

Amendments to Help Working Women



Iranian women are present in most professions.

Women's Social and Cultural Council has sent Labor Law amendments to Majlis, which reduce the working hours of women and ban their employment in night shifts.

Announcing the above, Akram Hosseini Mojarad told Mehr News Agency that employment policies, which were ratified in 13 notes by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution in 1992, guarantee the status and rights of women workers who form a large portion of the working strata.

"It gives high importance to women's pivotal role at home, their maternal responsibilities, family rights and spiritual health," she said.

> Legal Ban

Hosseini noted that members of Women's Social and Cultural Council want a legal ban on employing women in night shifts, except in jobs like nursing.

"Once the amendments are ratified, employers would not be allowed to recruit women in night shifts," she said.

"The amendments propose reduction of working hours along with full salary and fringe benefits."

According to Hosseini, the council has proposed the formation of an expert committee to specify the number of working hours.

"This covers all single and married women because women do not have physical strength like men," she said.

> Women Breadwinners

Another proposal presented to Majlis calls for giving privileges to women breadwinners, including reduction of working hours, proximity of jobs to their homes and transport services.

"Since women spend most of their useful time in working places, they don't have time

to promote themselves scientifically and culturally. The amendments obligate employers to provide facilities and hold training courses for women," she said.

The amendments also stipulate the law on returning to work after the end of maternity leave and supervision of medical expert on women's diseases.

Asked whether women would lose jobs after the reduction of working hours, she said contrary to state-run centers, many non-governmental companies and institutes are more inclined to recruit women.

Hosseini, however, warned that allocation of most job opportunities to women will have an adverse impact on families, "since men, as major breadwinners, need a job more".

"Women's Social and Cultural Council emphasizes gender equality in terms of education opportunities and women's access to higher education," she said.

Urbanization Impacts Health

Movements of people whether from rural to urban areas or from one country to another often alter the characteristic epidemiological disease profile, and at the same time new diseases appear or old ones reemerge.

Such is the case of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, yellow fever, dengue and Lyme disease, WIP reported.

For example, large-scale migrations to Costa Rica in the 1980s, stemming from conflicts in other Central American countries, produced a palpable increase—especially along border areas—in the prevalence of malaria and other infectious and parasitic diseases.

At the same time, urbanization is associated with changes in diet and exercise that increase the prevalence of obesity with increased risks of type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Among migrants, mobility-related risks include poverty, vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation, dangerous working conditions and separation from social support networks.

> Vulnerability

Many of these conditions affect the most vulnerable segment of the population: women, children and the elderly.

The reproductive system of pregnant women is especially vulnerable to environmental contaminants. Each step in the reproductive process can be altered by toxic substances in the environment that increase the risk of abortion, birth defects, fetal growth and perinatal death.

Many studies have shown that exposing pregnant women to carbon monoxide can damage the health of the fetus. In addition, the developing fetus is susceptible to environmental factors—for example, through the mother's exposure to toxic substances in the workplace.

Children are particularly susceptible to disease when they are born and develop in an environment characterized by overcrowding, poor hygiene, excessive noise and a lack of space for recreation and study. They suffer not only from a hostile physical environment, but from stress and factors such as violence that such environments create.

The more obvious ill effects of urban life—emotion-

al stress, loss of family structure, congested traffic, noise, environmental pollution—affect people from all incomes. Many city dwellers take for granted access to basic public services, such as drinking water supply, housing, solid waste disposal, transportation and healthcare.

For the poor, however, these are either deficient or nonexistent. Instead, those in poverty zones usually receive an extra dose of environmental pollution, since industries tend to cluster in outlying areas where regulations are more lax.

> Pollution

Motor vehicles are an important source of air pollution in cities. In addition, they can be a significant

of contaminants.

Yet Mexico City's pollution problem is hardly unique; virtually every major city in the Western Hemisphere is fighting the same battle. Residents of Santiago, Chile, are afflicted with a host of chronic respiratory infections caused by large concentrations of particulate pollutants in the atmosphere, whose persistence is facilitated by the area's unique topographical and climatic circumstances.

The crowded urban neighborhoods, combined with poor sanitary conditions and inadequate waste removal, create conditions favorable to the spread of infectious diseases.

The overcrowded housing in the slums exposes the urban poor to high rates of infectious diseases such as pneumonia, tuberculosis and diarrhea. As a result, the proportion of children dying from infectious and parasitic diseases in poor households in Africa, Asia and Latin America is several hundred times higher than in households in Western Europe or in the United States.

The environmental, social and economic situation at home is, in turn, influenced by the general social, economic and political situation. The laws and regulations governing a particular city or country will be a reflection of the priority that the government attaches to providing good services and a healthy environment to the population.

Given the serious effects that urbanization can have on health, it is essential to include health considerations into policymaking. Because many of the negative effects are suffered by the poor and minorities, it is equally essential to view the challenges incorporating considerations of social justice and equity. The economic situation is a key determinant in the decision, resolve and capacity of the authorities to tackle environmental problems more effectively.

As Herbert Girardet, an expert on urban sustainability, says, "If we are to continue to live in cities, indeed if we are to continue to flourish on this planet, we will have to find a viable relationship between cities and the living world—a relationship not parasitic but symbiotic, or mutually supportive."



News in Brief

Happy Life Filled With Earnest Talk

A happy life is social and conversationally deep rather than solitary and superficial, US researchers suggest.

Psychological scientists Matthias R. Mehl, Shannon E. Holleran and C. Shelby Clark from the University of Arizona, along with Simine Vazire of Washington University in St. Louis, investigated whether happy and unhappy people differ in the types of conversations in which they tend to engage.



Volunteers wore an unobtrusive recording device called the Electronically Activated Recorder for four days and the devices recorded 30 seconds of sound every 12.5 minutes, yielding a total of more than 20,000 recordings, Presstv reported.

Researchers then listened to the recordings and identified the conversations as trivial small talk or substantive discussions. In addition, the volunteers completed personality and wellbeing assessments.

The happiest participants spent 25 percent less time alone and 70 percent more time talking than the unhappiest participants. In addition to the difference in the amount of social interactions happy and unhappy people had, there was also a difference in the types of conversations in which they took part.

AIDS Rise May Force India To Spend More

India will have to scale up prevention of HIV to avoid having to spend an increasing share of its health budget on treatment of AIDS patients, the World Bank and other agencies said.

New Delhi spends about 5 percent of its \$5.4 billion health-care budget on treating AIDS patients, AFP reported.

India, with 2.5 million patients, is among the top three countries with the highest number of HIV cases, alongside South Africa and Nigeria.

But with HIV cases showing signs of rising in the capital New Delhi, in the financial hub of Mumbai, in the north and the northeast, the cost of treatment in India could rise to \$1.8 billion by 2020, about 7 percent of the total health expenditure, the World Bank says.

This would pose an enormous burden on the healthcare services and the budget in a country where malaria still kills hundreds of people every year and other health-sector challenges like non-communicable diseases are as sharp as AIDS, experts say.

More than 15 percent of the 200,000 plus injectable drug users are HIV positive in the country, against a global average of 10 percent, AIDS experts say.

Drought Threatens Vietnamese Livelihoods

As temperatures rise in Vietnam, a nationwide drought has dried up riverbeds, sparked forest fires and now threatens one of the world's richest agricultural regions, upon which millions depend for their livelihoods.

"The Mekong Delta is facing a serious drought," Nguyen Minh Giam, deputy director of the National Hydro-Meteorological Forecasting Center for the southern region, told IRIN.

Water levels on Mekong River are at an almost 20-year low, largely as a result of the rainy season ending early and a precipitous drop in water flow upstream, he said.

With virtually no rainfall in the north since September, fires have burned through the northern provinces of Lao Cai and Lai Chau.

In central Vietnam, sustained temperatures of about 38 degrees Celsius have sent hundreds to local hospitals.

According to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the heat and humidity have sparked a plague of insects and worms, which have eaten through thousands of hectares of rice paddies.

The drought conditions in the delta are also being felt in other Mekong countries because of the early end to the 2009 wet season, as well as low monsoon rainfall.

17,000 Germans Die From Medical Errors

About 17,000 deaths per year in Germany are due to preventable medical errors, a patient safety non-profit group estimates.

A report by the German Coalition for Patient Safety says adverse medical events include all harms occurring during patient care that are not due to the underlying disease, UPIR reported.



In other words, the medical treatment for both inpatient and outpatient care can make a patient ill, the report said.

For example with inpatients, shift work in hospitals necessitates complex organization of the work and numerous planning and communication processes, and information may get lost at each interface, the report added.

In addition, hand hygiene is not always optimal—lack of hand-washing can cause infections. Errors in providing medication also occur.

With outpatients, errors in diagnosis are possible, monitoring is more difficult and there is no common patient file for all physicians involved.