

# **Reconstructing Work–Life Balance in Peripheral Labour Markets: Structural, Sectoral, and Gendered Realities of Informal Employment in Chikmagalur District**

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## **Abstract**

Work-life balance (WLB) has become an important measure of worker well-being, still it remains extremely underexplored among India's informal workforce, especially in semi-urban regions. This study explores work life balance across five major informal sectors—construction, agriculture, textiles, hotels, and department stores—in Chikmagalur district, Karnataka. Using a mixed-method approach combining structured surveys and focus group discussions, the study evaluates how work hours, job security, physical strain, income stability, and gendered responsibilities influence WLB. The findings demonstrate substantial sectoral disparities, with construction and agriculture workers facing the poorest WLB due to excessive work demands and income volatility, whereas textile and hotel workers exhibit relatively balanced outcomes. Gender differences were significant: women consistently reported lower WLB due to a dual burden of paid work and domestic labour. The study provides a region-specific assessment of informal labour realities and proposes structural and policy interventions aimed at enhancing worker well-being. This research contributes new empirical evidence to an area often overlooked in labour scholarship—peripheral, semi-urban informal markets in India.

**Keywords:** Work-Life Balance, Informal Labour, Gendered Employment, Occupational Stress

## **1. Introduction**

India's informal sector represents one of the world's largest unregulated labour systems, employing more than four-fifths of the national workforce (Government of Karnataka, 2023). Despite its economic relevance, informal labour is characterised by unstable income, absence of legal protection, limited

workplace facilities, and demanding work schedules. These structural constraints make the attainment of work-life balance (WLB) especially challenging.

WLB refers to the equilibrium an individual maintains between professional activities and personal or family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 2000). While the concept has been widely explored in corporate and formal settings, its relevance in informal labour markets—where workers face occupational precarity and social expectations—requires deeper examination.

Chikmagalur district, known for agriculture and emerging service-sector activities, provides a meaningful context for analysing the lived realities of informal workers. Existing literature predominantly focuses on metropolitan informal employment (Sharma & Gupta, 2015; Rajkumar, 2019), leaving rural and semi-urban regions underrepresented. This study fills this gap by offering a sector-wise and gender-disaggregated assessment of WLB in Chikmagalur's informal economy.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptualizing Work-Life Balance in Informal Employment**

As per Allen et al., 2013, traditional studies have explained the work life balance concept in formal culture, especially in corporate environments highlighting flexible work arrangements and support from the organizations .

Standing 1999 explained that the considerability of conventional WLB models to informal employment is problematic due to lack of institutional buffers and heightened exposure to economic vulnerabilities and for unorganized workers, WLB is less about individual self management of competing sectors and more about surviving in a rigid environment.

### **2.2 Sector-Specific Challenges**

As per Rao 2020, In India, sector specific research has revealed unique patterns of work life challenges. As per the previous study, construction workers face extreme occupational hazards and erratic schedules which makes family engagements difficult.

Singh & Kumar 2018, reveals that agricultural laborers face seasonal instability that causes acute times of financial and emotional stress.

As per Mehta, 2017 the textile sector offers comparatively better scheduling feasibility but wages are low and occupational health standards are poor.

Patel & Shah, 2019 explained that tourism driven sectors such as hotels and department stores have regular shifts and have high emotional labor demands and gendered expectations around caregiving.

### **2.3 Gendered Dimensions of Work-Life Balance**

Desai, 2016 explained that gender dynamics further disturbs informal employment experiences where women are typically over burdened with dual responsibilities of economic and household labor.

As per Sharma & Gupta 2015, the empirical studies reveals that even though the women are engaged in paid work, household labour expectations are unchanged which results in 'double shifts' and heightened stress levels.

## 2.4 Gaps in Existing Literature

Though the studies on the informal economy are growing, still few studies adopt a comparative sector specific and gender sensitive lens in semi urban and rural contexts. The Chikmagalur district is a unique blend of agriculture, emerging tourism and retail employment; it offers an ideal setting for investigating these underexplored tendencies. Existing studies have predominantly focused on large urban centers or formal sectors (Rajkumar, 2019). Furthermore, existing study often treats the informal sector as comparable, overlooking sectoral nuances that this study aims to capture.

## 3. Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse sector-wise variations in work-life balance among informal workers in Chikmagalur district.
2. To examine how key work-related factors—job security, income stability, physical strain, and working hours—influence overall WLB.
3. To investigate gender-based disparities in WLB and the socio-cultural pressures associated with them.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of work-life balance in Chikmagalur's informal sector.

### 4.2 Data Collection

- **Quantitative Component** : A structured questionnaire was circulated across workers in construction, agriculture, textiles, hotels and department stores and the respondents rated proportions such as income satisfaction, job security, physical strain and WLB using Likert scales.
- **Qualitative Component** : Four focus group discussions (FGDs), managing 8–10 participants each. These discussions focused on the lived experiences of workers, gender-specific challenges, and sector-specific work conditions.

### 4.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS v.26. Descriptive statistics summarized WLB and related variables. One-way ANOVA tested sectoral differences, and t-tests assessed gender disparities. Qualitative data from FGDs were thematically analyzed to identify themes like workplace facilities and cultural norms in Chikmagalur.

### 4.4 Variables

Key variables measured include:

- **Work Conditions**: Hours worked per day, income volatility, job security, physical strain, and psychological stress.
- **Work-Life Balance Outcomes**: Family time, health impacts, overall job satisfaction, stress levels.
- **Demographic Variables**: Gender, age, sector of employment, and family responsibilities.

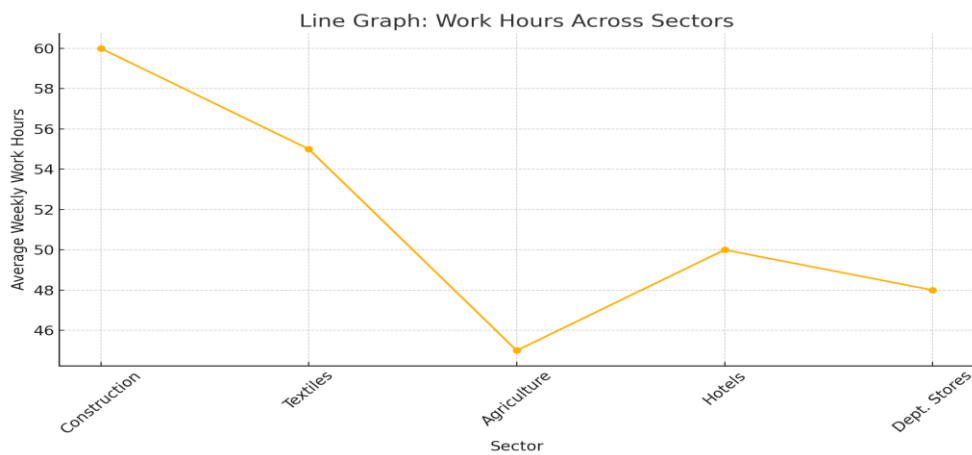
## 5. Results

### 5.1 Descriptive Statistics

The survey data show significant variation in WLB across sectors and gender. The following table summarizes key variables in relation to work-life balance of Chikmagalur's informal sectors. Construction and agriculture workers reported the longest hours (>9 hours for 40% and 38%, respectively), reflecting Chikmagalur's labor-intensive coffee and construction industries. Textiles and department stores had shorter shifts (<4 hours for 25% and 20%). Job security was lowest in construction (60% not secure) and highest in department stores (55% very secure). Income satisfaction was highest in hotels (35% very satisfied), driven by tourism, and lowest in textiles (30% very dissatisfied). WLB was completely balanced for 40% of textile workers but not balanced for 45% in agriculture.

**Table 1 : Sector-wise Distribution of Work Conditions and WLB Outcomes**

Sector	Average Work Hours (per week)	Income Satisfaction (%)	Job Security (%)	Physical Strain (Scale 1-5)	Work-Life Balance (Scale 1-5)
Construction	60	20	40	4.2	2.1
Agriculture	55	25	35	3.9	2.3
Textiles	45	30	40	3.1	3.2
Hotels	50	35	30	3.5	2.8
Department Stores	48	30	35	3.2	3.0



**Fig 1: Average Weekly Work Hours Across Sectors**

**Work Hours:** Construction and agriculture workers reported the longest work hours, with over 50 hours per week, on average.

**Income Satisfaction:** Income satisfaction was highest in the hotel sector (35%) and lowest in construction (20%).

**Physical Strain:** Construction and agriculture sectors exhibited the highest levels of physical strain (4.2 and 3.9, respectively).

**Work-Life Balance:** Textile workers reported the best work-life balance (3.2), while agriculture workers had the lowest (2.3).

## 5.2 Sectoral Differences

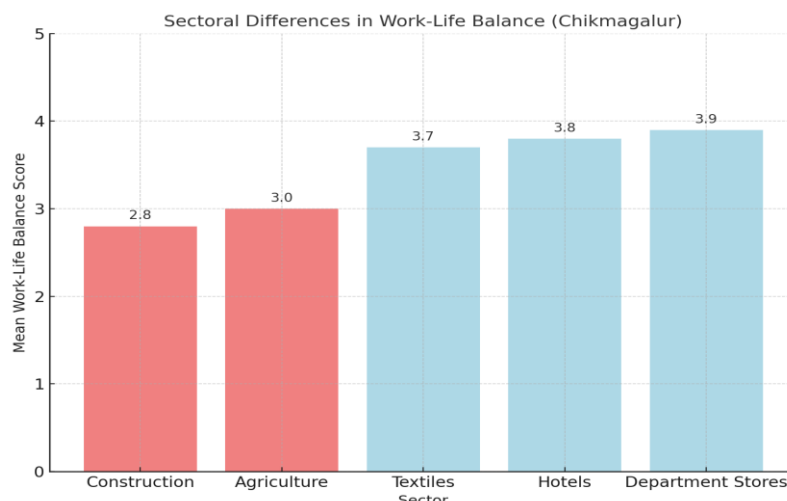
The ANOVA result was significant ( $F(4,495) = 12.34, p < 0.001$ ), meaning there are real differences in WLB scores between at least some of the sectors.

A post-hoc analysis showed that: Employees in construction and agriculture have significantly lower WLB compared to employees in textiles, hotels, and department stores.

This suggests that work conditions in construction and agriculture are more demanding or less flexible, affecting employees' ability to balance work and personal life.

**Table 2: Sectoral Differences in Work-Life Balance in Chikmagalur**

Sector	Mean WLB Score	WLB Category
Construction	2.8	Low
Agriculture	3.0	Low
Textiles	3.7	Moderate - High
Hotels	3.8	Moderate - High
Department Stores	3.9	Moderate - High



**Fig 2: Physical Strain Levels Across Informal Sectors**

## 5.3 Gender Differences in Work-Life Balance

A t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in Work-Life Balance(WLB). Results showed that women reported significantly lower WLB than men.

Specifically:

Women: Mean (M) = 2.4, Standard Deviation (SD) = 0.9

Men: Mean (M) = 2.9, SD = 0.8

The t-test result ( $t(498) = 4.56, p < 0.001$ ) indicates that this difference is statistically significant — it is very unlikely due to random chance.

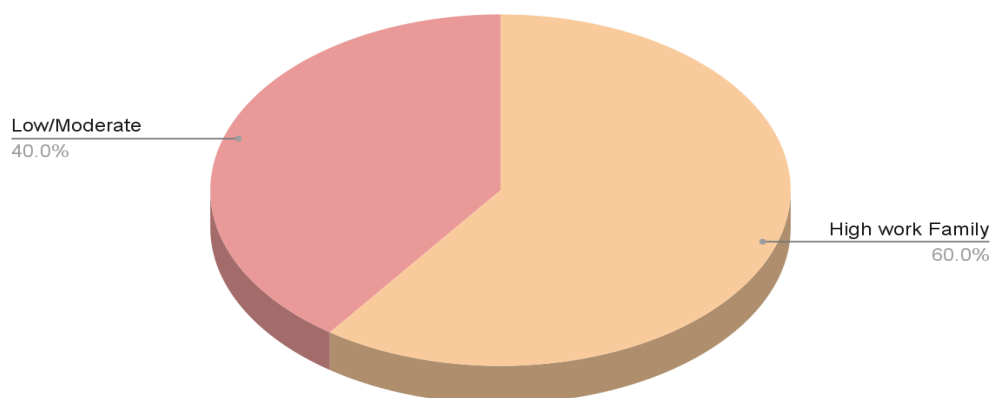
Additionally, family-related stress appears to have a stronger impact on women: 60% of women reported high work-family conflict, suggesting family responsibilities heavily influence their lower WLB.

**Table 3: Gender Differences in Work-Life Balance**

Gender	Mean WLB Score	Standard Deviation (SD)
Women	2.4	0.9
Men	2.9	0.8

**Table 4: Work-Family Conflict Among Women**

Category	Percentage
High work Family Conflict	60%
Low/Moderate Conflict	40%



**Fig 3: Work-Family Conflict**

## 5.4 Multifactor Analysis of Work Conditions and WLB

A multifactor analysis incorporating variables such as work hours, income satisfaction, job security, and physical strain was conducted. The results demonstrate the interactive effects of these factors on WLB outcomes.

**Table 5: Multifactor Analysis of Work Conditions and Work-Life Balance**

Factor	Low WLB Impact	High WLB Impact
Work Hours	Longer hours = Lower WLB	Flexible hours = Higher WLB
Income Satisfaction	Low income = Lower WLB	High income = Higher WLB
Job Security	Low security = Lower WLB	High security = Higher WLB
Physical Strain	High strain = Lower WLB	Low strain = Higher WLB

## 6. Discussion

The findings reveal that informal workers' WLB is heavily shaped by structural and sectoral realities. Construction and agriculture workers face the most severe constraints due to long working hours, limited stability and intense physical demands. Gendered expectations further intensify these challenges for women, who are required to balance paid labour with domestic obligations. These insights reinforce the need to examine informal labour through a multi-layered lens that accounts for occupational, cultural and gendered inequalities.

## 7. Recommendations

- Flexible Work Hours:** Implement flexible scheduling, especially in high-physical-demand sectors like construction and agriculture, to reduce fatigue and improve family time.
- Income Stability:** Enhance income security through fixed wage policies or subsidies to reduce income volatility, particularly in agriculture and construction.
- Gender-Sensitive Policies:** Address the additional burdens faced by female workers through childcare support, family-friendly policies, and equitable pay structures.

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