

## The Vulnerable Worker

The term 'vulnerable workers' is often used to describe workers who are at the lower level of the employment ladder. Basically, these are workers who are paid minimum wages and whose occupations are not ranked as white, blue collar or high-status jobs. Research findings throw up some critical factors which are included in the definition of a vulnerable worker. One definition defines vulnerable workers as those employed in low-skilled, low-paid jobs with little job security, and who are often exploited by their employers and forced to work long hours for low pay, or to work in dangerous conditions. Another definition refers to vulnerable workers as those for whom employment is precarious, poorly paid and sometimes dangerous, and who often suffer from some form of discrimination.

In examining these two definitions of vulnerable workers, the two key words that stand out are exploitation and discrimination. In looking up the meaning of these two words, it is unwise not to bear the relevance of their application when addressing the treatment of vulnerable workers. Workers stand to be exploited by their employers for profit purposes. In return, the employer does not share the gains with the employees. In short, labour is impacted psychologically, physically, emotionally and financially. When it comes to discrimination, the claim can be made that some employers treat some employees less favorably, merely because of the individual's race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability or social status.

There is a school of thought that vulnerable workers are usually young workers who fall between the ages of 15–24, and that this grouping is primarily made up of women and migrant workers. There is the contention that these workers generally exposed to poor conditions of service, hazardous and precarious work and work within the informal economy. Included within the informal economy would be wayside vendors, mechanics, minibus drivers and others who provide services but may not be formally registered. These workers can be deemed to be vulnerable workers given that they often work in small or undefined workplaces, unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, have low skill levels, receive low or irregular incomes, work long hours and lack access to information, markets, finance, training and technology.

Workers in the gig economy who are mainly temporary, part time and even contract employees, are also subject to the vulnerabilities of not being treated fairly and having job security. This applies to independent workers such as entrepreneurs, self-employed, free-lance and contract workers,

There is a notion that all age groups are susceptible to being vulnerable and moreover, is gender mutual. The real picture reveals that vulnerable groups may include young workers, older workers, pregnant workers and workers with a language barrier or communications problems. Moreover, there was once a misguided view that a conversation about vulnerable workers was primarily about individuals who suffered a disability.

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The ultimate concern is about the vulnerability of workers would be the denial of their workplace rights and entitlements. The assumption is that vulnerable workers are employed in low-paid, low-skilled jobs, who are often exploited by their employers, being unaware of their employment rights or being too scared of losing their job to stand up to their employers. While this may be accepted as being true, it can't be removed or denied that all category of workers remains vulnerable, as they remain subject to exploitation, discrimination and even victimization.