

## GENDER WAGE INEQUALITY IN URBAN INDIA: HARSH REALITY OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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### ABSTRACT

*Although equal pay for equal work is widely recognised as a labour right in India but the reality is different. There has been enough evidence of gender wage differentials prevailing in the country but the present study aims to look at the extent to which differences in the labour market characteristics are responsible for explaining gender wage gaps in India. The present study makes an attempt to analyse gender wage gaps for regular and casual workers in India using the 66<sup>th</sup> round of the National Sample Survey's Employment - Unemployment Schedule (2009-2010). The standard OLS regression method has been employed to assess the impact of different covariates such as education, caste, union membership, in explaining within and between group (gender) inequalities. Finally, Blinder-Oaxaca (1973) decomposition method is used to decompose gender wage gaps for both regular and casual workers to check what exactly explains the prevailing gender wage differentials in Indian labour market.*

*Key Words: Gender Wage differential, Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition, NSS*

### **I. Introduction**

Although, "Equal pay for equal work" is not explicitly enshrined as a fundamental right under the Indian constitution, but has the legal backing if violated as per article 14 and 39(d). The ultimate rationale behind such provisions was to ensure that women are not seen as the weaker sex, if they possess same performance capabilities in terms of skill, effort and responsibility, given the same working conditions. However, the provision has been reduced to a myth or a mere jargon despite changing times. Gender wage discrimination is a problem, apparent not only in the developing world but is widely experienced by females across the globe. In fact, the Human Development Report 2000 mentions that women, whose share

touches approximately fifty percent of the world's total populace, stands to perform a two-third of the work –hours but receive only one-tenth of the world's income and are entitled to only one-hundredth of the world's property. However, seeing the trends in Indian labour market, it cannot be debunked that the gender wage differentials are narrowing with passage of time but persistence of inequality with respect to pay-cheques and employment opportunities on the basis of gender remains to be an appalling reality of the country, questioning the entire operational structure of the largest democracy in the world.

The existing literature extends several explanations for persistence of the wage differences among males and females, like, human capital theory, compensating differentials, search models and discrimination. In this paper an attempt has been made to look at the extent to which differences in the labour market characteristics are responsible for explaining gender wage gaps among regular and casual workers in Urban India. This paper is organised as follows. Section II of the paper provides a review of the existing literature in this regard followed by objectives, data and methodology in Section III. Section IV presents the major findings of this paper with concluding remarks towards the end. An attempt has been in this paper to look at the extent to which differences in the labour market characteristics are responsible for explaining gender wage gaps in India.

## **II. Review of Literature**

Gary Becker, in 1950s developed a neoclassical model to study discrimination, wherein he introduced the concept of a taste for discrimination on the part of employers, employees or customers based on the assumptions of perfect competition and Utility maximisation. The result of the model showed that in equilibrium the firms which differentiates on the basis of gender tends to make lower profits than non-discriminating firms. Such loss making firms in the long run will either have to shut down or will be acquired by the profit-making non discriminating firms. But this model was vehemently critiqued by economists like Arrow and Phelps(1972) as they argued that the traditional neoclassical theory fails to explain discrimination in the labour market and therefore they came up with a statistical model to study discrimination based on the employer uncertainty about the productivity of the employee/worker. Oaxaca and Blinder(1973) then made a major contribution to the existing literature in this regard, by quantitatively measuring the wage discrimination. Several studies,

have used the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition to study wage differentials across occupations, industry, religions, social categories and gender. A study by Reilly and Dutta(1996) revealed that the average wage differentials between males and females was more the less stable during 1980s and 1990s. Another study by Duraisamy and Duraisamy(1996), in which the wages are decomposed for the workers who have acquired post secondary education in different scientific disciplines for the period 1961-81 reveals that the earnings of the females are about 21percent less than that of males and approximately 77 percent of the wage differential between the two sexes can be attributed to the discrimination component. Kingdon's study (1997) presents a detailed analysis of the male-female earnings in the Urban Lucknow (a state in India). Dataset for the year 1995 has been used for the study and the author has included both the self employed and the wage workers for the purpose of analysis. What follows from the analysis is no different from the previous studies. About 41 percent of the wage differential as per the analysis can be attributed to "discrimination" component. Kingdon and Unni(1997) studied gender wage differentials using the data from the NSS 43<sup>rd</sup> round for the districts of Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The findings showcased that females suffer a very high level of discrimination in the Urban labour market in India and the level of education contributes very little to this discrimination. Infact, the authors based on their findings, made a very crucial point which ridiculed the human capital explanations of low education leading to low labour market participation. The authors, instead postulated that the causality may run in the other direction, i.e., it's the persistence of the discrimination in the labour market which disincentivises(females) the labour and contributes towards low educational attainment.

One of the most recent studies which presents a comprehensive view about the Urban labour market in India- Regular and Casual-has been undertaken by Madheswaran and Khasnobis(2007). They have used three rounds of the EUS-38<sup>th</sup>(1983), the 50<sup>th</sup> and the 55<sup>th</sup>() with an objective to study gender wage differentials for both regular and casual wage workers in India. To assess the extent of the labour market discrimination the authors have employed B-O decomposition technique as well as the Banerjee and Knight Decomposition technique. The results of their analysis highlighted that the endowment as well as the discrimination component has narrowed down for regular workers over the span of 18983 and 1999-2000, while the endowment component has been widening for the Urban Casual wage workers for the period under study. However, the discrimination component has declined during this

period. A detailed decomposition put forth the fact that the differences in the educational level explain the persistence of the wage differentials among males and females to a great extent.

### **III. Data Sources and Methodology**

For the purpose of estimation, this paper relies on the data provided by the “thick” round of the NSS Employment Unemployment Survey (EUS), for the year 2009-10, i.e., the 66<sup>th</sup> round. This study is confined to the Urban labour market in India. Within the Urban market, the data is restricted to the regular wage/salaried full time and Casual workers with age between 15 to 59 years. The major reason for such restrictions on the data so filtered for the study is, regular salaried full time workers roughly correspond to formal workers and this paper intends to see if there exists gender wage discriminations in a sector which is governed by the “so-called” stringent labour laws and if at all there exists discrimination then whether the same factors explains the discrimination in the Urban casual market or not. In the dataset which has been used for the study about 81percent of the workers are males and 19 percent are females.( Appendix, Table 1).

The EUS records the data on weekly wages which has been used to estimate the daily wage earnings using the number of days worked in the survey week. The wage rates in this paper are the nominal wage rates measured in rupees. However, to get rid of the outliers the wages have been trimmed by 0.1 percent from the top and the bottom.

To study discrimination, Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition technique has been employed,<sup>1</sup> which bifurcates the observed wage gap into ‘endowment’ component and a ‘coefficient’ component. The later is derived as an unexplained residual and is termed as ‘discrimination’ coefficient.

### **IV. Results**

#### Gender Wage Differentials for Different levels of Education and across Occupations

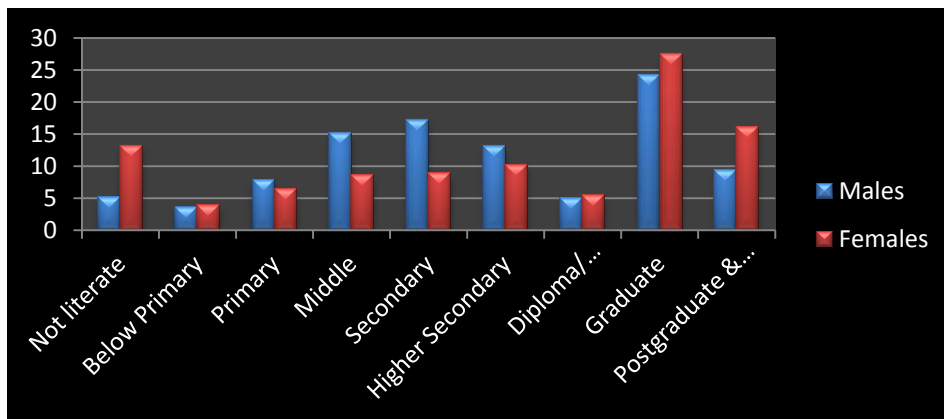
Regular full-time workers , the major proportion of whom are likely to be engaged in the formal sector, are less likely to exhibit gender wage differences as the sector is governed by

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<sup>1</sup> Detailed B-O Decomposition in Appendix

labour regulations as per which unequal pay for equal work is prohibited. But the data presents a different picture altogether.

**Fig1. Sex-wise Education level of Regular full-time Workers (Urban)**



Source: Calculated from NSS, 66<sup>th</sup> round

As fig1 above exhibits that approximately 13 percent of the women in this sector are illiterate while only 5 percent of the men are illiterate. At all other levels of education namely, primary, middle, secondary and higher secondary, the share of males exceeds that of females. But, at the higher level of education spectrum i.e. Graduate/post graduate and above (also in case of Diploma and Certificate courses) the percentage of females exceeds that of males. Thus, at both the extremes of education ladder share of females exceeds that of males.

The wage data reveals that, as envisaged the average daily wages increases as one moves up the education ladder. However, the wages of females are less than that of their male counterparts at all the levels of education. The wage differentials are highest among the illiterates and those have completed education only till below primary. At the higher end of the education spectrum the wage differentials between male and females decline and the gap is lowest for post graduate workers as exhibited by Table A below.

Table A: Gender Wage Differential across various levels of Education ( for Regular workers)

	Avg. Daily Wages		Wage Differential
	Males	Females	
<b>Not literate</b>	159.17	98.00	62.42
<b>Below Primary</b>	163.52	100.51	62.69
<b>Primary</b>	167.12	108.94	53.41
<b>Middle</b>	200.36	131.07	52.86
<b>Secondary</b>	286.46	213.79	33.99
<b>Higher Secondary</b>	344.32	257.46	33.73
<b>Graduate</b>	517.29	416.96	24.07
<b>Postgraduate &amp; Above</b>	621.84	502.40	23.77

Source: Unit level Data, NSS, 66<sup>th</sup> Round

Table B: Gender Wage Differential across various levels of Education ( for Casual workers)

Casual Urban Workers					
	Share (%)		Avg. Daily Wages		Wage differential
	Males	Females	Males	Females	
<b>Not literate</b>	23.17	51.02	102.66	58.36	75.91
<b>Below Primary</b>	11.69	12.24	103.97	59.80	73.86
<b>Primary</b>	19.76	15.78	118.68	80.14	48.09
<b>Middle</b>	26.61	14.40	120.17	84.48	42.25
<b>Secondary</b>	12.54	4.47	124.65	87.85	41.89
<b>Higher Secondary</b>	4.15	1.08	130.35	92.72	40.58
<b>Graduate</b>	1.14	0.60	140.90	102.37	37.63
<b>Postgraduate &amp; Above</b>	0.24	0.15	154.96	114.31	35.56

Source: Unit level Data, NSS, 66<sup>th</sup> Round

The extent of the labour market discrimination prevalent in the Urban labour market for regular wage/salaried workers can be gauged from the fact that the females who have attained

education till middle school receive wages even lower than an illiterate male on an average. The scenario is no different for casual workers in Urban labour market in India. Table B shows the share of males and females and average wage differentials in the casual labour force in the Urban sector according to their level of education. Approximately 50 percent of the females in the casual labour force are illiterate and unlike for the regular labour force, the level of education is low for females even at the higher education spectrum. The mean daily wages for casual workers increases with every additional year of education and the wage differential trend camouflages the one exhibited by the regular workers.

Wage differences among the two sexes can also be observed across the occupation categories. The dominant occupations for females are those of professionals, technicians and associate professionals, elementary occupations while for males are those of craft and related trade and plant and machine operators and assemblers. The gender wage gap is the highest for craft and related workers (approximately 94 percent) followed by plant and machine operators and assemblers. However, in the casual labour market too this disparity exists (Table 2 Appendix).

### **The Ordinary Least Squares Log Wage Regression Results**

In this section the earning function has been estimated separately for both males and females in Regular salaried and Casual labour market for the period 2009-10, with an ultimate objective to estimate the wage differential that is attributed to discrimination. The semi-log functional form has been employed for the estimation, wherein the natural log of daily wage (in Nominal terms) is used as the dependent variable and independent variables includes age and age squared which serves as the proxy for experience in the labour market. Other covariates used in the regression equation includes different levels of education-below primary and primary, middle school, secondary education, higher secondary education, diploma and Certificate courses, Graduate, Postgraduate and above and technical degree. The coefficients for each of these independent variables yield the private rate of return per year of education at different levels of education. These figures not only signals towards the productivity of education but also serves as an indicator of the incentive for an individual worker to invest in Human Capital.( Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2002). 'Illiterate' has been used as the base category.



Social category, namely Scheduled caste (SC), Scheduled tribe (ST) and Other Backward Categories(OBC) are also included in the regression equation while “Others” forms the reference group. The last term that has been included in the equation includes whether a worker is a member of a Union or not and does this factor impacts his/her daily wages. The results are reported in Table C below:

Table C: Earnings Function for Males and Females - Regular and Casual Workers: OLS Results  
Dependent Variable: Natural log( daily wage rate)

Variable	2009-2010							
	Regular Workers				Casual Workers			
	Male		Females		Males		Females	
	Coeff.	t-values	Coeff.	t-values	Coeff.	t-values	Coeff.	t-values
Age	0.048*** (0.004)	13.59	0.031*** (0.009)	3.559	0.050*** (0.004)	13.504	0.0288*** (0.004)	6.5
Agesq	0.000	-0.263	0.000	-0.976	- 0.00061** *	-18.31	- 0.00034*** (0.000)	-5.89
Bprim & prim#	0.052* (0.028)	1.818	0.215*** (0.055)	3.916	0.027* (0.017)	1.609	0.179 (0.038)	4.7
Middle#	0.210*** (0.027)	7.71	0.326*** (0.059)	5.513	0.149*** (0.018)	8.199	0.110*** (0.045)	2.43
Secon#	0.423*** (0.027)	15.75	0.765*** (0.059)	13.012	0.201*** (0.021)	9.49	0.230*** (0.07)	3.17
Hsc#	0.656*** (0.028)	23.46	1.116*** (0.058)	19.37	0.165*** (0.033)	4.990	0.695*** (0.117)	5.94
Grad#	0.942*** (0.027)	35.43	1.435*** (0.049)	29.482	0.544*** (0.123)	4.41	0.55139 (0.195)	1.42
Post Grad & abv#	1.131*** (0.030)	37.52	1.562*** (0.054)	28.992	0.263*** (0.055)	4.82	0.349*** (0.195)	1.793
Technica I educ#	0.412*** (0.026)	16.07	0.259*** (0.058)	4.491	0.440* (0.247)	1.779	1.402* (0.782)	1.794
Diploma/ Certificate	0.844*** (0.034)	24.96	1.308*** (0.070)	18.75	0.198** (0.083)	2.389	0.223 (0.287)	0.778



<b>Course#</b>								
<b>SC#</b>	-0.109*** (0.017)	-6.51	-0.107*** (0.042)	-2.541	-0.087*** (0.018)	-4.859	-0.101** (0.050)	-2.034
<b>OBC#</b>	-0.195*** (0.012)	-15.89	-0.270*** (0.031)	-8.62	-0.031** (0.016)	-1.910	-0.109** (0.048)	-2.275
<b>ST#</b>	0.006 (0.021)	0.270	0.094** (0.47)	2.016	-0.030 (0.025)	0.84	-0.078 (0.062)	0.207
<b>Unionme m#</b>	0.335*** (0.012)	28.66	0.547*** (0.029)	18.539	0.165*** (0.017)	9.932	0.233*** (0.050)	2.06
<b>Constant</b>	3.473 (0.068)	51.166	3.085 (0.163)	18.973	3.590 (0.064)	56.31	3.562	22.38
<b>F-Value</b>	939.157		266.685		89.96		26.22	
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.416		0.475		0.1961		0.1967	
<b>Adj.R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.415		0.473		0.1938		0.1987	
<b>N</b>	18850		4223		10885		2687	

**Note:** (#) dF/dx is for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1. z is the test of the underlying coefficient being 0. \*\*\*, \*\*, \* are significant at 1%, 5% and 10% level respectively.

The age coefficient is positive for all the equations while the age square is either negative or zero and both the variables are significant at 1 percent level of significance. One additional year of age(experience) increases wages by approximately 4.8 percent for males while only by 3.1 percent for females in regular full time work. The values are roughly the same for age coefficient for both the sexes respectively in casual labour force. The rate of return to education tends to rise with each level of education as apparent from the coefficients of education in the wage equation for both regular and casual workers. Education coefficients are not only significant at 1 percent level of significance but also the finding is consistent with the earlier studies on Indian labour market.( Duraisamy, 2006; Madheswaran and Khasnobis, 2007).

The rate of return to female education outstrips the returns to males in the regular labour market. The Caste dummies indicate that compared to the reference category (others in this case), SCs, STs and OBCs earn a significantly lower wage in the regular(barring regular full time ST workers in Urban labour market) and casual labour market. Although, it is true that the power and control of Unions have declined in the post liberalisation era but still, being a

member of a union exerts a strong impact on the workers daily wages. The coefficient for this variable is positive and significant (at 1 percent) for both males and females in Regular as well as Casual labour market.

As adopted in the existing literature, Chow test has been conducted using the wage function so given above. The calculated F-value is highly significant at 1 per cent level and it shows that the earnings function differs significantly between males and females in the casual and Regular labour market. Hence, it is necessary to decompose the earnings differential into explained and unexplained portions, which is carried out in the next section.( Madheswaran and Khasnobis, 2007).

The results reveal that the explained component in case of regular full time Urban workers is virtually nil and the discrimination or the “treatment” component is entirely responsible for log wage differential between males and females. What regression results for females employed in this sector highlighted is that the personal characteristics of the women are not unfavourable vis-à-vis men, instead return to these characteristics widens the gender wage gap. Hence, it can be concluded that “pre-market discrimination” does not prevail in case of regular wage/salaried workers. Infact in some respects like education at the higher education spectrum, women exhibit relatively better characteristics. This unexplained discrimination thus shows women who are equally qualified as men and possess other work associated characteristics which are similar to their male counterparts; they are still paid less than males. However, the scenario is different in the Casual labour market as the endowment difference stands to be around 33 percent while the unexplained discrimination is about 67 percent.

**The Blinder-Oaxaca Decomposition Results**

The OLS daily wage regression estimates are used to decompose gender wage gap into-endowment difference and treatment component, which is presented in Table D below.

Components	Blinder- Oaxaca	
	Regular Full time workers	Casual Workers
<b>Explained (endowment)</b>	0.003	0.29

<b>Unexplained (treatment)</b>	0.40	0.58
<b>Explained Difference (%)</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Unexplained Difference(%)</b>	<b>99.25</b>	<b>67</b>

All in all, there is strong evidence from the recent NSS data, of the persistence of discrimination against women in the Urban labour market in India. The possible reasons for this goes well beyond the variables this paper could capture. Societal and cultural norms are at the core in explaining such differences. Females because of their familial ties and household responsibilities are generally perceived to be less stable in job market than men. Employers attaches a very high probability of a women dropping from the labour market at some certain age and thus discriminates against women as they enter labour market.

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### **Appendix**

#### **Oaxca Decomposition Method:**

The decomposition method enables us to separate the wage differential into differences that can be explained by differences in characteristics and those that cannot be explained by differences in characteristics. The gross wage differential can be defined as

$$G = \frac{Y_m - Y_f}{Y_f} = \frac{Y_m}{Y_f} - 1 \quad (1)$$

Where  $Y_m$  and  $Y_f$  represents the wages of Male individuals and individuals belonging to the female categories respectively. In the absence of labour market discrimination, the male-female differential would reflect pure productivity differences (Q):

$$Q = \frac{Y_m^o}{Y_f^o} - 1 \quad (2)$$

Where the superscript denotes the absence of market discrimination. The market discrimination coefficient (D) is then defined as the proportionate difference between G+1 and Q+1

$$D = \frac{(Y_m / Y_f) - (Y_m^o / Y_f^o)}{(Y_m^o / Y_f^o)} \quad (3)$$

Equations (1)-(3) imply the following logarithmic decomposition of the gross earnings differential

$$\ln(G+1) = \ln(D+1) + \ln(Q+1) \quad (4)$$

This decomposition can be further applied within the framework of semi-logarithmic earnings equations (Mincer, 1974) and estimated via OLS such that

$$\ln \bar{Y}_m = \sum \hat{\beta}_m \bar{X}_m + \varepsilon_m \quad (\text{Male Wage equation}) \quad (5)$$

$$\ln \bar{Y}_f = \sum \hat{\beta}_f \bar{X}_f + \varepsilon_f \quad (\text{Female wage equation}) \quad (6)$$

where  $\ln \bar{Y}$  denotes the geometric mean of earnings,  $\bar{X}$  the vector of mean values of the regressors,  $\hat{\beta}$  the vector of coefficients and  $\varepsilon$  is the error term. Within this framework, the

gross differential in logarithmic term is given by

$$\begin{aligned} \ln(G+1) &= \ln(\bar{Y}_m / \bar{Y}_f) \\ &= \ln(\bar{Y}_m / \bar{Y}_f) \\ &= \sum \hat{\beta}_m \bar{X}_m - \sum \hat{\beta}_f \bar{X}_f \end{aligned} \quad (7)$$

The Oaxaca Decomposition simply observes that equation (7) can be expanded. In other words, the difference of the coefficients of the two earnings functions is taken as a priori evidence of discrimination. If, for the given endowment, females were paid according to the male wage structure in the absence of discrimination, then the hypothetical female earning function would be given as

$$\ln \bar{Y}_f = \sum \hat{\beta}_m \bar{X}_f \quad (8)$$

Subtracting equation (8) from equation (7) we get

$$\ln \bar{Y}_m - \ln \bar{Y}_f = \sum \hat{\beta}_m (\bar{X}_m - \bar{X}_f) + \sum \bar{X}_f (\hat{\beta}_m - \hat{\beta}_f) \quad (9)$$

Alternatively, the decomposition can also be done as

$$\ln \bar{Y}_m - \ln \bar{Y}_f = \sum \hat{\beta}_f (\bar{X}_m - \bar{X}_f) + \sum \bar{X}_m (\hat{\beta}_m - \hat{\beta}_f) \quad (10)$$

In equations, (9) and (10) above, on the right hand side, the first term can be interpreted as endowment differences. The second term in these equations has been regarded in the literature as the discrimination component. This study basically focuses on the discrimination component. Studies use either of these alternative decomposition forms (equation 9 or 10) based on their assumptions about the wage structure that would prevail in the absence of discrimination.

Table1: Distribution of Sample

	Regular full-time	Casual	Total
Males	18850	10885	29735
Females	4223	2687	6910
Total	23,073	13,572	36,645

Table2:

Casual Urban Workers					
	Share (%)		Avg. Daily Wages		Wage differential
	Males	Females	Males	Females	
Not literate	23.17	51.02	102.66	58.36	75.91
Below Primary	11.69	12.24	103.97	59.80	73.86
Primary	19.76	15.78	108.68	80.14	35.61
Middle	26.61	14.40	120.17	90.00	33.52
Secondary	12.54	4.47	120.65	95.85	25.87
Higher Secondary	4.15	1.08	120.35	89.72	47.27
Diploma/Certificate Course	0.69	0.26	110.83	100	10.83
Graduate	1.14	0.60	150.90	102.37	20.05
Postgraduate & Above	0.24	0.15	164.96	139.31	18

Table3: Share of Regular Workers and Gender Wage Differential

Regular(full time) Urban Workers					
	Share (%)		Avg. Daily Wages		Wage differential
	Males	Females	Males	Females	



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legislators, senior officials and managers	7.03	9.52	580.37	451.14	28.65
Professionals	11.82	17.37	579.90	485.22	19.51
technicians and associate professionals	12.29	18.29	465.61	404.31	15.16
Clerks	8.47	6.43	400.66	348.41	14.99
service workers and shop and market sales workers	16.76	11.16	239.68	178.45	34.31
skilled agriculture and fishery workers	1.37	1.49	268.00	206.41	29.84
craft and related trade workers	14.15	9.81	231.79	119.15	94.54
plant and machine operators and assemblers	12.19	4.95	260.82	146.27	78.31
elementary occupation	10.32	15.41	179.46	102.84	74.50
workers not classified by occupations	5.61	5.56	406.47	375.60	8.22