

# *Hysterectomy's Impact on Female Sugarcane Workers of Beed District of Maharashtra*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The sugarcane industry in Maharashtra's, Beed district heavily relies on migrant labourers, primarily couples to meet production requirements. But these workers endure harsh living conditions without basic necessities such as proper sanitation and clean drinking water. The strenuous working conditions, societal taboos around menstruation, and financial stress have led to an increase in hysterectomies among female sugarcane labourers. In recent years thousands of women in Beed district had undergone this surgery contributing to Maharashtra's status as the leader in hysterectomy rates nationwide. Mukadams play an important role in organizing labour and ensuring timely production, act as intermediaries between labourers and sugar mills. The pressure to meet targets can result in exploiting and endangering the health of female workers. They might choose to have hysterectomies to avoid fines or loss of income due to pregnancy and menstruation. This article highlights the intricate economical, social and health implications faced by female cane cutters of Maharashtra shedding light on the immediate need for better working conditions and support systems in the industries.

## INTRODUCTION

**B**eed is the name of the district situated in Maharashtra, India. Beed district, which is renowned for its historical importance, agricultural prominence and cultural heritage lies within the Marathwada region. Agriculture is the primary livelihood for residents of Beed district. They cultivate crops such as cotton, sugarcane, pulses and oil seeds. Beed encounters obstacles like water scarcity and insufficient infrastructure, despite its agricultural success and cultural wealth. The government and local authorities are continuously striving to tackle these challenges and promote sustainable development in the district. Maharashtra is the top sugarcane producing state. Sugar industry of Maharashtra is very much dependent on cane cutters. These workers are the seasonal migrants from the different district of Maharashtra. Labourers and farmers migrate during the harvesting season from (October till May).

### Work and living conditions of sugarcane cutters

According to (Breman 1978), usually labourers work together in pairs (husband – wife) directed by mukadams and these mukadams act as a middle man between the factories and the sugarcane cutting labourers. Before the starting of harvesting season, the sugar mills inform the “Mukkadam” (labour contractor) about the number of cane cutters that the mills require. These contractors then hire the labourers. Typically, the sugarcane labourers are employed in pairs known as “Jodis”, a team of husband and wife and are supervised by the “mukadam” during the whole service period. After the mukadam has recruited the required number of workers, they make a contract with the sugarmill, who gives him an advance payment. Using part of this payment, the Mukkadam provides an upfront round sum salary to each Jodi, typically

ranging from Rs. 50,000 to 1 lakh, for a period of (4 – 6) months of work. This upfront payment often assists the Jodis to migrate to the work area initially. Mukadam plays an important role during the harvesting season.

The workers of cane cutters inhabit in small huts within sugarcane mills or cane fields. Because their stay is not permanent, they have no proper sanitation facilities, toilets and clean drinking water. These inadequate living condition adversely affect the health of the labourers especially women, during their menstruation days. This results in serious reproductive health issues, skin rashes and infections.

**Table 1: The Total Population Count per District within The Marathwada Region**

District	Population
Aurangabad	3,695,928
Beed	2,585,962
Hingoli	1,178,973
Jalna	1,958,483
Latur	2,455,543
Nanded	3,356,566
Osmanabad	1,660,311
Parbhani	1,835,982
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,727,748</b>

**Source: India's 2011 Census**

### Frequency of hysterectomies among sugarcane workers

During the drought in 2019, female hysterectomies gained national attention due to reports in local newspaper in Beed district of Maharashtra (Jadhav, 2019a; Menon, 2019; Mulye, 2019; Nighoskar, 2019 and Shelar,

2019). It is crucial to understand that within rural Indian societies, menstruation is viewed as culturally sensitive subject (Garg and Anand, 2015). Maharashtra state commission for women in 2018, found that almost 36% female cane cutters had undergone hysterectomy (Shukla and Kulkarni, 2019). Moreover, in Maharashtra's, Beed district, between 2016 and 2019 approximately 4600 women had undergone uterus removal procedure (Big Think, 2019 and Chitrajoshi, 2022). As a result of this growing phenomenon, Maharashtra is now recognized for having the highest rates of hysterectomies nationwide.

In a sugarcane factory, there is a strict timeframe given by the factory to achieve production targets, which becomes challenging to accomplish if female labourers miss work during their pregnancy or menstruation period. As the sugarcane cutters lack discipline, their work schedules are decided by owner of the factories and the mukadams. Timely delivery of freshly harvested sugarcane to the factory is crucial for profitability prompting female labourers to be awakened as early as 3 am to load trucks.

The mukadams don't directly compel women to undergo uterus removal. Women opt for this procedure because of the heavy amount of fines and unemployment. They make this decision because if they get their periods, fall sick or become pregnant might require to take off from strenuous work, which will affect their earnings.

## CONCLUSION

The difficulties of sugarcane workers in Beed district of Maharashtra highlight the various challenges that poor communities face with money, jobs and staying healthy. Despite farming is doing well in the district, there are some significant issues that persist such as not having enough water, poor infrastructure and

tough jobs that is making life difficult for the people, who depend on sugarcane farming for living. Many female sugarcane labourers are getting hysterectomies at a higher rate, showing how tough their condition is. They undergo this procedure because of the fear of losing their jobs. We need help from the government to solve these problems, more access to health care and hygiene practices. It is very much important to teach people about reproductive health for making the workplace better for the cane cutters. Working together we can assure that everyone receives the rights and support they deserve regardless of their financial status and their jobs.

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