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## A Study on Women Workers in Dairy Milk Pocket Staking Operations

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### 1. Introduction

The Tamilnadu Co-Operative Milk Producers Federation Ltd (i.e) TCMPFLtd is an apex co –operative Federation in Tamilnadu. Previously this was Tamilnadu Dairy development Corporation, a Govt. of Tamilnadu undertaking. Following the Anand pattern, an apex Federation was formed on 01.02.81 with three tier system; village level milk producers Societies, District Level Unions and State Level Federation. The Federation has to arrange for marketing of surplus milk and milk products.

One of the objectives of TCMPFLtd is to make available quality milk and milk products to urban consumers at a reasonable price. For this purpose, the TCMPFLTD has established 3 liquid milk dairies and one product dairy (Ambattur Dairy, Central Dairy – Madhavaram, Sholinganallur Dairy & Product Dairy

Marketing Division takes care of Sachet Milk Marketing, bulk vending and products. These units are functioning under the control of the General Manager (Marketing) reporting to the Joint Managing Director, Chennai. There are support functions like, Projects, Purchase, administration, Accounts, transport, Quality Control and HRD.

Raw milk is received from the nearby District Unions. It is processed and packed in 500 ml and 1000 ml pouches and marketed in Chennai City. A small quantity of milk is converted into products at the Products Dairy. Presently there are 26 district unions are there under TCMPFLtd

Ambattur Dairy: My internship study is at this dairy, my observation on these women's working pattern, difficulties encountered how they encountered are revealed in this article.

Ambattur Dairy is located in Ambattur Industrial Estate with installed capacity of 4.00 Lakhs litres per day. Four varieties of milk are handled at this dairy; Toned, Standardised, Full Cream Milk and flavoured milk. Women workers around 100 are working under daily wages scheme as

casual laborers for staking of milk pockets (sachets 500 ml and 1000ml) plastic tubs. Working in morning and evening shifts i.e 6 am to 2 pm, 2 pm to 10 pm. Their wages Rs 375 / - per day these women are coming from the nearby villages and towns to Ambattur Dairy reaching Korattur railway station. These women workers are from Arakkonam, Thiruvallur, Pattabiram, Avadi and Ambattur nearby rural areas. Normally they need to wake up between 3 am to 4 am cooking for their breakfast and lunch including for their elderly and school going children's. They need to walk 1.5 km to 2 km to reach nearby railway station to come to Korattur railway station from there also the need to walk 2 km to reach Ambattur Dairy for the morning shift by 6 am and after 2 pm they have to go back. Evening shift 2 to 10 pm but relieved of by 8.30 pm itself for safety and travel reasons.

### 2. Key Areas of Focus for Your Article:

#### 2.1 Work-Life Balance Issues

Difficulty in managing household responsibilities (especially early morning and late evening hours). Impact on childcare, eldercare, and cooking responsibilities.

#### 2.2 Safety and Transportation Concerns

Lack of safe and reliable transport during early or late hours. Fear of harassment or unsafe public transit conditions.

#### 2.3 Physical Demands of the Job

Physical strain of stacking heavy milk packets repeatedly. Health issues like back pain, fatigue, or menstrual discomfort.

### **2.4 Workplace Policies and Infrastructure**

Lack of flexible shifts or rotation policies for women. Absence of rest areas, toilets, or hygiene facilities during long shifts.

### **2.5 Societal and Cultural Expectations**

Pressure from family or society against working odd hours. Stigma around women working in industrial settings during night/morning shifts.

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## **3. Observation & experiences during the internship related to topic**

### **3.1 Work-Life Balance Issues**

It is observed that the women working on the morning shift are in the age group between 18 to 50 coming from near by rural areas and towns i.e. Arakkonam and other places like Avadi, Thiruvallur, Ambattur, Pattabiram so on. They have to wake up between 3.30 am to 4.00 am in the early morning so as to walk a distance 1 km to 1.5 km to catch up near by suburban train station to reach korattur railway station and from there they need to walk to dairy around 1.5 km to 2 km by 6.am for the morning shift and back by 2.pm on completion of the morning shift.

With respect to Childcare and schooling are taken care by elderly people at home. Cooking responsibilities some times these women doing it in the early morning or some time local purchase and some time by elderly people at home. Eldercare is completely absent here.

### **3.2 Safety and Transportation Concerns**

With respect to safety of the women is stated that they form team minimum 2 to 3 person jointly to come along and also stated that they don't have costly jewels which may some time leads to theft.

Regarding transportation from house to near by railway station they need to walk the distance as there is no auto, bus in the early hours. From korattur railway station to dairy though there is share auto not preferring due to cost. This is really hardship.

### **3.3 Physical Demands of the Job**

Physical strain of cold milk packets (4 deg C) repeatedly stacking in a plastic tub to coup up the speed of production of sachets is really tough task which they do regularly. In between work 5 min relaxation is permissible under supervisor permission.

Health issues like back pain, fatigue, or menstrual discomfort are to be taken care by them self. Break fast and lunch is their own responsibility. A rest room neatly maintained available for the workers.

### **3.4 Workplace Policies and Infrastructure**

Shift flexibility not available the morning shift where as the evening shift women workers permitted to return by 8.30 pm it self considering their safety and transport convenience. On ration other works cleaning tubs, floor cleaning, leak pockets cutting ect are in rotation of the works within the shift.

Rest areas, toilets are available but the hygiene facilities needs to be maintained in a better way.

### **3.5 Societal and Cultural Expectations**

Though they work in add hours there is no other ways to manage family income. If their husband some where working and earning some income then their life is better some extend otherwise it is very very hard only. There is no compulsion for women to work in the night shift. Some women voluntarily working in the night shifts and normally their work up to 3 am only. They can go for rest.

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## **4. Challenges encountered and how they were addressed**

### **1. Challenges Encountered by Women Workers**

#### **4.1 Physical Strain and Repetitive Work**

Continuous lifting and stacking of heavy milk packets led to back pain, fatigue, and repetitive strain injuries.

#### **4.2 Discomfort Due to Shift Timings**

Morning shifts starting at 4:00 AM and evening shifts ending late disrupted women's sleep cycles, household responsibilities, and work-life balance.

#### ***4.3 Unsafe or Uncomfortable Work Environment***

Wet, cold, or slippery floors created a risk of slips and injuries.

Inadequate PPE (gloves, footwear, uniforms) increased physical discomfort.

#### ***4.4 Lack of Facilities***

Insufficient women-specific amenities such as restrooms, changing rooms, and break areas.

No access to on-site childcare, affecting mothers during long shifts.

#### ***4.5 Transport and Safety Issues***

Lack of safe and reliable transport made early morning and late evening commutes difficult and unsafe.

#### ***4.6 Gender Bias and Lack of Representation***

Limited involvement of women in decision-making or supervisory roles.

Occasional instances of verbal abuse, overwork, and lack of grievance support.

## **2. Challenges addressed (Solutions Implemented )**

#### ***4.7 Ergonomic Improvements and Health Safety***

Introduced trolleys and lifting tools to reduce manual strain.

Provided anti-fatigue mats at stacking stations.

Regular medical check-ups and workshops on physical health and posture.

#### ***4.8 Shift Flexibility and Work-Life Support***

Implemented rotational shift schedules to distribute morning/evening shifts fairly.

Allowed limited shift swaps for women with family responsibilities.

Granted rest periods and extra breaks for women during long shifts.

#### ***4.9 Improved Workplace Safety***

Installed non-slip flooring, proper drainage, and safety signage.

Provided appropriate protective gear (PPE) such as gloves, boots, and jackets.

Conducted safety training for both male and female staff.

#### ***4.10 Facilities and Women Welfare Measures***

Upgraded restroom and changing room facilities exclusively for women.

Allocated rest and refreshment areas during breaks.

Launched women's health camps and wellness awareness sessions.

#### ***4.11 Transport and Security Enhancements***

Arranged company-sponsored pick-up and drop for early and late shift workers.

Installed CCTV cameras and enhanced plant lighting for safety.

Coordinated with local police for security patrols during shift change hours.

#### ***4.12 Gender Inclusivity and Empowerment***

Formed Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) under POSH Act.

Conducted gender- sensitization training for all employees.

Promoted qualified women to supervisory roles and safety committees.

These measures led to:

Reduced absenteeism and injuries among women workers.

Improved job satisfaction, morale, and productivity.

Strengthened employee trust and organizational reputation as a gender-supportive workplace.

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### **5. Personal Reflections and Key Takeaways**

#### ***5.1 Personal Reflections***

During my observation of women workers involved in milk sachet stacking during morning and evening shifts at the dairy unit, I gained a deeper appreciation for the physical and emotional resilience of women in the workforce. Despite facing challenges such as awkward shift timings, heavy workload, and safety concerns, many continued to work diligently to support their families and contribute to the organization.

I was especially moved by how routine challenges—like commuting in early hours or working in cold conditions—became daily battles for these women. It highlighted the importance of gender-sensitive policies and the need for organizations to listen to their workforce and act responsibly.

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### **6. Key Takeaways**

#### ***6.1 Inclusivity in Shift Planning is Crucial***

Shift work disproportionately affects women due to family and safety responsibilities. Flexibility and fair scheduling are essential for gender equity.

#### ***6.2 Workplace Safety is Non-Negotiable***

Basic infrastructure like non-slip floors, proper lighting, and PPE can drastically reduce accidents and improve confidence among workers.

#### ***6.3 Supportive Facilities Make a Big Difference***

Even simple amenities like clean restrooms and rest areas significantly improve the morale and dignity of women workers.

#### ***6.4 Transport and Security Define Retention***

Many women drop out of shift work not due to the job itself, but because of unsafe commutes. Providing safe transport is a strong retention strategy.

#### ***6.5 Empowerment Comes from Representation***

When women are included in committees and supervisory roles, their issues are better represented, and workplace culture becomes more inclusive.

#### ***6.6 Change is Possible with Commitment***

The efforts made to address these challenges show that small, consistent actions from management can lead to major positive changes.

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### **7. Final Thought:**

This experience helped me understand that gender equality at the workplace isn't just about hiring more women—it's about supporting them through every stage of their work life, especially in industries like dairy processing where physical and logistical challenges are high.

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## 8. Conclusion and possible recommendation

### 8.1 Conclusion

The participation of women in shift-based operations such as milk sachet stacking at TUD dairy units highlights both their contribution and the systemic challenges they face in physically demanding and time-sensitive environments. This study revealed key issues including physical strain, unsafe working conditions, lack of transport, inadequate facilities, and gender bias, particularly during morning and evening shifts.

However, through organizational initiatives—like ergonomic support, transport arrangements, facility upgrades, and inclusion of women in welfare committees—TUD has made meaningful progress in addressing these concerns. These steps have not only improved the well-being and safety of women workers but also enhanced overall productivity and morale.

Despite improvements, continued efforts are essential to sustain and build a truly gender-supportive work environment.

### 8.2 Possible Recommendations

#### 1. Introduce Flexible Shift Scheduling

Offer rotational or part-time shift options for women with family or caregiving duties.

Avoid assigning continuous early morning or late shifts to the same individuals.

#### 2. Strengthen Health and Ergonomic Interventions

Provide lightweight lifting equipment, regular physiotherapy access, and mandatory health and safety workshops.

Monitor fatigue levels through rest break tracking and adjust shift durations accordingly.

#### 3. Enhance Workplace Infrastructure

Ensure clean, private restrooms and rest areas for women.

Establish on-site childcare/crèche facilities for working mothers.

#### 4. Ensure Reliable and Safe Transportation

Expand company-provided transport facilities, especially during unsafe hours.

Implement GPS-tracked shuttle services and a women-only travel option if possible.

#### 5. Promote Representation and Voice

Increase women's representation in supervisory roles and safety committees.

Conduct regular feedback sessions and employee satisfaction surveys involving women workers.

#### 6. Implement Policy and Grievance Redressal Mechanisms

Strengthen the role of the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) and conduct gender-sensitization training for all employees.

Display grievance contact information and conduct confidential reporting sessions.

#### 7. Recognition and Career Development

Provide skill development programs, on-the-job training, and promotion opportunities to women workers to enhance their career growth.

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