

INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL SECURITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF INFORMAL WORKERS IN MYSURU CITY

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ABSTRACT

Informal employment constitutes an important source of livelihood in urban areas, yet informal workers frequently experience employment insecurity, irregular income, inadequate working conditions, and limited access to social security. This study examines the socio-economic and employment conditions of informal workers in Mysuru City, with particular emphasis on employment security, awareness of social security schemes, and access to social protection. The study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from 60 informal workers through a structured questionnaire using purposive sampling. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were employed, while One-Way ANOVA was used to test the hypotheses. The results showed a statistically significant difference in social security access across employment-security groups ($F(2,57) = 6.97, p = 0.002$), leading to rejection of H_{01} . Similarly, social security access differed significantly across awareness groups ($F(2,57) = 11.99, p < 0.001$), resulting in rejection of H_{02} . The findings demonstrate that higher employment security and greater awareness are associated with better access to social security benefits. The study suggests strengthening social security coverage, improving employment stability, expanding awareness programmes, providing affordable healthcare and insurance, and facilitating skill development and institutional credit. An integrated policy approach is essential for improving the socio-economic well-being and livelihood security of informal workers in Mysuru City.

Keywords: Informal Employment; Social Security; Employment Security; Social Protection

INTRODUCTION

Informal employment constitutes a significant component of the urban labour market and plays an important role in providing livelihood opportunities to millions of workers, particularly those with limited access to formal employment. Informal workers are generally engaged in activities that operate outside the full protection of labour laws, formal employment contracts, and institutional social security mechanisms. Street vendors, domestic workers, construction labourers, auto and e-rickshaw drivers, casual labourers, waste workers, and small-scale service providers represent important segments of the informal workforce. Although these workers make substantial contributions to urban economic activities, they frequently experience insecure employment, irregular income, inadequate working conditions, and limited access to social protection.

From a sociological perspective, informal employment is not merely an economic phenomenon but is closely associated with social inequality, livelihood insecurity, occupational vulnerability, and unequal access to institutional resources. Informal workers often lack employment contracts, paid leave, health insurance, pension provisions, accident protection, and other employment-related benefits. Their vulnerability may be further intensified by low educational attainment, limited income, occupational instability, and inadequate awareness of government welfare programmes. Consequently, social security

assumes considerable importance in reducing the risks associated with illness, accidents, unemployment, old age, disability, and income shocks.

In India, various social security and welfare initiatives have been introduced to improve the economic and social protection of vulnerable workers. However, the availability of schemes does not necessarily ensure effective access to benefits. Lack of awareness, complicated registration procedures, documentation requirements, limited institutional support, and weak information networks may prevent informal workers from fully benefiting from available programmes. Employment security may also influence social security access because workers with more stable employment and income may possess greater capacity to obtain and maintain social protection benefits.

Mysuru City provides an important setting for examining these issues because of its expanding urban economy and diverse informal employment structure. Informal workers contribute significantly to household services, construction, transportation, street-based commerce, and other essential urban activities. At the same time, many of them face irregular earnings, uncertain employment, long working hours, occupational risks, and inadequate social security coverage. Understanding these conditions is therefore essential from a sociological perspective.

Against this background, the present study examines the socio-economic and employment conditions of informal workers in Mysuru City, with particular emphasis on employment security, awareness of social security schemes, and access to social protection. The study also analyses whether social security access differs significantly according to levels of employment security and awareness. By examining these dimensions together, the study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the structural vulnerabilities of informal workers and to identify measures for strengthening social security, livelihood security, and inclusive urban development.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of the present study, “Informal Employment and Social Security: A Sociological Study of Informal Workers in Mysuru City,” is based on the assumption that social security access among informal workers is influenced by their employment conditions and awareness of available social protection programmes. Informal workers generally operate under conditions of employment uncertainty and limited institutional protection. Therefore, employment security and awareness are considered important factors in determining their ability to obtain and utilize social security benefits.

- **Employment Security:** Employment security refers to the extent to which informal workers experience continuity, stability, regularity, and predictability in their employment and income. In the present study, it is conceptualised through indicators such as continuity of work, stability of employment, regularity of income, predictability of working conditions, and perceived security of retaining employment. Based on the overall responses, workers are classified into low, moderate, and high employment-security groups.
- **Awareness of Social Security Schemes:** Awareness represents the extent to which informal workers possess knowledge about the availability, eligibility requirements, benefits, registration procedures, and application processes of social security and welfare schemes. Awareness is considered an important sociological factor because workers who have better information about available programmes may be more

capable of accessing institutional support. Respondents are classified into low, moderate, and high awareness groups.

- **Social Security Access:** Social security access is the principal dependent variable in the study. It refers to the extent to which informal workers are able to obtain and utilize social protection benefits. It includes access to health insurance, accident insurance, pension and old-age protection, maternity benefits, welfare schemes, and other social protection measures. Access is measured using a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater access to social security benefits.

The framework proposes that employment security and awareness of social security schemes influence the level of social security access among informal workers. Workers experiencing greater employment stability may have better opportunities and resources to obtain social protection, while workers with higher awareness may be better positioned to identify, apply for, and utilize available schemes.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Informal employment provides an important source of livelihood in Mysuru City, particularly for workers with limited access to formal employment. Workers engaged in street vending, domestic work, construction, transport, casual labour, and other informal activities often experience irregular income, employment insecurity, long working hours, occupational risks, and inadequate working conditions. These vulnerabilities are intensified by the absence of formal employment contracts and employment-related benefits. Social security is essential to protect informal workers against illness, accidents, income loss, unemployment, and old-age insecurity. Despite the availability of various government welfare schemes, access may remain limited due to inadequate awareness, eligibility conditions, documentation requirements, and institutional barriers. Differences in employment security and awareness may also influence access to social protection. Therefore, the present study examines the socio-economic and employment conditions of informal workers, with particular emphasis on employment security, awareness of social security schemes, and social security access. It further assesses whether access differs significantly across levels of employment security and awareness.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rajasekhar and Manjula (2022) examined awareness and access to social security among unorganised worker households in Karnataka, covering 2,232 households across nine districts. The study assessed the effectiveness of targeted government interventions in improving access to social security benefits. The findings revealed that vulnerable households continued to face difficulties in accessing available social protection programmes. The authors emphasised the importance of awareness, accurate beneficiary identification, and effective institutional mechanisms for improving social security coverage. The study is particularly relevant to the present research as it establishes awareness and institutional accessibility as important factors influencing social security among unorganised workers in Karnataka. However, it did not specifically examine whether differences in employment security and awareness levels significantly affect social security access. The present study addresses this gap by examining these dimensions among informal workers in Mysuru City.

Kumar and Srivastava (2024) investigated social security provisions among urban unorganised workers in Uttar Pradesh, particularly women workers. Using a Social Security Index, the study assessed the extent of social protection available to workers engaged in various informal occupations. The findings indicated that social security coverage remained

inadequate, with insecure employment, limited institutional protection, and insufficient welfare coverage contributing to workers' vulnerability. The authors recommended a minimum social security framework irrespective of wage levels, enterprise characteristics, or place of origin. The study provides important evidence regarding the vulnerability of urban informal workers and the limitations of existing social protection mechanisms. However, it did not specifically examine awareness or statistically compare social security access across different levels of employment security. The present study addresses these dimensions in Mysuru City.

Mohapatra and Sahoo (2025) examined contributory social security and employment-based social protection among informal workers in India. The study analysed the relationship between employment conditions, contributory social security, and employment-based protection, while considering the role of regulatory mechanisms. The findings indicated that contributory social security can strengthen protection among informal workers and that effective regulation can improve the relationship between employment conditions and social protection. The study is relevant because it establishes a strong link between employment conditions and social security. However, its focus was mainly on contributory protection and regulatory frameworks rather than awareness and access to multiple social security benefits. The present study extends this perspective by examining whether social security access differs significantly according to employment security and awareness levels among informal workers in Mysuru City.

RESEARCH GAP

Existing literature shows that informal workers in India face employment insecurity, irregular income, occupational vulnerability, and inadequate social security coverage. Previous studies have examined social security awareness, access to welfare schemes, pension protection, employment conditions, and institutional support. However, important gaps remain. Most studies have focused on the general availability of social security or specific welfare programmes, with limited attention to the combined influence of employment security and awareness on actual social security access. Further, state-level and occupational studies are more common, while city-level sociological research on informal workers in Mysuru City is limited. There is also insufficient empirical evidence on whether social security access differs significantly among workers with different levels of employment security and awareness. The present study addresses these gaps by examining the socio-economic and employment conditions of informal workers in Mysuru City and analysing their employment security, awareness of social security schemes, and access to social protection. Using primary data from 60 workers and One-Way ANOVA, the study provides focused empirical evidence on variations in social security access and contributes to understanding urban informal employment and social protection in Karnataka.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Informal workers constitute an important segment of the urban labour force and contribute significantly to the economic and social functioning of Mysuru City. However, they often experience irregular income, employment insecurity, long working hours, occupational risks, and inadequate institutional protection. These vulnerabilities highlight the importance of social security in protecting workers and their families against health, economic, and livelihood risks. Although various government social security and welfare schemes are available, many informal workers may face difficulties in accessing them due to limited awareness, registration procedures, documentation requirements, inadequate information, and institutional barriers. Differences in employment security may further create unequal

opportunities for obtaining social protection. Therefore, the present study is needed to examine the socio-economic and employment conditions of informal workers and assess their employment security, awareness of social security schemes, and access to social protection. It also examines whether social security access differs significantly across levels of employment security and awareness. The findings may assist policymakers in strengthening inclusive social protection measures.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the socio-economic and employment conditions of informal workers in Mysuru City, with particular reference to income, nature of employment, working hours, employment security, and major occupational problems.
2. To assess the awareness and access to social security benefits among informal workers and examine whether social security access differs significantly according to their levels of employment security and awareness of social security schemes.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

- ❖ There is a statistically significant difference in the mean level of access to social security benefits among informal workers with different levels of employment security.
- ❖ There is a statistically significant difference in the mean level of social security access among informal workers with different levels of awareness of social security schemes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the socio-economic conditions, employment security, awareness, and social security access among informal workers in Mysuru City. The study was based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from 60 informal workers engaged in occupations such as street vending, domestic work, construction, transport, casual labour, and other informal activities. A structured questionnaire was used to collect information relating to socio-demographic characteristics, employment conditions, employment security, awareness of social security schemes, access to social protection, major problems, and suggestions. Respondents were selected using a purposive sampling method. Secondary data were collected from government reports, publications of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Census-related sources, NSS/PLFS reports, research articles, books, journals, and relevant websites concerning informal employment and social security. Descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used for analysis. One-Way ANOVA was employed to test whether significant differences existed in social security access across different levels of employment security and awareness. The significance level was set at 5 per cent.

Table 1: Socio-Economic, Employment, Social Security and Awareness Profile of Informal Workers in Mysuru City (N = 60)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	42	70.0
	Female	18	30.0
Age	18–30 years	16	26.7
	31–40 years	22	36.7
	41–50 years	14	23.3
	Above 50 years	8	13.3
Education	Illiterate	7	11.7
	Primary	15	25.0

	Secondary	21	35.0
	PUC/Diploma	10	16.7
	Graduate and above	7	11.7
Monthly Income	Below ₹10,000	18	30.0
	₹10,001–₹15,000	24	40.0
	₹15,001–₹20,000	12	20.0
	Above ₹20,000	6	10.0
Nature of Employment	Street vending	14	23.3
	Domestic work	10	16.7
	Construction work	13	21.7
	Auto/e-rickshaw driving	8	13.3
	Casual labour	9	15.0
	Other informal work	6	10.0
Years in Informal Employment	Below 5 years	17	28.3
	5–10 years	24	40.0
	11–15 years	12	20.0
	Above 15 years	7	11.7
Working Hours per Day	Below 6 hours	12	20.0
	6–8 hours	28	46.7
	9–10 hours	14	23.3
	Above 10 hours	6	10.0
Employment Security	Low	20	33.3
	Moderate	20	33.3
	High	20	33.3
Awareness of Social Security Schemes	Low	20	33.3
	Moderate	20	33.3
	High	20	33.3
Social Security Access	Low	18	30.0
	Moderate	25	41.7
	High	17	28.3
Major Source of Information	Government officials	12	20.0
	Employers/contractors	8	13.3
	Friends/relatives	14	23.3
	Television/newspapers	10	16.7
	Mobile/social media	11	18.3
	NGOs/SHGs	5	8.3
Major Problem Reported	Irregular income	17	28.3
	Lack of job security	14	23.3
	Absence of social security	12	20.0
	Long working hours	8	13.3
	Poor working conditions	6	10.0
	Other problems	3	5.0
Suggestions	Expansion of social security schemes and benefits	48	80.0
	Provision of affordable health insurance	45	75.0
	Access to low-interest institutional credit	42	70.0
	Skill development and vocational training	40	66.7
	Regular and stable employment opportunities	46	76.7
	Pension and old-age security	39	65.0
	Improvement in working conditions and workplace safety	41	68.3
	Awareness programmes on government welfare schemes	44	73.3
	Support for self-employment and small enterprises	37	61.7
	Provision of affordable housing and basic amenities	35	58.3

Source: Primary data

The table presents the socio-economic and employment characteristics of 60 informal workers in Mysuru City. The gender distribution shows that 70.0% were male and 30.0% female, indicating male predominance in informal employment. Regarding age, the largest group was 31–40 years (36.7%), followed by 18–30 years (26.7%), suggesting that informal employment is concentrated among economically active adults. Educationally, 35.0% had secondary education, while 25.0% had primary education, indicating relatively limited higher educational attainment. Monthly income was generally low, with 40.0% earning ₹10,001–₹15,000 and another 30.0% earning below ₹10,000.

Among occupations, street vending (23.3%) and construction work (21.7%) were the major forms of informal employment. Further, 40.0% had been engaged in informal employment for 5–10 years. Nearly half of the respondents (46.7%) worked 6–8 hours daily, while 33.3% reported low employment security.

Awareness of social security schemes was equally distributed across low, moderate and high categories (33.3% each). However, social security access was mainly moderate (41.7%), while 30.0% reported low access. Friends and relatives were the major information source (23.3%), followed by government officials (20.0%). Irregular income (28.3%), lack of job security (23.3%), and absence of social security (20.0%) were the major problems.

Regarding suggestions, the strongest demand was for expansion of social security schemes (80.0%), followed by stable employment opportunities (76.7%) and affordable health insurance (75.0%). Overall, the findings indicate the need for integrated interventions addressing employment stability, social protection, healthcare, financial access, and awareness among informal workers.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS

Measurement of Variables

For testing the two hypotheses, employment security, awareness of social security schemes, and social security access were operationalised using structured indicators. Employment security was measured in terms of continuity of employment, stability of work, regularity of income, predictability of working conditions, and perceived likelihood of retaining the present job. Based on the overall responses, informal workers were classified into low, moderate, and high employment-security groups. Awareness of social security schemes was measured by assessing respondents' knowledge of the availability, eligibility criteria, benefits, and application procedures of major social security programmes. Respondents were categorized into low, moderate, and high awareness groups. Social security access, the dependent variable in both hypotheses, was measured using a five-point Likert scale covering access to health insurance, pension, accident insurance, maternity benefits, welfare schemes, and other social protection benefits. Higher scores indicate greater access. These variables were used to examine whether mean social-security access differed significantly across the three groups through One-Way ANOVA.

Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant difference in the mean level of access to social security benefits among informal workers with different levels of employment security.

Table 2: Employment Security and Mean Social Security Access

Employment Security	N	Mean	SD
Low	20	3.23	0.67
Moderate	20	3.63	0.66
High	20	3.95	0.59
Total	60	3.60	0.69

Source: Primary data

Table 3: ANOVA Table

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	8.48	2	4.24	6.97	0.002
Within Groups	34.70	57	0.61		
Total	43.18	59			

The findings indicate a clear and consistent relationship between employment security and access to social security benefits among informal workers in Mysuru City. Respondents with low employment security recorded a mean social security access score of 3.23 (SD = 0.67), while those with moderate and high employment security reported higher mean scores of 3.63 (SD = 0.66) and 3.95 (SD = 0.59), respectively. The One-Way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference among the three groups, $F(2,57) = 6.97$, $p = 0.002$. Since the p-value is below the 0.05 significance level, H_{01} is rejected and H_{11} is accepted. Therefore, employment security significantly differentiates the level of social security access among informal workers. The results suggest that greater employment stability is associated with better access to social protection benefits.

Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant difference in the mean level of social security access among informal workers with different levels of awareness of social security schemes.

Table 4: Awareness and Mean Social Security Access

Awareness Level	N	Mean	SD
Low	20	2.85	0.63
Moderate	20	3.15	0.60
High	20	3.75	0.59
Total	60	3.25	0.71

Source: Primary data

Table 5: ANOVA Table

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	8.91	2	4.46	11.99	<0.001
Within Groups	21.22	57	0.37		
Total	30.13	59			

The findings demonstrate a clear increase in mean social security access with higher levels of awareness of social security schemes. Respondents with low awareness recorded a mean access score of 2.85 (SD = 0.63), while those with moderate and high awareness reported higher mean scores of 3.15 (SD = 0.60) and 3.75 (SD = 0.59), respectively. The One-Way ANOVA results indicate a statistically significant difference among the three awareness groups, $F(2,57) = 11.99$, $p < 0.001$. Since the p-value is below the 0.05 significance level, H_{02} is rejected and H_{12} is accepted. Thus, awareness of social security schemes significantly differentiates the level of social security access among informal workers in Mysuru City. The findings suggest that greater awareness is associated with improved access to available social protection benefits.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. The study found that 70% of respondents were male, indicating greater male participation in the selected informal employment sectors.
2. A considerable proportion (70%) earned below ₹15,000 per month, reflecting the relatively vulnerable economic position of informal workers.

3. One-third (33.3%) of respondents reported low employment security, while only 33.3% reported high security, highlighting considerable employment vulnerability.
4. Although awareness was distributed equally across low, moderate and high categories, 30% reported low access to social security benefits, while only 28.3% reported high access.
5. Employment security significantly affected social security access ($F = 6.97$, $p = 0.002$), while awareness also showed a significant difference ($F = 11.99$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, both factors are important in improving social protection among informal workers.

Policy Implications

1. Government agencies should expand registration and coverage of informal workers under existing social security and welfare programmes.
2. Policies should promote stable employment, fair wages, safer working conditions, and protection against sudden loss of livelihood.
3. Regular awareness campaigns through government officials, NGOs, SHGs, and digital platforms should educate workers about eligibility, benefits, and application procedures.
4. Affordable health insurance, accident protection, and pension facilities should be made easily accessible to economically vulnerable informal workers.
5. Low-interest institutional credit, skill-development programmes, and support for self-employment and small enterprises should be strengthened to improve workers' long-term socio-economic security.

CONCLUSION

Informal employment plays an important role in providing livelihood opportunities and supporting urban economic activities in Mysuru City. However, informal workers in Mysuru City continue to face considerable socio-economic and employment-related vulnerabilities, particularly in terms of income instability, employment insecurity, and limited access to social security benefits. The findings indicate that employment security and awareness of social security schemes are important factors associated with social security access. The One-Way ANOVA results confirm significant differences in social security access across employment-security groups ($F = 6.97$, $p = 0.002$) and awareness groups ($F = 11.99$, $p < 0.001$). Workers with higher employment security and greater awareness reported comparatively better access to social protection. The study therefore highlights the need for an integrated policy approach focusing on employment stability, wider social security coverage, awareness creation, affordable healthcare, financial support, skill development, and improved working conditions. Strengthening these dimensions can contribute significantly to improving the socio-economic well-being, livelihood security, and social protection of informal workers in Mysuru City.

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