or state of events which poses a threat to the surrounding environment and adversely affects people's health (from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). In context to any occupation, it is a component in the workplace environment that can cause injury, illness, or death. In a harsh working environment like construction of buildings or industries; the components are multifold. These may include polluted air (full of dust and chemicals fumes); annoying noises; unsafe water; and unhygienic, stinking and filthy surroundings inviting various diseases (Jaselskis *et al.*, 1994).

Every year International Women's Day is celebrated on March 8. It offers an opportunity to reflect on the situation of women and examine recent developments and overall trends. Women workforce constitutes an integral part of total

workforce in India. Their proportion in the country's workforce has increased during the last three decades. In 1981 it was 19.67 per cent and rose to 25.68 per cent in 2001, according to the Census of India 2001 (Anonymous, 2001). However, there are more women in unorganized sector mainly due to lack of education and opportunities to train themselves for better employment. They enter unorganized sector along with men particularly if they migrate for greener pastures with family and construction industry being the lone employment provider (Nandal, 2006). In mega city like Ludhiana, these women are a common site, but are facing pathetic employment conditions. They are considered only for load carrying or helping men and paid lowly. As mentioned by Self Employed Women Association (SEWA, 2000), women in construction sector face multidimensional problems, environmental hazards