

Beyond Daily Wages: An Empirical Inquiry into Work Rhythms, Rest Deficits, and Work–Life Balance in the Informal Economy of Chikmagalur

Mandara SM¹ (Research Scholar) , Dr. Sarbananda Sahoo² (Research Supervisor)

¹School of commerce and Management, Shri Venkateshwara University, Gajraula, Uttar Pradesh, India - 244236

²School of commerce and Management, Shri Venkateshwara University, Gajraula, Uttar Pradesh, India - 244236

Email ID : mandarasm8@gmail.com

Abstract

The informal economy in India is affected by unregulated work structures, trembling work hours, small rest periods, and minimal access to occupational support systems. These dynamics significantly influence how workers manage daily time demands and sustain work–life equilibrium. This study explores work rhythms, rest deficits, and perceptions of work–life balance among informal workers in Chikmagalur district using primary data from multiple respondents across five different sectors and the findings reveal centralization of long-hour work patterns, inadequate rest intervals, high physical strain, and inconsistent workplace facilities. Workers experience varying stress and role overload due to unpredictable work routines and financial hardship. The analysis highlights the importance of structured work schedules, basic workplace amenities, and improved rest provisions for sustaining workers' physical and mental well-being. The study contributes empirical insights into the temporal pressures embedded within informal labor patterns and offers recommendations to enhance the lived work experiences of unorganized workers.

Keywords : wages, unorganised sectors, strain, labors

1. Introduction

The informal economy forms a crucial backbone of India's labor force, offering employment to millions in rural and semi-urban regions. Even with its economic contribution, the sector is marked by a lack of formal work arrangements, undefined job roles, wage volatility, and insufficient occupational safeguards and workers mostly experience unpredictable work cycles including extended work hours, physically intensive tasks, and limited rest.

Chikmagalur, known for its agricultural landscapes, plantations, construction activity, and local retail businesses, depends heavily on informal labour and unorganised sector workers in this district often engage in multiple roles simultaneously—balancing paid work with household responsibilities—resulting in work–life imbalance. While studies have explored informal labor at macro levels, micro-level evidence from Chikmagalur remains sparse.

This study offers a practical exploration of how work-hour patterns, break intervals, workload intensity, and workplace conditions shape work–life balance among informal workers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Informal Work Structures

As per Chen 2012, the informal sector is differentiated by flexible yet unstable working arrangements and the workers often lack written contracts, regulated shifts, or fixed payment structures, making their schedules extremely variable. Budhwar and Debrah (2019) highlights that the absence of institutional frameworks of workers results in adjusting the time commitments based on economic necessity rather than personal well-being.

2.2 Work Rhythms and Time Poverty

Varghese, 2021 explained the concept of *time poverty* which is lack of discretionary time due to long work hours or multiple responsibilities—has been widely documented among informal workers . As per Benería, 2001, extended work timings, often without adequate recovery, decrease physical and psychological resilience.

2.3 Rest Deficits and Physical Strain

Singh, 2020 explained that irregular or minimal rest breaks significantly influence workers' energy levels and operational efficiency and studies show that inadequate rest increases health risks which contributes to muscular fatigue, sleep disruptions, and cognitive stress. Physical strain is magnified in manual labor jobs prevalent in informal sectors.

2.4 Work–Life Balance in Informal Labour

As per Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985 traditional work–life balance theories emphasize role conflict and resource limitations and informal workers experience unique time-related constraints due to unpredictable workloads, lack of sick leave, and daily-wage dependency. Sharma (2019) notes that unorganized sector workers often struggle to allocate time for personal and family needs due to the demanding nature of daily wage labor.

2.5 Workplace Conditions and Basic Facilities

As per Rao, 2020 basic workplace amenities such as water, sanitation, safety measures, and rest areas are often missing in informal settings and this contributes to occupational fatigue, reduces productivity, and affects workers' overall work experience

3. Theoretical Background

Greenhaus and Beutell's 1985 role conflict theory supports this study, explaining that multiple role urges compete for limited individual resources such as time and energy. Varghese, 2021 explained that the time allocation frameworks argue that individuals distribute time based on socio-economic pressures, which is particularly visible in daily-wage informal labor.. Time poverty theory is claimed to understand the deficiency of personal time resulting from long and unpredictable working hours.

Meijman & Mulder, 1998 explains how extended work without adequate recovery leads to cumulative stress and fatigue, affecting performance and well-being

4. Research Gap

Existing literature broadly talks about informal labor at national and state levels and still provides limited empirical micro-studies focusing on the time dynamics work hours, rest, rhythm patterns—within specific districts and no prior study has examined work rhythms and rest adequacy as central determinants of work–life balance among informal workers in Chikmagalur. This study infused this gap by using primary field data to analyze how temporal pressures shape workers' daily experiences.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

A descriptive quantitative approach was used to analyze work-hour patterns, rest adequacy, and work–life balance perceptions. 50 informal workers were surveyed across different sectors like agriculture, construction, textiles, hotels and department stores.

5.2 Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was used, containing 55 variables covering multiple factors like work hours, overtime, rest intervals, physical strain, work place facilities, perception of balance and stress indicators. The survey was done among the unorganized sector workers to collect the quantitative data and an in depth interview was conducted to have a better understanding on their work life.

5.3 Data Analysis Techniques

The study includes descriptive statistical techniques to systematically interpret the primary data collected from informal workers across Chikmagalur. Frequency distributions and percentage analyses were used to summarize key variables such as work hours, rest intervals, stress levels, workplace facilities, and perceived work–life balance and graphical representations including line charts and distribution plots were generated to visually compare patterns and identify target regions within the data. These visual tools aided in understanding the temporal rhythms of work and the prevalence of rest deficits among workers and all the data were processed using spreadsheet and statistical software to ensure accuracy, consistency, and clarity in identifying fundamental trends. The combined use of numerical summaries and visual analytics enabled a complete clarification of workers' daily experiences, revealing how oscillating work intensities and limited recovery periods impact overall work–life balance.

6. Results and Calculations

6.1 Work-Hour Distribution

The work-hour distribution shows that most unorganized sector workers fall within the 7–9 hour category, indicating long daily commitments typical of labor-intensive jobs. A considerable number also work more than 9 hours, suggesting extended workloads without structured limits and Only a small portion work short hours, reflecting irregular or task-based employment. Overall, the pattern highlights a high daily time burden for the majority of workers.

Table 1: Daily Work Hours Distribution

Work Hours	NO. of workers
Less than 4 hours	10
4-6 hours	8
7-9 hours	20
More than 9 hours	12



Fig 1: Distribution of Daily Work Hours

6.2 Stress Levels

Stress levels vary extensively, with many workers experiencing stress rarely or never, showing some adaptability to routine demands. However, a considerable number of workers report frequent stress, indicating the presence of workload pressure, physical strain, or unpredictable schedules. The mixed pattern reflects the inconsistent nature of informal work and its direct impact on workers' psychological well-being

Table 2: Stress Levels Distribution

Stress Level	Frequency
Never	11
Rarely	17
Sometimes	9
Frequently	13



Fig 2: Stress Level Pattern

6.3 Rest Adequacy and Facilities

Responses by the labourers collected during the survey indicate that rest breaks are often irregular or insufficient, especially on days with heavy workloads or extended hours. Limited access to basic amenities—such as drinking water, sanitation, and resting spaces—further restricts meaningful recovery during work and these deficits collectively contribute to fatigue, reduce the ability of workers to maintain balance between work and personal needs

7. Discussion

Workers displayed visible temporal challenges—long hours, rare rest, and fluctuating workloads. The concentration around 7–9 hours and the significant share exceeding 9 hours indicate labor-intensive routines and stress frequency corresponds strongly with inconsistent work rhythms and inadequate recovery time. Overall, work–life balance remains heavily compromised due to structural constraints rather than personal choice.

8. Conclusion

Unorganized workers in Chikmagalur district experience high pressure, inadequate rest, and limited workplace facilities, leading to compromised work–life balance. Their work rhythms are shaped more by economic necessity than individual well-being. Conveying rest sufficiency, predictable schedules, and basic amenities could significantly improve workers' overall life quality.

9. Recommendations

1. Establish structured break intervals within informal work settings.
2. Introduce worker awareness programs on fatigue management.
3. Provide basic facilities such as drinking water, sanitation, and shaded rest areas.
4. Encourage community-based support groups for stress and workload management.

References

1. Benería, L. (2001). *Gender, Development, and Globalization*. Routledge.
2. Budhwar, P., & Debrah, Y. (2019). *HRM in Developing Countries*. Routledge.
3. Chen, M. (2012). *The Informal Economy: Definitions, Theories, and Policies*. WIEGO.
4. Greenhaus, J., & Beutell, N. (1985). Work–family conflict. *Academy of Management Review*, 10(1), 76–88.
5. Standing, G. (2011). *The Precariat*. Bloomsbury.
6. Sharma, R. (2019). Work–life challenges among rural workers. *Social Work Review*, 18(1), 54–67.
7. Varghese, T. (2021). Time poverty in informal sectors. *Journal of Rural Development*, 40(2), 230–248.
8. Rao, M. (2020). Informal labor vulnerabilities in Karnataka. *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 63(4), 1123–1140.

9. Singh, P. (2020). Informal sector occupational hazards. *Labour Studies Journal*, 45(2), 145–162.
10. World Bank. (2019). *Working Conditions and Informal Employment*.
11. Meijman, T., & Mulder, G. (1998). Effort–recovery model.
12. Kabeer, N. (2014). Gender and labor inequalities. *Feminist Economics*, 20(3), 1–26.
13. ILO (2018). *Informal Economy Statistics*.
14. Das, S. (2016). Daily wage labor dynamics. *Economic Affairs*, 61(3), 345–352.
15. Gupta, A. (2017). Informal work environments. *Indian Journal of Social Research*, 58(4), 512–530.
16. Thomas, A. (2019). Work intensity in developing regions. *Global Labour Journal*, 10(2), 99–115.
17. Saha, B. (2018). Labor fatigue patterns. *Occupational Health Review*, 27(1), 22–31.
18. Jacob, T. (2020). Unstructured labor time. *Work and Society*, 15(2), 189–205.
19. Prasad, K. (2015). Rest patterns in informal sectors. *Indian Journal of Occupational Studies*, 12(1), 14–24.
20. Kumar, R. (2021). Temporal burdens and informal work. *Journal of Development Studies*, 58(3), 289–304.
21. Fernandes, L. (2019). Daily work rhythms. *South Asian Labour Review*, 9(1), 70–88.
22. Balasubramanian, S. (2020). Workplace amenities and labor welfare. *Human Resource Insights*, 33(2), 145–169.