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Status of Immigrant Women Workers from India to the Middle East

This study on the "Status of women Immigrants from India to the Middle East" is a modest attempt to discuss the socio economic status of women immigrants from India in the Middle east countries. The women migrants from India comprise two streams. One, those who are professionally qualified and are in better paid better status positions and two, those who are uneducated and unskilled and end up in low paid low status jobs like those of housemaids ayahs and cleaners. There is no reliable secondary data that give the number of women immigrants from India in the Middle east. However, a rough and crude approximation based on the data from the Ministry of Labour, Government of India it could be assumed that in 1991 there was between 150000 - 200000 women workers from India in the Middle east. This does not include the dependents of male workers. The study is based exclusively on primary data collected from 504 women migrants in 8 countries of the Middle East. The survey was conducted during 1995 April - May period. Some of the respondents were interviewed while they were on vacation in India while others were interviewed in their countries of domicile. Majority of the women workers in the sample, more than 60%, were in the relatively young age group of 24 - 39. Nearly 60% of the respondents were Christians, 25% Hindus and 15% Muslims. The educational status of the women migrants was low in general with more than 50% having no formal degree or diploma. The occupational distribution of the sample indicate that not even 5% of the women belong to the higher status occupations like doctors, engineers and the like. 27% of the women interviewed are hospital workers, nearly 27% are housemaids, ayahs and cleaners and only 1.5% fall into the category of managers. This clearly indicate that the majority of women workers >from India crowd in the low paid low status jobs. The results of the study also reveal that the economic status of the women migrants are poor with more than 75% of them getting a monthly salary of less than \$ 300. But the salary of professionals were quite good. Large majority of the unskilled category of women were living alone and their life away from husbands and other relatives seemed to be one of 'loneliness, helplessness and dependence'. The facilities enjoyed by the skilled workers were comparatively much better than those of unskilled workers. Religious freedom was poor in many countries. But most of them reported that they did not face any kind of harassment at work contradictory to the news appearing in the media. The general picture that emerge from the study is that the majority of the women workers from India enjoy a better status in the Middle East. But the unskilled category of women like housemaids, ayahs cleaners etc have a very low status and get exploited and abused.