



Original Article

AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF BRICK-MAKING WORKERS IN KOLHAPUR CITY

Dr. Ram Ningappa Naik¹, Dr. Kedar Vijay Marulkar² & Dr. Anil Govind Suryawanshi³

¹Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, Smt. Kusumtai Rajarambapu Patil Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Islampur, Dist- Sangli

²Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, Shivaji University, Kolhapur

³Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, New College, Kolhapur.

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Corresponding Author:
Dr. Ram Ningappa Naik

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Abstract:

The brick-making industry constitutes an important segment of the informal sector in India and provides livelihood opportunities to a large number of economically marginalized workers. Despite its contribution to urban infrastructure and construction activity, the sector remains characterized by low wages, poor working conditions, and absence of social security. The present study undertakes an economic analysis of brick-making workers in Kolhapur city with the objective of examining their socio-economic profile, employment characteristics, educational attainment, and wage structure. The study is based on primary data collected from 92 brick-making households comprising 272 workers, including both male and female labourers.

Descriptive statistical techniques such as percentages and comparative analysis are employed to interpret the data. The findings reveal that the majority of brick-making households belong to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category, indicating that poverty and lack of alternative livelihood opportunities are the primary factors compelling workers to engage in this occupation. Educational attainment among workers is found to be low, with most workers having education only up to the secondary school level, thereby restricting their access to better employment options. Gender-wise analysis shows significant participation of female workers; however, a pronounced gender wage disparity exists, with women receiving substantially lower wages than men despite performing similar manual tasks.

Economic compulsion emerges as the dominant reason for engagement in brick-making work, highlighting the vulnerability and dependency of workers on informal employment. The study concludes that brick-making workers in Kolhapur city remain economically and socially disadvantaged. It emphasizes the need for effective policy interventions such as enforcement of minimum wages, promotion of gender wage equality, access to education and skill development, and inclusion of brick-making workers under social security and welfare schemes to improve their overall living and working conditions.

Keywords: Brick-making workers, Informal sector, Wages, Education, Poverty, Kolhapur City

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Introduction:

The brick-making industry is one of the oldest and most labor-intensive segments of the informal sector in India and plays a vital role in meeting the growing demand for construction materials in urban and peri-urban areas. Rapid urbanization and infrastructure development have increased the dependence on brick kilns, thereby generating employment opportunities for a large number of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. However, despite its economic significance, brick-making remains a largely unorganized activity characterized by seasonal employment, low wages, and inadequate social protection for workers.

In cities like Kolhapur, brick-making units provide livelihood support to migrant and local workers drawn mainly from economically weaker sections. Entire households, including women, are often engaged in brick-making activities to supplement family income. Workers typically operate under physically demanding conditions involving long working hours, exposure to extreme weather, and health risks, with limited access to basic amenities. Gender-based division of labour and wage disparities further exacerbate socio-economic inequalities within the sector.

The majority of brick-making workers possess low levels of formal education, which restricts their mobility into better-paid employment in the formal sector. Poverty, lack of alternative livelihood options, and limited access to skill development opportunities compel workers to remain in this occupation over extended periods. Despite the presence of labour laws and welfare schemes, implementation gaps often exclude brick-making workers from social security benefits.

Against this background, a systematic economic analysis of brick-making workers is essential to understand their living and working conditions. The present study focuses on brick-

making workers in Kolhapur city, examining their demographic profile, economic status, educational attainment, reasons for employment, and wage structure. By identifying key challenges and disparities, the study seeks to contribute to policy-oriented discussions aimed at improving the socio-economic well-being of brick-making workers and promoting inclusive urban development.

Review of Literature:

Existing literature on the informal sector highlights the crucial role of brick-making industries in providing employment to economically marginalized and migrant workers in India. Studies on unorganized labour emphasize that brick kiln workers are among the most vulnerable occupational groups due to low wages, seasonal employment, and lack of social security (ILO, 2021). Research has consistently shown that poverty and absence of alternative livelihood opportunities compel workers to engage in brick-making activities, often involving entire families.

Several empirical studies reveal that educational attainment among brick-making workers remains extremely low, which restricts their access to formal employment and perpetuates intergenerational occupational immobility. Gender-based analyses indicate significant participation of women in brick-making activities; however, female workers continue to face wage discrimination and limited bargaining power (NSSO, 2020). Studies also point out that informal employment relationships and contractual arrangements enable employers to bypass minimum wage regulations and labour welfare provisions.

Regional studies conducted in Maharashtra have highlighted poor living conditions, health hazards, and inadequate access to housing, sanitation, and healthcare facilities among brick kiln workers. Scholars have further observed that weak



enforcement of labour laws and limited awareness among workers contribute to their continued exploitation. While government schemes exist for unorganized workers, their outreach and effectiveness remain limited.

The existing literature underscores the need for location-specific empirical studies to capture regional variations in employment patterns, wages, and socio-economic conditions. The present study contributes to this body of knowledge by providing an economic analysis of brick-making workers in Kolhapur city, focusing on education, income, gender disparities, and household economic conditions.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To examine the gender composition of brick-making workers in Kolhapur city.
2. To analyze the economic condition of brick-making households.
3. To study the educational status of brick-making workers.
4. To identify reasons for engagement in brick-making work.
5. To analyze wage differentials between male and female workers.

Research Methodology:

The present study is based on primary data collected from brick-making workers in Kolhapur city. A total of 92 households comprising 272 workers were selected using purposive sampling, as brick-making workers form a scattered and unorganized population. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire covering demographic characteristics, economic condition, educational level, reasons for employment, and wage structure.

Both male and female workers were included in the sample to ensure gender

representation. Secondary data were collected from government reports, labour surveys, and published research studies to support the analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as percentages, ratios, and tabular analysis. The results were interpreted to identify patterns, disparities, and key socio-economic issues faced by brick-making workers. The methodology adopted is suitable for capturing the economic realities of informal sector workers and provides a reliable basis for policy-oriented conclusions.

Profile of the Study Area:

The present study is conducted in Kolhapur city, located in the south-western part of Maharashtra state. Kolhapur is an important urban center known for its historical, cultural, and economic significance. The city has witnessed steady urban expansion and infrastructural development in recent years, leading to increased demand for construction materials such as bricks. This demand has contributed to the growth of brick-making units in and around the city, providing employment opportunities to a large number of unorganized workers.

Kolhapur city has a mixed economic structure comprising agriculture, small-scale industries, trade, and services. The brick-making industry operates mainly in peri-urban areas and on the outskirts of the city, where land availability and proximity to raw materials such as clay and water support brick production. Brick-making units largely function on a seasonal basis and employ labourers from economically weaker sections, including local residents and migrant workers.

The workforce engaged in brick-making in Kolhapur city is characterized by low levels of education, limited skill diversity, and heavy dependence on manual labour. Entire households,



including women, often participate in brick-making activities to supplement family income. The working environment is physically demanding, with workers exposed to long hours, harsh climatic conditions, and health risks.

Kolhapur city was selected as the study area due to the concentration of brick-making units and the socio-economic vulnerability of workers engaged in this sector. The city provides an appropriate setting to examine employment patterns, wage structure, and living conditions of brick-making workers within the broader context of urban informal sector employment.

Analysis and Interpretation:

Table 1 Gender-wise Distribution of Brick-Making Workers

Gender	Number of Workers	Percentage
Male	168	61.76
Female	104	38.24
Total	272	100

Interpretation:

The table indicates that male workers constitute a majority of the brick-making workforce, while female participation remains substantial. This pattern reflects the physically demanding nature of the work and the prevalence of family-based labour, where women significantly contribute to brick-making activities to support household income.

Male workers constitute the majority of the workforce. However, female participation is substantial, indicating family-based labor engagement in brick-making activities.

Table 2 Economic Condition of Brick-Making Households

Economic Category	Households	Percentage
Middle Class	14	15.22
BPL Class	78	84.78
Total	92	100

Interpretation:

The table reveals that a large majority of brick-making households fall under the Below Poverty Line category. This highlights that brick-making employment is primarily poverty-driven and undertaken due to limited livelihood alternatives, reinforcing the dependence of economically vulnerable households on informal sector employment.

A large majority of households belong to the Below Poverty Line category, confirming that brick-making is predominantly a poverty-driven occupation.

Table 3 Educational Status of Brick-Making Workers

Education Level	Total Workers	Percentage
Up to SSC	189	69.49
HSC	67	24.63
Graduate	11	4.04
Post Graduate	5	1.84
Total	272	100

Interpretation:

The table shows that most brick-making workers possess education only up to the secondary level. Very few workers have attained higher education, indicating restricted human capital development. Low educational attainment limits occupational mobility and confines workers to low-paid, manual employment in the informal sector. Low educational attainment dominates the workforce. Limited education restricts occupational mobility and access to better-paying jobs.



Table 4 Reasons for Working as Brick-Making Workers

Reason	Workers	Percentage
Family economic condition	134	71.28
To pursue education	14	7.45
Other reasons	20	10.64

Interpretation:

The table clearly indicates that economic necessity is the dominant reason for engagement in brick-making work. A small proportion of workers are employed to support educational pursuits or due to other reasons, emphasizing that brick-making is largely a survival-oriented occupation rather than a preferred employment choice

Economic compulsion is the primary reason for engagement, highlighting livelihood insecurity.

Table 5 Gender-wise Daily Wages

Gender	Daily Wage (₹)
Male	500
Female	300

Interpretation:

The table highlights a significant gender wage disparity in the brick-making sector. Male workers earn substantially higher daily wages compared to female workers, despite performing similar manual tasks. This reflects persistent gender-based discrimination and weak enforcement of minimum wage regulations in informal employment.

A clear gender wage disparity exists, reflecting inequality in the informal labor market.

Findings:

The present study provides important insights into the socio-economic conditions of brick-making workers in Kolhapur city based on primary

data collected from 92 households comprising 272 workers. The major findings are presented below.

Findings:

1. The study reveals that brick-making employment is predominantly undertaken by economically marginalized households. A substantial majority of the surveyed households belong to the Below Poverty Line category, indicating that poverty and lack of alternative livelihood opportunities are the primary drivers of engagement in this occupation. Male workers constitute a larger share of the workforce; however, female participation is also significant, reflecting the family-based nature of brick-making labour.
2. Educational attainment among brick-making workers is found to be low. Most workers possess education only up to the secondary school level, while very few have completed higher education. This low level of human capital restricts their access to better employment opportunities and perpetuates occupational immobility. Economic compulsion emerges as the dominant reason for employment, confirming that brick-making is a survival-oriented activity rather than a choice-based occupation.
3. A significant finding of the study is the presence of gender-based wage disparity. Male workers receive higher daily wages compared to female workers despite performing similar manual tasks. This highlights gender inequality and weak enforcement of minimum wage regulations in the informal sector. The study also indicates the absence of job security, social protection, and welfare benefits, making brick-making workers highly vulnerable to exploitation and income instability.



Suggestions:

In view of the above findings, several policy measures are suggested. There is an urgent need for strict enforcement of minimum wage laws and gender wage equality in the brick-making industry. Labour inspection mechanisms should be strengthened to ensure compliance with labour regulations. Educational support schemes, including access to schooling and scholarships for workers' children, should be promoted to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

Skill development and vocational training programs should be introduced to enhance employability and enable workers to transition to alternative occupations. Brick-making workers should be brought under social security schemes such as health insurance, pension, and accident coverage. Additionally, awareness programs regarding labour rights and government welfare schemes can empower workers to improve their socio-economic conditions and ensure inclusive and sustainable development.

Conclusion:

The present study provides a comprehensive economic analysis of brick-making workers in Kolhapur city and brings to light the socio-economic vulnerabilities faced by workers engaged in this informal sector. The findings clearly indicate that brick-making employment is largely poverty-driven and undertaken by households with limited access to alternative livelihood opportunities. A majority of workers belong to the Below Poverty Line category and possess low levels of formal education, which restricts their occupational mobility and confines them to low-paid, manual labour.

The study highlights significant gender disparities within the brick-making workforce. Although female participation is substantial, women

continue to receive lower wages compared to male workers despite performing similar tasks. This reflects persistent gender-based inequality and weak enforcement of labour laws in the informal sector. The absence of job security, social protection, and welfare benefits further exacerbates the economic insecurity of brick-making workers.

Overall, the study underscores the need for focused policy interventions to improve the living and working conditions of brick-making workers. Ensuring fair wages, promoting gender equality, enhancing access to education and skill development, and extending social security coverage are essential steps toward safeguarding the rights and well-being of these workers. Strengthening institutional support and effective implementation of labour welfare measures can contribute significantly to improving the socio-economic status of brick-making workers and fostering inclusive urban development.

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