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Gender Discrimination: A Major Constraint on the Path of Status of Women Refugees of Odisha

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Abstract

The refugee women face unique or gender-related forms of persecution or violence. Women refugees may be more vulnerable than other refugees, finding themselves uprooted and separated from their family members or traditional support mechanisms, or isolated from their communities. They may be at risk or have suffered from a wide range of protection problems, including physical abuse, intimidation, torture, particular economic hardship, marginalization or community hostility. It is always the women refugees who suffer more on account of unemployment, food insecurity as well as a threat to their physical wellbeing. Gender inequality in a patriarchal society exacerbates the situation. In the economic realm a refugee crisis may lead to further marginalization and impoverishment of women through loss of traditional sources of income. Hence combating it also requires addressing the gender inequality that is at its root. This may necessitate a specific response. The Women-at-Risk resettlement criterion is one of these responses. It calls for providing international protection and assistance through resettlement.

Keywords Persecution, vulnerable, marginalization, impoverishment, Crisis

Introduction

The word "refugee" is used to describe a person who is forced to flee his home for any reason for which the individual is not responsible, be it persecution, public disorder, civil war, famine, earthquake or environmental degradation. However, in international law a "refugee" is a person who is forced to leave home for certain specified reasons and who, furthermore, is outside the country of his or her origin and does not have its protection. According to Astri Suhrke "Global Refugee movements and strategies of response" in M. Kritz ed. US Immigration and Refugee Policy: Global and Domestic Issues (1983) P.P. 157-62 a "refugee" can be defined in three ways;

- ❖ Legally (as stipulated in national or international law)
- ❖ Politically (as interpreted to meet political exigencies)
- ❖ Sociologically (as reflecting an empirical reality)

It is estimated that more than 7, 00,000 refugees are living in various parts of Odisha. A majority of them are Bengali refugees, the rest are from Tibet, Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. After the formation of East Pakistan in 1948, thousands of Bengalis had left their homes to settle in India. In Odisha, poverty is a key challenge for the majority of refugees and asylum-seekers, who also face discrimination from local communities with little understanding of refugee issues. The refugee women of Odisha face a number of challenges for their sustenance in the society. They face economic and cultural challenges and challenges to lead a safe and secured life.

Objective In this paper attempt has been made to study the challenges faced by refugee women and their concerns.

Methodology adopted

The present study has been carried out in Rajnagar, Mahakalpada and Pattamundai blocks of

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Kendrapada district of Odisha. All total 100 women refugees of Kendrapada district have been selected through stratified quota sampling procedure. The refugees from young, middle and elderly age group have been selected for proper representation of the sample.

Study outcomes

The refugee women of Odisha face economic challenges because of their lack of access to various rights. About 54% of respondents face discrimination in their access to land right. About 13% of respondents cannot able to exercise their reproductive right. They also face discrimination in deciding their size of family, number of children and space between the children. All these are decided by the male member of the family. Gender discrimination is very prominent in each and every sector

of society and it hampers the status of women in general and refugee's women in particular. So the refugee women have shared their feelings regarding the ending the gender discrimination from the family. Around 54% of respondents are in favour of increasing the awareness of parents for ending gender discrimination. If the parents will be aware about the impact of gender inequality then they can able to establish one gender neutral society and can mobilise their children to maintain gender equality in each and every sphere. Around 13% of women refugees have reported that it is very essential to educate the girl children regarding the gender neutral education. If the girl children will be trained about the gender equality then they can able to set up gender neutral society. The refugee women of Odisha are of opinion that child marriage is a major Constraint for improving their health status.

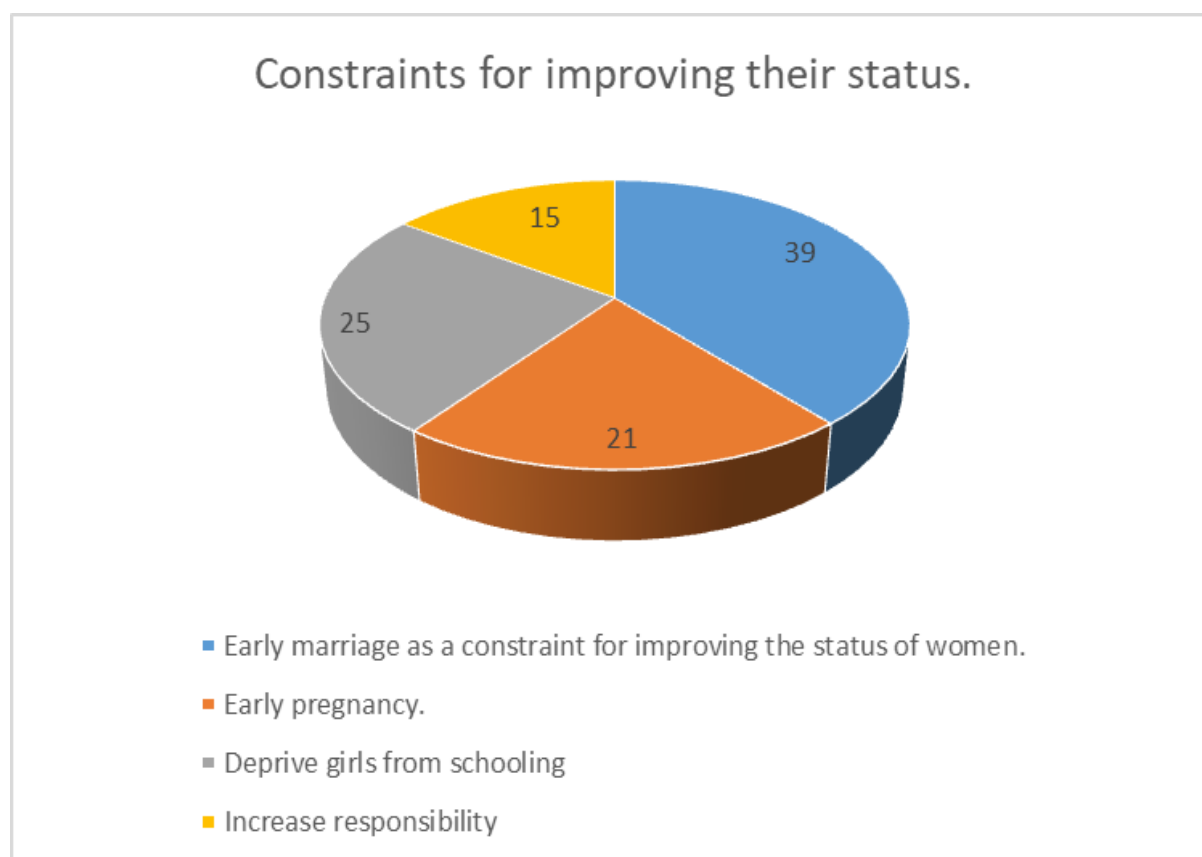


Fig.1: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of constraints on the path of their status

About 39% of respondents have reported that early marriage is a major barrier for hindering the status of women. The health condition of women is very much affected by early pregnancy. As the girls married an early age, so 25% of respondents are of the opinion that they became deprive of education and cannot able to attend the school regularly which is a major cause of increasing the dropout rate among the women refugees. As the girls shares the house hold responsibility at an early age so about 39% of respondents have pointed out that their house hold responsibilities is a major constraint for improving their status. About 21% of women refugees are of the opinion that early marriage leads to early pregnancy which is a major cause of low birth weight babies which are also the major cause of increasing maternal mortality rate and Infant

Mortality rate of the country. As they belong to poor socio-economic group so their knowledge regarding earning per day is an important component for determining their economic status. About 26% of respondents said that minimum earning per day is < Rs. 400/- where as 38% of respondents pointed out that it is between Rs. 400/- to Rs 500/-. About 18% of respondents pointed out that, it is > Rs. 500/-. So the women refugees do not have any accurate information regarding minimum earning per day. They are cheated by their employers in terms of wage and hours of work. So the chances of exploitation by the employer are more in case of women refugees, because they do not have any proper information regarding the minimum wage per day. The poor, innocent and illiterate women refugees face a lot of harassment at the workplace by their employers.

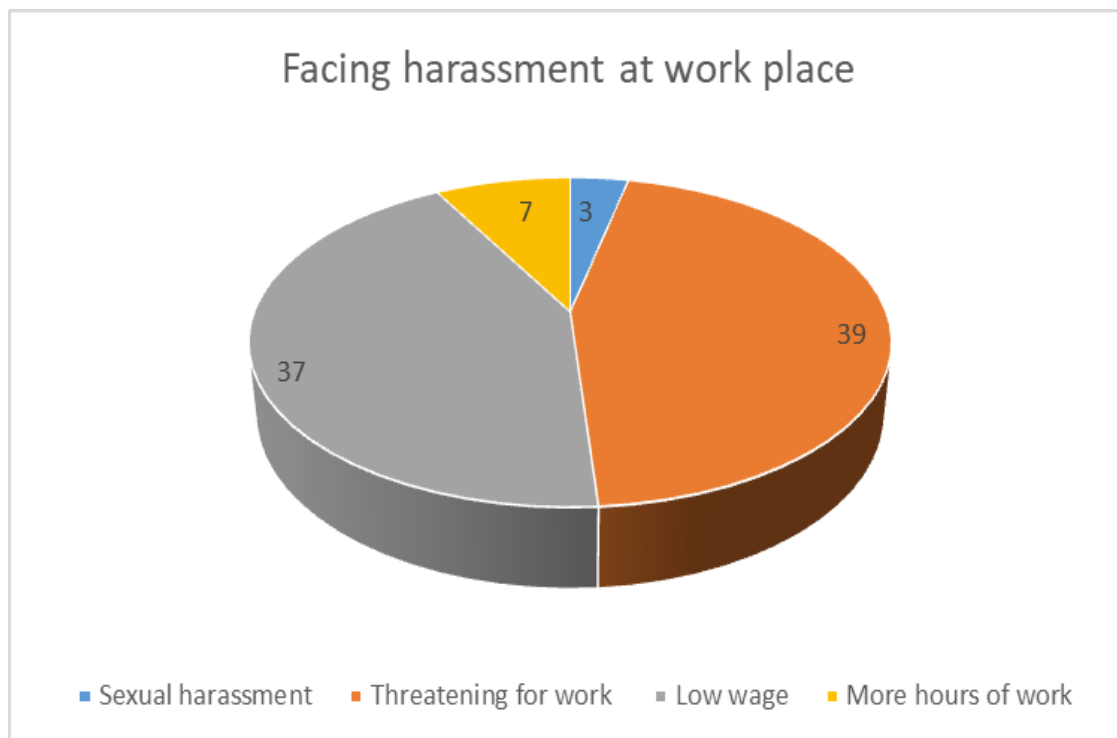


Fig.2: Distribution of respondents on the basis of Harassments faced by the Refugee women

The above figure shows that very marginal response i.e 3% regarding the sexual harassment at work place reveals that either they do not know about the concept of sexual harassment or as it is a very sensitive issue they remain silent about it. Maximum percentage of respondents i.e. 39% have pointed out that they have been threatened by their employer to leave the job in case of delay in coming to the work place. Around 37% of women refugees are getting

low wages for their work and they do not open their voice against it because of their lack of union and lack of knowledge about minimum wage act. Only 7% of respondents are of the opinion that they are doing more hours of work and getting low wages. In this way the women refugees are exploited by the employer at work place and facing a lot of problem.

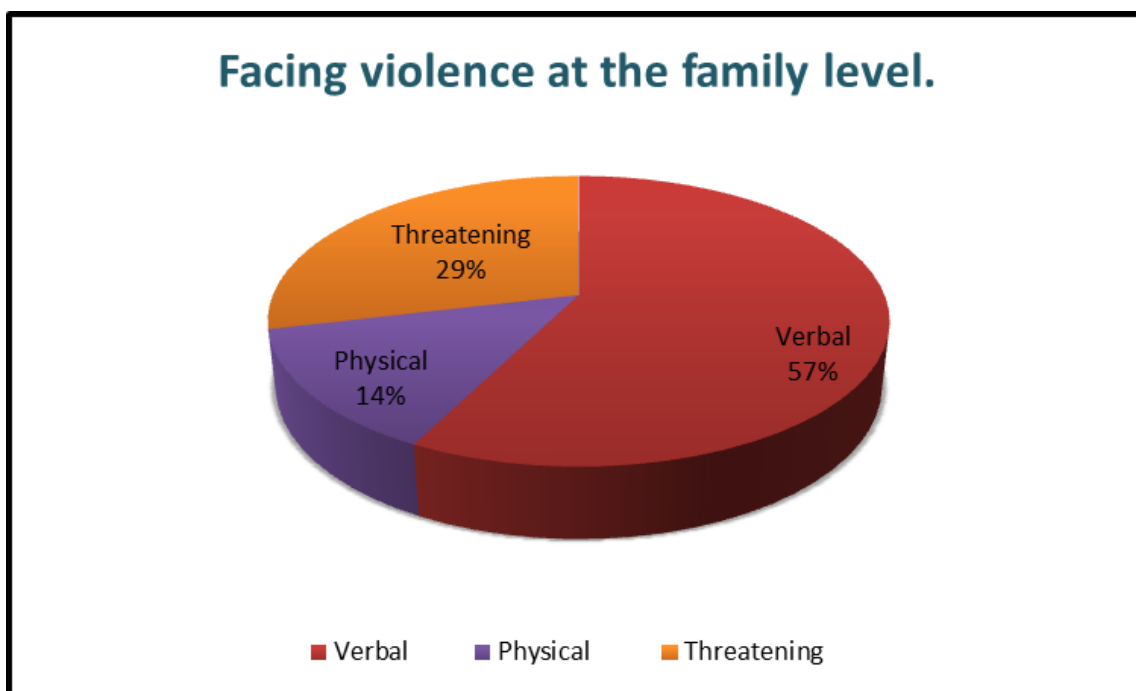


Fig.3: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of violence faced by the women Refuge

The above figure reveals that in the present day society the violence is a serious issue which is affecting the lives of women and they become mentally and morally suppressed and cannot able to share their problems with others. About

57% respondents are facing verbal violence in the family. All type of abusive languages is listened by them by their family members and husbands in case of any type of problem in the family, as if they are responsible for all type

of disturbances in the family. Around 14% of women refugees are beaten by their husbands because of drinking habits by their husbands. Around 29% of respondents are threatened by their husbands at the time of meeting the financial need of the family. Besides economic challenges, the refugee women also face cultural challenges because the poor refugee women are most innocent in nature. They also became the prey of the evil practices and obey all the blind beliefs to bring perfection in their life. The stereotypical culture has compelled them to fall prey of all the blind beliefs.

Table No-1.1: Distribution of respondents on the regarding various beliefs.

Type of Beliefs	Frequency	Percentage
Son preference is essential	67	67
Education for girls is an unnecessary expenditure	07	07
Sons are the assets for the parents	10	10
Less Education of daughter is preferred by the parents	04	04
More no of children in the family	01	01
Women without son are not given due respect in the society.	11	11
Daughter in law should bring dowry	--	--

It is evident from the table 1.1 that about 67% of women refugees are in favour of sons. Because they put importance to son for taking care in the later part of life and for the continuation of family. About 10% of respondent are of the opinion that sons are the economic assets of the family and they will enhance the economic condition of the family. Only 7% of women refugees think that spending money for the education for girls is wastage of money. The daughter will marry and will go to the in laws house. So the daughters should not be provided with any education. So 4% of parents are of the opinion that less education will be given to the daughters, because less education means less dowry and the bride price in the marriage market will be less. About 11% of respondents are of the opinion that if the women will not able to reproduce the son in the family they are treated as a witch. Nobody likes to see her face. The people think that she has committed sin in her life for which she cannot able to reproduce a son. She should observe some rituals or follow the path of saints to have a baby boy. So all these blind beliefs make the life of women refugees miserable. They cannot able to lead a peaceful life and maintain their proper status in the family and in the society.

Table No-1.2, Distribution of respondents on the basis of societal practices as per the taboos

Taboos	Practices	Frequency(%)
Regarding Son preference	Practicing female foeticide	03
	Adopting blind belief	11
Education for girls is an unnecessary expenditure	Not sending their daughters to School	03
	Dropping out them from education	08
Sons are assets for parents	More Investment is done by the parents for son's education.	07
	Providing more care to the sons than	01

	daughters	
Less education for daughters is preferred by parents.	Less dowry	07
	Support in house hold work	30
More number of children in the family	Practice of Child Labour	05
	Affecting the rights to education of children	--
Women without sons are not given due respect in the family	Give rise to practice of witch hunting	--
	Mistreatment by the family members	09
Daughter- in- law without dowry	Dowry torture	--
	Bride burning	--

The above table shows that in order to bring perfection in life the respondents have to undertake some taboos. About 38% of women refugees are worshipping God to beget a son. About 30% of respondents are observing rituals to get a son and 25% are following the words of Guru's and Babas to beget a son. This reveals that son preference is very high among the refugee women. About 35% of respondents are of the opinion that education for girls is an unnecessary expenditure. Around 27% of women refugees are of the opinion that expenditure on girl's education is an unnecessary expenditure because they will not do any job and earn money. 32% of respondents are of the opinion that after marriage the girls will be house wives so it is an unnecessary expenditure. Around 44% of them have pointed out that the sons are the assets for the future because they will be the income earner of the family and improve the economic status of the family. About 23% of respondents are of the opinion that sons are assets for the family because they will take care of their parents in the old age. 30% of parents preferred less education for their daughters because they think that they will help in domestic work. 35% of them preferred early marriage of their daughters because of less education. Only 6% of respondents are of opinion that less education of daughters will relieve them from marriage market. Around 35% of respondents prefer more number of children because that leads to more earning hands in the family. 23% are of the opinion that more of children will increase the income of the family. 15% of respondents reported that it will improve the standard of living of the family. 20% of respondents feel that women without son are considered as career of misfortune. Around 43% are of the opinion that society has a differential attitude towards women without son. 23% of respondents are of the opinion that if daughter will not bring dowry they will face domestic violence. 38% are of the opinion that they will face bride burning. Regarding the practices of these taboos respondents are of the opinion that the practices of these beliefs have made their life miserable. About 30% of women refugees are not in favour of education of their daughters. They are not sending their daughters to the school because they said that their daughters are helping them in doing the household works. So if they will go to school it will be difficult for them to manage all the household works. About 11% of respondents reported that they have done the brats and observe fasts to have a son. It is imposed on them by their mother- in- laws. Around 9% of respondents face mistreatment from family members because they do not have sons. 7% of respondents have spent money for the education of their sons and they also said that they have

dropped the education of their daughters without completion of class – V. Because they are of the opinion that less education leads to less dowry for their daughters. About 8% of respondents have drop their daughter from class VI-because they think that it is an unnecessary expenditure. In other cases very marginal percentage of

respondents are practicing the other beliefs and taboos. Security and safety plays an important role for leading a peaceful life. The women refugees, as they are being migrated from other places, so for them security and safety should prioritized on the basis of support services

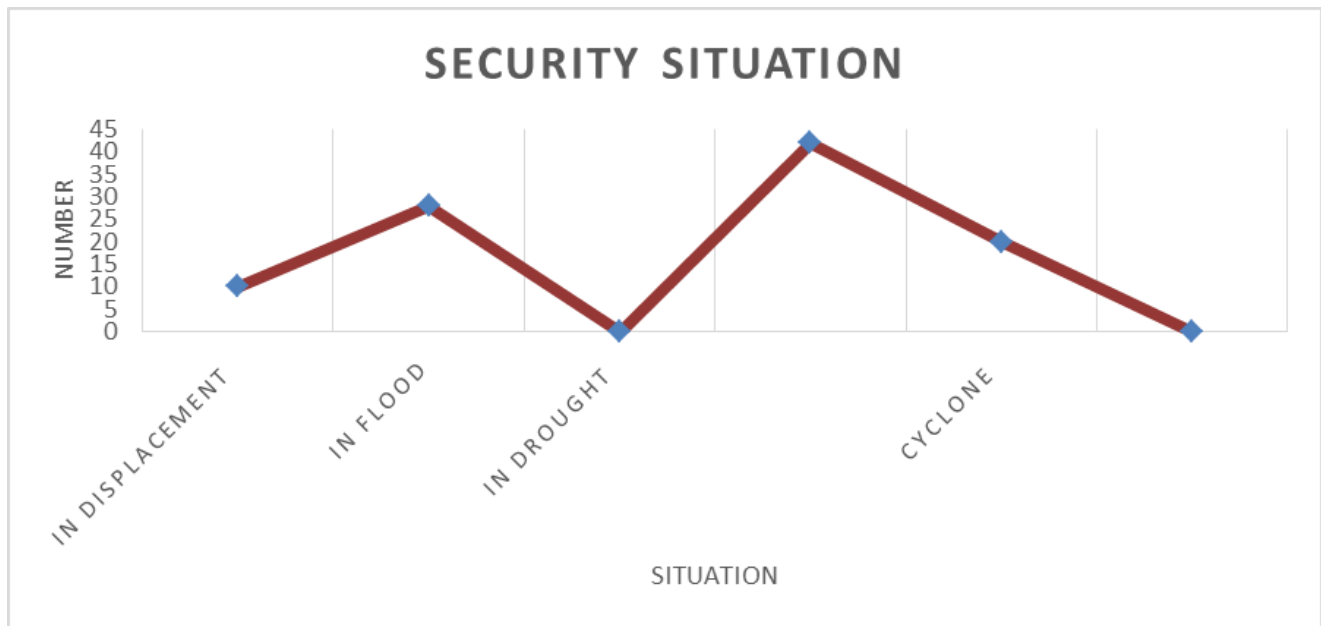


Fig.4: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of security situation

The above figure states that around 42% of respondents are of the opinion that security should be provided to them at the time of violence in their community. About 28% of women refugees need security at the time of flood. Around

20% of respondents need security and safety at the time of cyclone. Only 10% of respondents are of the opinion that support should be provided to them at the time of displacement.

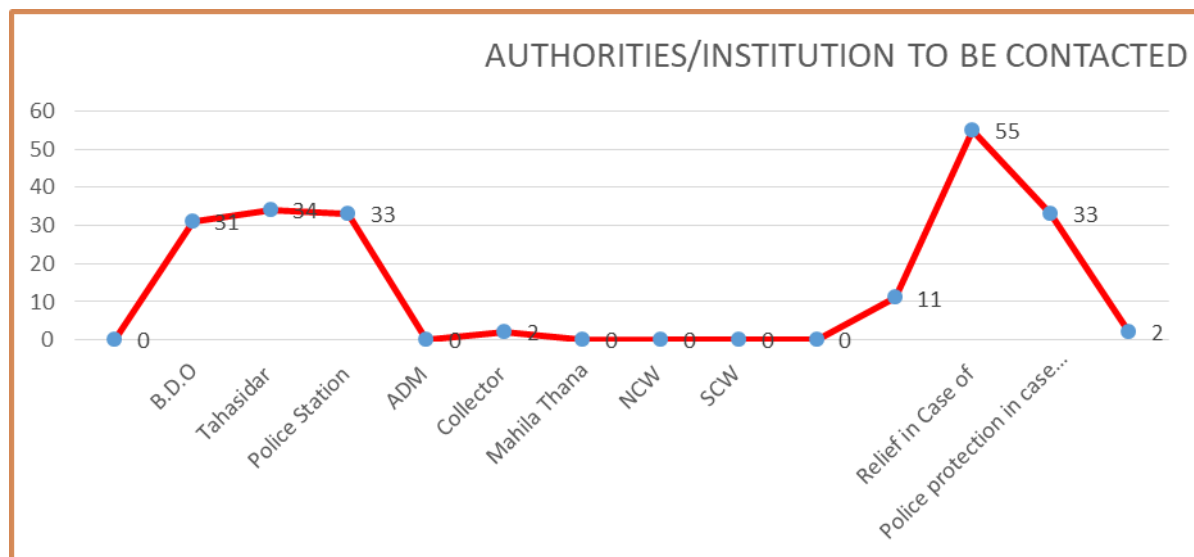


Fig.5: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of authorities or Institutions to to be contacted

In order to assess the knowledge of the refugee women regarding the authorities or institutions for getting security at the time of violence or any other crisis situation it has been seen that around 31% of respondents are of the knowledge that. 34% want to consult Tahasildar at the time of crisis. Around 33% are of the opinion that the support of the police should be needed at the time of crisis. They do not have any knowledge about Mahila Thana, National Commission for women and State Commission for women.

Block development authority should be contacted at the time of any crisis situation. Regarding the type of support provided by the authority about 11% of respondents have reported that Resettlement and Rehabilitation support has been provided by the District Collector at the time of displacement. Around 55% of respondents reported that relief has been provided to them at the time of flood or cyclone. 32% of respondents said that police protection has been given to them at the time of Communal unrest. So in

this way the different institutions and authorities have provided the support to the women refugees for their safety and security. This reveals that all the institutional mechanisms and authorities are very proactive in supporting the women refugees at the time of crisis situation. So the women refugees of Kendrapara district are leading a very protective life.

Conclusion

As gender discrimination is a major factor affecting the status of women refugees so they face discrimination in process of decision making process in the family relating to the matters like their access to land right, in exercising their reproductive right and right to education which are very essential in empowering the women refugees of Odisha. Awareness generation for propagating the ideology of gender equality among the mindset of refugees is highly essential. It is highly essential to educate the parents of refugee families for ending gender discrimination. To educate the girl children regarding the gender neutral education is also equally important. All of the above, the role of media is highly significant for the society. There are number of constraints on the path of enhancement of health status of women refugees. Consequences of early marriage reveals that it leads to increase household responsibilities and dropout rate, early pregnancy, low birth weight babies, increase in maternal mortality rate and infant mortality rate which also affects the development indicators on the State. The women refugees are exploited by their employers due to lack of their accurate information regarding minimum earning per day. They are cheated by their employers in terms of wage and hours of work. So the chance of exploitation by the employer is more in case of women refugees, because they do not have any proper information regarding the minimum wage per day. The poor, innocent and illiterate women refugees face a lot of harassment at the workplace by their employers. Even if they are cheated by the employers in terms of doing more hours of work and getting fewer wages still then they cannot open their voice against it because of their lack of union and lack of knowledge about minimum wage act. The refugee women are facing verbal violence in the family. All type of abusive languages is listened by them from their family members and husbands in case of any type of problem in the family. They are also beaten by their husbands because of their drinking habits. They become mentally and morally suppressed and cannot able to share their problems with others. The refugee women also face cultural challenges because of existence of blind beliefs and superstitions of the society. They have been insisted by the elderly members of the family to observe all rituals, festivals, brats and follow the path of saints to overcome all the miseries of their life. As the blind beliefs are responsible for precarious condition of refugee women so they also obey the taboos to overcome the specific problem what they are facing in their life. They are observing rituals worshipping God or obeying the words of Gurus to beget son as if without son the life is meaningless for women. In that way they remain bind with a number of taboos. The women refugees of Kendrapada are practicing a number of societal stigmas to maintain their status. They are not interested to spend money on daughter's education because they think that it is an unnecessary expenditure. They are not sending their daughter's to school. As the women refugees are being

migrated from other places, so for them security and safety should prioritized on the basis of support services. At the time of communal violence, natural calamities and in displacement they need the support of higher authorities. The refugee women have very limited information regarding the authorities to be contacted at the time of riot or violence. They are mentioning about the Block development authority, Tahasildar and Police. But they lack the knowledge about Mahila Thana, National Commission for women and State Commission for women etc. They have the information regarding the type of support like Resettlement and Rehabilitation support was provided by the District Collector at the time of displacement. The overall women refugee status of Odisha shows their vulnerability to their basic necessities, social and economic rights, violence and community hostility. Hence they need to be safeguarded against arbitrary arrest or other forms of human rights violations. They also require a legal status that accords adequate social and economic rights and access to such basic necessities as food, shelter and clothing. This is one of the reasons why certain countries introduced special resettlement quotas and/or programmes for refugee women. The deep involvement of the Government authorities, activists and social organisations those who are concerned about the issue of women refugees can able to uproot the risks and hardships of the women refugees. This support and cooperation will strengthen their sustainability in the society.

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