THINK INDIA JOURNAL

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-14-December-2019

Nature of Contracting and Subcontracting among Home-Based Workers in Punjab

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Abstract: Various major interrelated factors stimulate the informal economy. Key amongst these are the adoption of LPG regime, under which there has been more emphasis on the flexible contracting and sub- contracting as the employers aimed to reduce their costs by using the low cost producers via subcontracting and creates greater vulnerabilities for informal workers, specially home based workers. Through the use of homeworkers in rural and urban locations, supplies to national and multinational corporations reduce their overheads and economic risks by transferring the pressures of prices and tight deadlines imposed buyer driven chains onto the most vulnerable workers (subcontracting workers) at the bottom of supply chains. The object of this paper an attempt has been made to examine the nature/ type of work the home based workers have to perform in the different industry groups and production activities. This paper is based on primary data collected through the survey of home based workers in Punjab state. The study can be stated that manufacturing is the main sector for male and female home based workers in both rural and urban areas. large majority of these workers (60.00 per cent) involved in manufacturing work and the share of female home based workers involved in manufacturing is more than 70 per cent in both rural and urban areas. 20 per cent home-based workers are involved in wholesale and retail trade. It points towards the limited employment opportunities for female subcontracting workers, especially in rural areas and most of them are working from their own dwelling unit in rural (86.36 per cent) as well as urban areas (79.89 per cent).

Keywords: Manufacturing, Subcontracting Workers, Own Account Workers, Rural, Urban

Introduction

International research proves that in all regions of the world, informal employment is growing (Jutting and Laiglesia, 2009). Various major interrelated factors stimulate the informal economy. Key amongst these are globalisation which provides firms with

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ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-14-December-2019

opportunity to access new product and labour markets and creates greater vulnerabilities for workers, the movement of production and the widespread use of management innovations in particular, practices associated with flexibility, outsourcing and subcontracting the generalised adoption of neo-liberal philosophies and practices, especially increased deregulation and over reliance on markets to provide regulating functions (Beynon and Schier, 2002). Through the use of homeworkers in rural and urban locations, supplies to national and multinational corporations reduce their overheads and economic risks by transferring the pressures of prices and tight deadlines imposed buyer driven chains onto the most vulnerable workers (homeworkers) at the bottom of supply chains.

Production is generally organised by middlemen or contractors who form the crucial link between a supplier and the homeworker. Contractors usually work on a contract basis as casual workers or on a commission/piece-rate basis, they are not employees. Contractors may come from the same locality or community as the homeworkers and often have non-commercial relations within the community as well (NGH, 2007). Increasingly, there is evidence of a web of linkages between formal and informal employment (Trebilcock, 2005). Formal enterprises are using informal enterprise in their value chains and purchasing products directly or indirectly from informal workers. Moreover, workers are moving between formal and informal work on a needs basis. According to recent evidence, the 2008-09 global financial crisis has caused many workers to lose their formal jobs (Jutting and Laiglesia, 2009), and turn to informal work such as subcontracting workers and own account workers.

Although home-based work seems to be increasing in both developed and developing countries, in the former, this increase is confined largely to micro-electronic technology and the automation of office work. In the developing world, however, this increase seems to span an enormous range of both traditional activities and new technologies, and to be associated with increasing landlessness and poverty. In developing countries with no unemployment insurance, people are forced into informal employment with low pay, no protection and high risk exposure. There is growing evidence of the deteriorating conditions and decreasing autonomy of home- based workers. The reasons for these include the decreased availability of raw materials which result in rising production costs, exploitation by private contractors resulting in very low incomes, the lack of alternative employment opportunities which reduces the bargaining power of workers and the increasing informalisation of the modern sector (Singh and Viitanen, 1987). But in spite of the deteriorating conditions and decreasing

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ISSN:0971-1260
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autonomy, the number of workers engaged in home- based production in Asia is not only massive, but evidently increasing. In India, home-based workers are engaged in innumerable trades. Homeworkers are doing a variety of activities like stitching garments, food processing, weaving, spinners, toy making, potters, embroidery work, lace makers, zari work and knitting etc., on the other side, own account workers are doing majority of work related to wholesale and retail trade. There are however no authentic statistics available regarding the home based workers. Only a small proportion of trades are officially recognised as home-based work for which the statutory minimum wage must be paid. Since home based work is covered by an intricate tape story of contractual arrangements for piece-rate payments, the minimum wage-rate often remains a distinct theoretical ideal.

Objective and Methodology: In the present paper, an attempt has been made to examine the nature/ type of work the home based workers have to perform in the different industry groups and production activities. An attempt has also been made to examine the nature of work such as distribution of home based workers in different industry sections, location of workplace, type of provision of raw material/credit/equipments and availability of work. This study is based on primary data of home based workers in Punjab state. Primary data collected through the survey of home based workers in Punjab. A well-designed questionnaire has been used to record the data and the collect the data through multistage random sampling method.

The proportion of home based workers in different industry groups of NIC 2008 in non agricultural sector in Punjab has been presented in table 1. It may be noted that among the different industry sections, the home based workers do not exist in industry sections such as D, E, F, H, J, K, O, R, T and U in both rural and urban areas. In rural areas, they are also absent in Real Estate Activities (L), Professional Activities (M) and Administrative and Support Services (N). It shows that the work activities of home based workers are restricted in few industry groups. In rural areas, the share of male home based workers is 44.32 per cent in Section C (manufacturing) , 36.36 per cent in Section G (Wholesale and Retail trade), 1.14 per cent in section I (Accommodation and Food Service Activities), 5.68 per cent in section Q (Human Health and Social Work Activities) and 12.50 per cent in section S (Other Service Activities) while a major share of home based female workers is found in Section C (manufacturing) which is 73.48 per cent. Another11.36 per cent of them is involved in Section G (Wholesale and Retail trade), 5.30 per cent in section P (Education),0.76 per cent in

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ISSN:0971-1260
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section Q (Human Health and Social Work Activities) and 9.09 per cent in section S (Other Service Activities).

Table 1: Distribution of Home-Based Workers according to Industry Section NIC 2008

Industry Section	Rural		Total	Urban		Total	Rural+Urban
	Female	Male		Female	Male		Female+Male
Manufacturing (C)	97 (73.48)	39 (44.32)	136 (61.82)	129 (72.07)	47 (38.84)	176 (58.67)	312 (60.00)
Wholesale and Retail trade (G)	15 (11.36)	32 (36.36)	47 (21.36)	11 (6.15)	48 (39.67)	59 (19.67)	106 (20.38)
Accommodation and Food Service Activities (I)	0 (0)	1 (1.14)	1 (0.45)	2 (1.18)	6 (4.96)	8 (2.67)	9 (1.73)
Real Estate Activities (L)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0.56)	2 (1.65)	3 (1.00)	3 (0.58)
Professional Activities (M)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (3.35)	7 (5.79)	13 (4.33)	13 (2.50)
Administrative and Support Service (N)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0.56)	0 (0)	1 (0.33)	1 (0.001)
Education (P)	7 (5.30)	0 (0)	7 (3.18)	13 (7.26)	3 (2.48)	16 (5.33)	23 (4.42)
Human Health and Social Work Activities (Q)	1 (0.76)	5 (5.68)	6 (2.73)	0 (0)	3 (2.48)	3 (1.00)	9 (1.73)
Other Service Activities (S)	12 (9.09)	11 (12.50)	23 (10.45)	16 (8.94)	5 (4.13)	21 (7.00)	44 (8.46)
Total	132	88	220	179	121	300	520

Note: Figures in brackets denote percentage
Source: Field Survey, 2018-19

The table further shows that, in urban areas that is 38.84 per cent of the sampled home based workers are involved in Section C (manufacturing), 39.67 per cent in Section G (Wholesale and Retail trade), 4.96 per cent in section I (Accommodation and Food Service Activities), 1.65 per cent in section L (Real Estate Activities), 5.79 per cent in section M (Professional Activities), 2.48 per cent in section P (Education) as well as in section Q (Human Health and Social Work Activities) and 4.13 per cent in section S (Other Service Activities). The gender-wise division of the workers shows that 72.07 per cent home based female workers are occupied in manufacturing sector, 6.15 per cent are in Wholesale and Retail trade sector, only 1.18 per cent are engaged in accommodation and food service activities, 3.35 per cent in section M (Professional Activities), a very small proportion of them (0.56 per cent) is engaged in administrative and support service and real estate activities and 8.94 per cent are active in section S (Other Service Activities). A negligible number is

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ISSN:0971-1260
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engaged in health services in urban areas. The data in the above table clearly show that a large majority of these workers (60.00 per cent) indulges in manufacturing work and the share of female home based workers involved in manufacturing is more than 70 per cent in both rural and urban areas. Manufacturing is the single most important industry for male and female home based workers in both areas. By contrast, about 20 per cent home-based workers are involved in wholesale and retail trade. Thus, women home-based workers are concentrated in two categories - wholesale and retail trade and other services. But the proportion of female home based workers in wholesale and retail trade is a smaller than the male workers.

Table 2: Distribution of Home Based Workers by their Employment Status in Different Industry Section

Industry Section	Own Account Workers		Total	Subcontracting workers		Total	Employers		Total
	Rural	Urban		Rural	Urban		Rural	Urban	
Manufacturing (C)	83 (50.00)	78 (41.05)	161 (45.22)	47 (97.92)	91 (92.86)	138 (94.52)	6 (100)	7 (58.33)	13 (72.22)
Wholesale and Retail trade (G)	47 (28.31)	58 (30.53)	105 (29.49)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (8.33)	1 (5.56)
Accommodation and Food Service Activities (I)	1 (0.60)	6 (3.16)	7 (1.97)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (16.67)	2 (11.11)
Real Estate Activities (L)	0 (0)	2 (1.05)	2 (0.56)	0 (0)	1 (1.02)	1 (0.68)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Professional Activities (M)	0 (0)	9 (4.74)	9 (2.53)	0 (0)	4 (4.08)	4 (2.74)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Administrative and Support Service (N)	0 (0)	1 (0.53)	1 (0.28)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Education (P)	7 (4.22)	16 (8.42)	23 (6.46)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Human Health and Social Work Activities (Q)	6 (3.61)	3 (1.58)	9 (2.53)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Other Service Activities (S)	22 (13.25)	17 (8.95)	39 (10.96)	1 (2.08)	2 (2.04)	3 (2.05)	0 (0)	2 (16.67)	2 (11.11)
Total	166	190	356	48	98	146	6	12	18

Note: Figures in brackets denote percentage
Source: Field Survey, 2018-19

Further, we can look at the distribution of home-based workers on basis of their employment and activity status in table 2. Self employed workers constitute a predominant share as home based workers. The self employed workers can be divided in employers, own account workers (OAWs) and subcontracting workers. The table shows that own account

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ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-14-December-2019

work has the major proportion in manufacturing category for both men and women in both rural and urban areas. The percentage of rural OAWs (50 per cent) in manufacturing category is higher than urban OAWs (41.05 per cent). The data show that about 30 per cent of the workers have been involved within wholesale and retail trade activities in rural areas and urban areas. Wholesale and retail trade is second major industry groups in which majority of the own account workers are engaged that is 28.31 per cent in rural areas and 30.53 per cent in urban areas. In addition, the share of own account workers into other service activities is higher (13.25 per cent) in rural areas than that of the urban (8.95 per cent) ones. Only 4.74 per cent own account workers have been working in professional activities in urban areas but a negligible number are engaged in professional activities, administrative and support service and real estate activities in rural areas. A very small proportion of them (0.60 per cent) are occupied in accommodation and food service activities in rural areas as compared to 3.16 per cent in urban areas. Only 1.05 per cent of the own account workers are engaged in real estate activities and 0.53 per cent workers are busy in administrative and support services in urban areas at the time of survey. They are also involved in education in which the share of urban own account workers (8.42 per cent) is higher as compared to the rural ones (4.22 per cent). Nearly 3.61 per cent own account workers are working within human health and social work activities in rural areas and only 1.58 per cent is working in urban areas.

The data in the above table clearly shows that a large majority of subcontracting workers (94.52 per cent) indulges in manufacturing and around 2 per cent subcontracting workers are involved in professional activities and other service activities, respectively and there are negligible involvement of subcontracting workers in other industry sectors. However, the table 2 also demonstrates that a large majority of subcontracting workers (more than 90.00 per cent) are engaged in manufacturing sector. It is found that 97.92 per cent subcontracting workers indulge in rural areas and 92.86 per cent subcontracting workers are working in manufacturing sector in urban areas. Only 1.02 per cent and 4.08 per cent subcontracting workers are involved in real estate activities and professional activities in urban areas. Yet, 2 per cent subcontracting workers are involved in other service activities in both rural and urban areas. The table also shows that a very small proportion of the workers are working as employers. In rural areas all employers are engaged in manufacturing sector as compared to 53.33 per cent in urban areas. It is also found that nearly 17 per cent of the employers are working into accommodation and food service activities and other service

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ISSN:0971-1260
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activities in urban areas. Only 8.33 per cent employers are engaged in wholesale and retail trade in urban ones.

Further, from table 3, we can see a detailed picture of location of workplace of home based workers in rural as well as urban areas. In rural areas, 56.82 per cent home based workers are working from own dwelling unit and majority of female home based workers i.e., 86.36 per cent have been working from home as compared to male home based workers (12.50 per cent). Another 26.36 per cent of the home based workers are managing their work from a structure attached to own dwelling unit in rural areas. This proportion is only 11.36 per cent for the females as compared to 48.86 per cent for the males in rural areas. The table further shows that 7.27 per cent home based workers are working from open area adjacent to own dwelling unit in rural areas and this proportion is 17.05 per cent for males and only 0.76 per cent for the females. Nearly 10 per cent of rural home based workers are working from detached structure adjacent to own dwelling unit (21.59 per cent males and about 2 per cent for females).

Table 3: Distribution of Home Based Workers by Location of Workplace

Location of workplace	Rural			Urban			R+U
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	F+M
Own dwelling unit	114 (86.36)	11 (12.50)	125 (56.82)	143 (79.89)	32 (26.45)	175 (58.33)	300 (57.69)
Structure attached to own dwelling unit	15 (11.36)	43 (48.86)	58 (26.36)	28 (15.64)	45 (37.19)	73 (24.33)	131 (25.19)
Open area adjacent to own dwelling unit	1 (0.76)	15 (17.05)	16 (7.27)	5 (2.79)	8 (6.61)	13 (4.33)	29 (5.58)
Detached structure adjacent to own dwelling unit	2 (1.52)	19 (21.59)	21 (9.55)	3 (1.68)	36 (29.75)	39 (13.00)	60 (11.54)
Total	132	88	220	179	121	300	520

Note: Figures in brackets denote percentage
Source: Field Survey, 2018-19

In urban areas, 58.33 per cent home based workers are working from own dwelling unit. This proportion is around 80 per cent for females and 26.45 per cent for the males. The table further shows that 24.33 per cent of the home based workers are working from structure attached to own dwelling unit (15.64 per cent for females and 37.19 per cent for males); 4.33

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ISSN:0971-1260
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per cent from open area adjacent to own dwelling unit (6.61 per cent males and 2.79 per cent females) and 13 per cent are working from detached structure adjacent to own dwelling unit (29.75 per cent males and only 1.68 per cent females). Thus, it can be stated that a majority of the home based workers are working from their own dwelling unit and this proportion is considerably higher for the females than the males who have a greater proportion of those working from a structure attached to own dwelling unit.

Table 4: Distribution of Home Based Workers by Type of Provision for Credit/Raw Material/Equipments

Type of provision	Own Account Workers			Subcontracting Workers		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Own arrangement	110 (66.27)	142 (74.74)	252 (70.79)	0 (0)	3 (3.06)	3 (2.05)
provided by the Customer				provided by the enterprise		
Raw Material Only	56 (33.73)	48 (25.26)	104 (29.21)	34 (70.83)	76 (77.55)	110 (75.34)
Equipment only	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (2.08)	3 (3.06)	4 (2.740
Credit only	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (8.33)	2 (2.04)	6 (4.11)
Raw Material+ Equipment	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (8.33)	12 (12.24)	16 (10.96)
Raw Material+ Credit	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	5 (10.42)	2 (2.04)	7 (4.79)
Credit+ Equipment	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Total	166	190	356	48	98	146

Note: Figures in brackets denote percentage
Source: Field Survey, 2018-19

Different types of provisions for credit, raw materials, and equipments are given by their source in table 4. Among the own account workers, own arrangement is predominant in both rural and urban areas. 66.27 per cent of own account workers in rural areas and 74.74 per cent in urban areas are managing these provisions from their own sources. Only those who are working under the specification of the customer are provided with only the raw material. This share is high in rural areas (33.73 per cent) than in urban areas (25.26 per cent). Table presents the subcontracting workers working under the product specification for which provision of credit/raw materials/equipments is made by the enterprise .Only 3.06 per cent of the subcontracting workers have arranged all things personally in urban areas while none of them has done so in the rural areas. 75.34 per cent subcontracting home based

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ISSN:0971-1260
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workers are working under the specification of the enterprises is provided support with the raw material and this share is 70.83 per cent in rural areas and 77.55 per cent in urban areas.

Those who are working under the specification of the enterprises are provided support with equipment is only 2.74 per cent. This share is high in urban areas (3.06 per cent) than in rural areas (2.08 per cent). The proportion of credit provided by (employer) enterprise is about 4 per cent and this share is 8.33 per cent in rural areas, who worked under the specification. In the urban areas, this proportion is only 2.04 per cent. The proportion of raw material and equipment provided by enterprises is 8.33 per cent in rural areas and 12.24 per cent in urban areas. The share of raw material and credit are provided by enterprises is 10.42 per cent in rural areas and 2.04 per cent in urban areas. The most common form of support is in terms of raw materials only. The forms of support like credit and equipment is almost non-existent. Credit support, which is much more important than any other form of support, it is very little in both areas.

Mode of payment of wages is an important determinant of quality of employment. This is also important in deciding labour processes. Piece rate is a clearly much more manageable and cost reducing method of wage payment. Piece rate is widely prevalent basis of payment among subcontracting workers on the other side own account workers are received payment only in cash. It is clear from table 5 the quality of employment of subcontracting workers are poor than own account workers and other informal workers. Because subcontracting workers are exploited by contractors or middlemen and depend on contractors or middlemen for work orders and payments. Subcontracting workers have to put in extreme hard work and then receive the piece-rates wages which are remarkably low.

Table 5: Distribution of Subcontracting Workers according to Basis of Payment

Methods of payments	Rural		Urban		Rural+Urban
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female+Male
Piece rate %	47 (97.92)	0 (0)	84 (96.55)	7 (63.64)	138 (94.52)
Cash/contract rate %	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (3.45)	4 (36.36)	7 (4.79)
In kind %	1 (2.03)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0.68)
Total	48	0	87	11	146

Note: Figures in brackets denote percentage

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ISSN:0971-1260
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Source: Field Survey, 2018-19

Table 5 shows the methods of payment of subcontracting workers. The piece rate formed the basis of payment for the majority of the subcontracting workers in rural as well as urban areas. The non-agricultural sector and a higher proportion of females received piece rate payment than males. In the rural areas 97.92 per cent females subcontracting workers received piece rate payment as compared to 96.55 per cent in urban areas and 63.64 per cent male workers received piece rate payment in urban areas. While only 3.45 per cent of female workers in urban areas have received it in cash as compared to 36.36 per cent male workers. 2.03 per cent female workers in rural areas have received payment in kind.

Table 6: Distribution of Home Based Workers according Received Type of Training

Training Source	Own Account Workers			Subcontracting workers		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Government	15 (9.04)	32 (16.84)	47 (13.20)	1 (2.08)	6 (6.12)	7 (4.79)
Private	29 (17.47)	43 (22.63)	72 (20.22)	2 (4.17)	9 (9.18)	11 (7.56)
Informal Source	45 (27.11)	36 (18.95)	81 (22.75)	42 (87.50)	83 (84.69)	125 (85.62)
No training	77 (46.38)	79 (41.58)	156 (43.82)	3 (6.25)	0 (0)	3 (2.05)
Total	166	190	356	48	98	146

Note: Figures in brackets denote percentage
Source: Field Survey, 2018-19

Subcontracting workers especially female workers work on low piece rate because they have not received any profession and vocation training from government and private institutes and mostly subcontracting workers have received informal training on the other side mostly own account workers received vocation and profession training from government and private institutes. This is one major factor which has an effect on the working condition of subcontracting workers or quality of employment. Table 6 gives the details related to home based workers' training status. The table shows that 13.20 per cent own account workers have received training from government institutes but this proportion is only 4.79 per cent for the subcontracting workers. Further 20.22 per cent own account workers got training from private institutes as compared to merely 7.56 per cent for the subcontracting workers. The proportion of informal training is high among subcontracting workers; it is 85.62 per cent as

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ISSN:0971-1260
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compared to own account workers (22.75 per cent). 43.82 per cent own account workers have not received any training on the other only 2.05 subcontracting workers have not received training. The table also shows a better training status in urban areas than the rural ones.

Table 7: Distribution of Subcontracting Workers according to the Availability of Work

Work Availability categories	Rural	Urban	Total
Less than 6 months	8 (16.67)	10 (10.20)	18 (12.33)
6 - 8 months	33 (68.75)	49 (50.00)	82 (56.16)
9 - 10 months	6 (12.50)	29 (29.59)	35 (23.97)
11 - 12 months	1 (2.08)	10 (10.20)	11 (7.53)
Total	48	98	146

Note: Figures in brackets denote percentage
Source: Field Survey, 2018-19

From the table 7, it can be interpreted that 12.33 per cent subcontracting workers work for less than 6 months in a year while 56.16 per cent per cent of them work for 6 -8 months, nearly 24 per cent work for 9-10 months and only 7.53 per cent work for 11-12 months. It means that majority of subcontracting workers get work between 6-8 months in a year. In rural areas 16.67 per cent work for less than 6 months in a year as compared to 10.20 workers in urban areas. Only 2.08 per cent workers work for 11 -12 months in rural areas while this proportion is 10.20 per cent in urban areas.

Table 8: Distribution of Subcontracting Workers according to Number of Outlets

Number of outlets	Rural	Urban	Total
One outlet %	38 (79.17)	70 (71.43)	108 (73.97)
Two outlets %	9 (18.75)	25 (25.51)	34 (23.29)
Three outlets %	0 (0)	3 (3.06)	3 (2.05)
Do not know %	1 (2.08)	0 (0)	1 (0.68)
Total	48	98	146

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ISSN:0971-1260
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Note: Figures in brackets denote percentage
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Table 8 shows that the presence of only one outlet of disposal is prominent in both rural and urban areas and this proportion is higher in rural areas (79.17 per cent) than the urban ones (71.43 per cent). On the other hand 18.75 per cent in rural areas and 25.51 per cent in urban areas are working for two outlets and only 3.06 per cent in urban areas are working for three outlets.

Conclusion: To sum up, it can be stated that manufacturing is the main sector for male and female home based workers in both rural and urban areas. Wholesale and retail trade is second major industry groups in which majority of the own account workers are engaged. This share is higher for male workers and those who work in urban areas. Own account workers perform a greater variety of activities than the subcontracting workers. It has also been found that it is largely the female workers who are engaged in subcontracting and that too is mainly in the manufacturing sector. It points towards the limited employment opportunities for female subcontracting workers, especially in rural areas and most of them are working from their own dwelling unit in rural as well as urban areas. It has also been found that most of the home based workers are making their own arrangements for basic provisions of raw material credit etc and only the subcontracting workers are provided with some raw material by the employer. For most of them single outlet of disposal is more common in both rural and urban areas. Finally, the mode of payment for a big majority of these workers is based on the piece rate. In short, the nature of work has been found to be better for the own account workers than the subcontracting workers.

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