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RESEARCH ARTICLE

HEALTH SECTOR IN BIHAR: DECENT WORK DIMENSIONS OF HEALTH CARE WORKERS

*Mr. Piyush Bhadani

Assistant Professor, P.G. Department of Economics, Jai Prakash University, Chapra, Bihar

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*Corresponding author:

Mr. Piyush Bhadani

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ABSTRACT

The health sector in Bihar plays a crucial role in the overall development of the region. This article examines the current state of the health sector in Bihar with a particular focus on the decent work dimensions for health workers. It explores working conditions, wages, job security, and other critical factors that contribute to the well-being and productivity of health sector employees. The analysis draws on various data sources, including government reports, academic research, and field studies, to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities in improving decent work conditions in Bihar's health sector. The health sector in Bihar faces significant challenges and disparities, impacting both government and private health care workers. This article synthesizes findings on wages, income security, working conditions, social protection, and participation in decision-making processes.

INTRODUCTION

Bihar, with a population exceeding 120 million, faces significant challenges in delivering quality healthcare services. The state has made strides in improving healthcare infrastructure and accessibility, but the working conditions of health sector employees remain a critical area of concern. Decent work, as defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO), encompasses opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace, social protection for families, and better prospects for personal development and social integration. This paper focuses on assessing these dimensions within Bihar's health sector.

Current State of Health Sector in Bihar: Bihar's healthcare infrastructure has seen notable improvements over the past decade. According to the Bihar State Health Society (2020), the number of healthcare facilities has increased, with 2,061 Primary Health Centres (PHCs), 533 Community Health Centres (CHCs), and 38 District Hospitals operational as of 2020. But Bihar still severely lags in several key health indicators. Various health indicators provide a comprehensive picture of the state's health status, infrastructure, and outcomes. Below are some key health indicators of Bihar.

Maternal and Child Health

- **Infant Mortality Rate (IMR):** Bihar has an IMR of 29 deaths per 1,000 live births, which is higher than the national average of 28 (NFHS-5, 2020-21).
- **Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR):** The MMR in Bihar is 149 deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to the national average of 113 (Sample Registration System, 2016-18).
- **Under-Five Mortality Rate (U5MR):** The U5MR in Bihar is 37 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to the national average of 34 (NFHS-5, 2020-21).
- **Antenatal Care (ANC):** Only 44% of pregnant women received four or more ANC visits, compared to the national average of 58.6% (NFHS-5, 2020-21).
- **Institutional Deliveries:** Institutional deliveries in Bihar have increased to 76.2%, up from 63.8% in NFHS-4 (2015-16), but still lag behind the national average of 88.6% (NFHS-5, 2020-21).

Nutrition

- **Stunting among Children (Under 5 years):** 42.9% of children under five in Bihar are stunted (short for their age), higher than the national average of 35.5% (NFHS-5, 2020-21).
- **Wasting among Children (Under 5 years):** 21.3% of children under five are wasted (thin for their height), compared to the national average of 19.3% (NFHS-5, 2020-21).
- **Underweight Children (Under 5 years):** 41% of children under five are underweight, against the national average of 32.1% (NFHS-5, 2020-21).

Immunization

- **Full Immunization Coverage:** Full immunization coverage among children aged 12-23 months in Bihar is 61.7%, below the national average of 76.4% (NFHS-5, 2020-21).

Health Infrastructure

- **Doctor-Patient Ratio:** Bihar has a doctor-patient ratio of 1:17,685, significantly below the WHO recommendation of 1:1,000 (Bihar Health Department, 2021).
- **Hospital Beds:** The state has 0.3 hospital beds per 1,000 population, compared to the national average of 0.5 (Bihar State Health Society, 2020).

Water and Sanitation

- **Access to Improved Drinking Water:** 98.2% of households in Bihar have access to improved drinking water sources, slightly higher than the national average of 95.9% (NFHS-5, 2020-21).
- **Access to Improved Sanitation Facilities:** Only 50.9% of households have access to improved sanitation facilities, below the national average of 70.2% (NFHS-5, 2020-21).

Health Workforce

- **Nurse and Midwife Density:** Bihar has a nurse and midwife density of 1.4 per 1,000 population, compared to the national average of 1.7 (WHO, 2020).

These indicators highlight the pressing health challenges Bihar faces, particularly in maternal and child health, nutrition, immunization, health infrastructure, and workforce. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies and robust policy interventions to improve health outcomes and overall well-being in the state.

Review of Existing Literature

Bihar faces substantial challenges in its health sector. The state's health indicators are among the worst in the country, reflecting significant deficiencies in health infrastructure, workforce, and services. This literature review explores the health sector in Bihar through the lens of decent work dimensions, as defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO): opportunities for work, adequate earnings and productive work, decent working time, combining work, family, and personal life, work that should be abolished, stability and security of work, equal opportunity and treatment in employment, safe work environment, and social security.

Opportunities for Work

Workforce Shortage: Bihar suffers from a severe shortage of health care workers. According to the Bihar Health Department (2021), the state still struggles with a doctor-patient ratio of 1:17,685 and a nurse-patient ratio of 1:8,639, both significantly below the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended ratios of 1:1,000 and 1:300, respectively. The shortage is even more acute in rural areas, exacerbating disparities in access to health care services (Bihar Health Department, 2021). A report by the Centre for Health Policy at the Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI) (2021) confirms this shortage, noting that many primary health centres (PHCs) operate without sufficient medical staff.

Training and Education: The skill level and training of health care workers in Bihar are often inadequate. Kumar *et al.* (2012) discusses the gaps in medical education and the need for continuous professional development to enhance the competencies of health workers in Bihar. The study highlights the importance of strengthening medical and nursing schools in the state (Kumar, S., *et al.*, 2012).

Adequate Earnings and Productive Work

Wage Disparities: Government health care workers in Bihar typically receive standardized salaries as per government pay scales, which provide a level of income security. In contrast, private health care workers often face greater variability in wages and job

security. Private sector workers, especially those in smaller clinics, tend to earn significantly less than their public sector counterparts (Dussault, G., and M.C. Franceschini, 2006).

Income Security: Gupta *et al.* (2014) highlights the financial instability faced by many private sector health workers due to the prevalence of contractual and temporary employment. This lack of stable employment affects their overall income security and financial well-being (Gupta, I., *et al.*, 2014).

Decent Working Time

Working Hours and Conditions: Health care workers in Bihar, particularly in rural areas, often face long working hours and high patient loads. This is particularly true for government health care workers, who frequently work beyond their scheduled hours due to staff shortages and high demand (Mavalankar, D.V., and P. Sankara Raman, 2009). Private sector workers may also experience extended working hours, often without additional compensation, especially in smaller clinics and hospitals.

Combining Work, Family, and Personal Life: Balancing work and personal life is a significant challenge for health care workers in Bihar. Baru *et al.* (2010) notes that female health workers, in particular, struggle with work-life balance due to societal expectations and the lack of supportive workplace policies, such as flexible working hours and child care facilities (Baru, R., *et al.*, 2010). Government workers generally have better access to structured leave policies, including maternity leave, compared to their private sector counterparts.

Stability and Security of Work

Employment Security: Government health care workers in Bihar enjoy greater job security and stability due to formal employment contracts and pension plans. In contrast, private sector workers often face job insecurity due to the prevalence of temporary and contractual employment arrangements (Sundaraman, T., *et al.*, 2012). This job insecurity is a significant concern for private sector health workers, impacting their financial and social stability.

Equal Opportunity and Treatment in Employment

Gender Disparities: Gender disparities in the health workforce are evident in Bihar. According to UN Women (2021), female health workers in Bihar, especially in the private sector, face challenges such as lower wages, limited career advancement opportunities, and workplace discrimination (UN Women, 2021). Efforts to address these disparities are crucial for ensuring equal opportunities and treatment for all health workers.

Safe Work Environment

Occupational Safety: Sharma and Zodpey (2011) point out that health care workers in Bihar face various occupational hazards, including exposure to infectious diseases, inadequate sanitation facilities, and lack of safety equipment. These issues are particularly pronounced in rural and smaller health care facilities, where resources and infrastructure are limited (Sharma, A., and S.P. Zodpey, 2011).

Social Security

Health Insurance and Benefits: Social security provisions, such as health insurance and pensions, are more comprehensive for government health care workers in Bihar. Private sector workers often lack access to such benefits, leaving them vulnerable to financial risks and instability (Gupta, I., *et al.*, 2014). The Bihar State Health Society (2020) emphasizes the need for improved social security measures for all health care workers to ensure their well-being and financial security.

Social Dialogue and Participation in Decision-Making

Unionization and Collective Bargaining: Unionization and collective bargaining are more prevalent among government health care workers in Bihar, providing them with platforms to negotiate better wages, working conditions, and address grievances. However, private sector workers have limited opportunities for collective bargaining and participation in decision-making processes, which affects their ability to advocate for their rights (George, A., 2009).

Decent Work Dimensions in Bihar's Health Sector

Wage and Income Security

Wages and Income Security of Health Care Workers in Bihar: Government health care workers in Bihar, including doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals. Health workers in Bihar often face challenges related to wages and income security. While government-employed doctors and nurses receive salaries as per national standards, those working in private or contractual positions frequently report lower wages and irregular payment schedules. A study by the Centre for Health Policy at the Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI) highlighted that many contractual health workers earn less than the minimum wage (ADRI, 2021).

Government Health Care Workers: These include:

Doctors

- Government doctors in Bihar are paid according to the 7th Pay Commission recommendations.
- Entry-level doctors, such as Medical Officers, earn between INR 56,100 to INR 1,77,500 per month, depending on their level and experience.
- Senior doctors and specialists can earn higher salaries, with additional allowances for housing, transportation, and other benefits.
- Besides the base salary, government doctors receive dearness allowance (DA), house rent allowance (HRA), and medical benefits.

Nurses

- Government-employed nurses in Bihar receive salaries ranging from INR 35,400 to INR 1,12,400 per month, in line with the 7th Pay Commission.
- Additional benefits include DA, HRA, and other allowances, along with retirement benefits such as pensions and gratuities.

Other Health Workers

- Paramedical staff and other health workers receive wages according to the respective pay grades, typically ranging from INR 25,500 to INR 81,100 per month.
- These workers also enjoy job security, regular increments, and benefits similar to those provided to doctors and nurses.

Private Health Care Workers: In contrast, health care workers employed in the private sector in Bihar often face significantly different wage structures and levels of income security:

Doctors

- Private sector doctors' salaries can vary widely depending on the hospital or clinic, the doctor's specialty, and experience.
- Entry-level doctors in private hospitals may earn between INR 30,000 to INR 50,000 per month.
- Experienced specialists in renowned private hospitals can earn significantly higher, with some earning upwards of INR 1,50,000 per month, but these figures are not standardized and depend on individual contracts.

Nurses

- Private sector nurses generally earn lower salaries compared to their government counterparts.
- The average salary for nurses in private hospitals in Bihar ranges from INR 15,000 to INR 40,000 per month.
- Many private sector nurses do not receive additional allowances or benefits like DA, HRA, or pensions.

Other Health Workers:

- Salaries for paramedical staff and other health workers in the private sector are often lower than those in the public sector.
- These workers typically earn between INR 10,000 to INR 25,000 per month.
- Income security is a major concern, as many private health workers do not have access to benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, or retirement plans.

Comparative Analysis

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Government and Private Sector Workers with respect to Wage and Income Security

Basis of Comparison	Government Sector	Private Sector
Wages	The government sector offers standardized, higher wages with additional allowances and benefits. The are also entitled for regular increments and pay revisions as per government policies which ensure consistent wage growth.	In private sector wages are generally lower, with significant variability. Lack of standardization leads to disparities in pay, especially for entry-level positions.
Income Security:	The government sector employees enjoy high income security due to permanent employment, regular pay, and comprehensive benefits including pensions and gratuities. Job security is bolstered by strong labour protections and unions.	The private sector employees face lower income security due to the prevalence of contractual and temporary employment. Many workers face delayed payments and lack of benefits like health insurance, paid leave, and retirement plans.
Benefits and Allowances:	Comprehensive benefits package including DA, HRA, medical benefits, pensions, and other allowances.	Limited benefits, often restricted to basic health insurance. Many private sector workers lack access to comprehensive social security schemes.

The disparity between government and private health care workers in Bihar is stark, with government workers enjoying significantly higher wages, better income security, and comprehensive benefits. Addressing these disparities is crucial for improving the overall quality of healthcare in Bihar. Policymakers need to enforce better wage standards and ensure social protection for all health care workers, irrespective of their employment sector. Such measures would not only improve the livelihood of health workers but also enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the health care system in Bihar.

Working Conditions and Job Security

Job security is a significant issue, especially for contractual and temporary staff. The lack of permanent positions and the prevalence of short-term contracts create an environment of job insecurity. Additionally, many health workers report inadequate working conditions, including insufficient medical supplies, poor infrastructure, and high patient loads, which contribute to job-related stress and burnout (Bihar Health Department, 2021).

Working Conditions of Health Care Workers in Bihar

Government Health Care Workers: Government health care workers in Bihar typically experience varying working conditions depending on their location, role, and facility type. The working environment in government hospitals, Primary Health Centres (PHCs), and Community Health Centres (CHCs) generally reflects the state's efforts to provide public health services, but it also reveals significant challenges.

Infrastructure and Resources

Government Hospitals: Larger government hospitals, particularly in urban areas, are relatively better equipped with medical supplies, diagnostic equipment, and other necessary infrastructure. However, many rural government hospitals and PHCs face chronic shortages of essential medicines, equipment, and supplies (Bihar State Health Society, 2020).

PHCs and CHCs: Many PHCs and CHCs are understaffed and under-resourced. The lack of basic amenities, poor maintenance of facilities, and inadequate medical supplies are common issues, leading to a strained working environment for health care workers (Centre for Health Policy, ADRI, 2021).

Workload and Patient Load: Government health care workers often face high patient loads, especially in rural areas where the doctor-patient and nurse-patient ratios are significantly below the recommended levels. For instance, the doctor-patient ratio in Bihar is 1:17,685, far below the WHO recommendation of 1:1,000 (NFHS-5, 2020-21). The high patient load leads to long working hours, increased stress, and burnout among health care workers. Government health centres often operate with fewer staff than required, increasing the burden on existing employees (Bihar Health Department, 2021).

Job Security and Stability: Government health care workers enjoy high job security, particularly those in permanent positions. This security comes with benefits like pensions, health insurance, and other allowances, contributing to a more stable working environment. Contractual staff, however, face less job security and stability, with contracts typically renewed annually and often subject to delays or cancellations.

Training and Professional Development: Opportunities for training and professional development are more structured in the government sector, with regular programs and workshops. However, the reach and frequency of such programs can be limited, especially in rural areas (WHO, 2020).

Private Health Care Workers: Private sector health care workers in Bihar encounter different working conditions, often marked by variability depending on the hospital or clinic's size, reputation, and financial stability.

Infrastructure and Resources

Private Hospitals: Larger, well-funded private hospitals in urban areas usually have better infrastructure, advanced medical equipment, and adequate supplies. These hospitals can offer a more comfortable working environment compared to government facilities.

Small Clinics: Smaller private clinics and hospitals, particularly in rural areas, often struggle with limited resources, outdated equipment, and inadequate medical supplies, similar to some government facilities (Centre for Health Policy, ADRI, 2021).

Workload and Patient Load: Private sector health workers generally experience a varied workload. In well-established private hospitals, the patient-to-staff ratio is often better managed, but smaller private clinics can face high patient loads due to limited staffing. Working hours in the private sector can be longer and less regulated, with many private health care workers reporting extended shifts and on-call duties (UN Women, 2021).

Job Security and Stability: Job security in the private sector is often lower compared to the government sector. Many private health care workers are employed on a contractual basis, with less stability and fewer long-term guarantees. Benefits such as

pensions, comprehensive health insurance, and paid leave are less common in the private sector, contributing to job insecurity (ILO, 2019).

Training and Professional Development: Private sector opportunities for training and professional development are highly dependent on the employer. Large, reputable private hospitals may offer regular training and upskilling programs, but smaller facilities often lack the resources to invest in their staff's professional growth. The absence of standardized training programs in many private hospitals limits professional development opportunities for health care workers (WHO, 2020).

Comparative Analysis

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Government and Private Sector Workers with respect to Working Conditions and Job Security

Basis of Comparison	Government Sector	Private Sector
Infrastructure and Resources	Larger hospitals are relatively well-equipped, but rural facilities often lack basic resources and infrastructure.	Larger private hospitals have better infrastructure, but smaller clinics face similar resource constraints as rural government facilities.
Workload and Patient Load	High patient loads and inadequate staffing lead to long working hours and stress.	Workload varies, with some private hospitals managing patient loads effectively while others, particularly smaller clinics, face high patient volumes.
Job Security and Stability	High job security and stability for permanent staff, with comprehensive benefits.	Lower job security and stability, with fewer long-term benefits and protections.
Training and Professional Development	Structured but limited professional development opportunities, especially in rural areas.	Inconsistent professional development opportunities, highly dependent on the employer's resources and commitment to staff training.
Work Environment and Conditions	Generally structured working conditions but often strained by resource limitations and high patient loads.	Better working conditions in large hospitals, but smaller facilities may have similar issues to government clinics, including resource shortages and high workloads.

The working conditions of health care workers in Bihar reveal significant disparities between the government and private sectors. While government health care workers benefit from higher job security and more structured benefits, they often face high workloads and resource constraints, particularly in rural areas. Private sector workers, on the other hand, may experience better infrastructure and working conditions in large hospitals but face greater job insecurity and variability in working conditions. Addressing these disparities is essential for improving the overall quality of healthcare and ensuring the well-being of health care workers across both sectors in Bihar.

Social Protection

Social protection for health workers in Bihar is uneven. Permanent employees typically have access to benefits such as health insurance, partial pensions, and paid leave. In contrast, contractual workers often lack these protections, making them vulnerable to financial instability in cases of illness or injury. Efforts to extend social protection to all health workers are crucial for ensuring decent work conditions (ILO, 2019).

Social Protection of Health Care Workers in Bihar: Social protection encompasses various forms of financial and social security measures that help workers manage risks and ensure their well-being. For health care workers in Bihar, social protection varies significantly between those employed in the government sector and those in the private sector.

Government Health Care Workers: Government health care workers in Bihar benefit from a comprehensive social protection system, which includes health insurance, pensions, paid leave, and other benefits. These protections are designed to provide financial security and support throughout their careers and into retirement.

Health Insurance: Government health care workers are typically covered under the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) or the Employee State Insurance Scheme (ESIS). These schemes provide comprehensive medical coverage, including outpatient care, hospitalization, and specialized treatments. The CGHS covers not only the employees but also their dependents, ensuring extensive health protection.

Pensions and Retirement Benefits: Government employees are entitled to pensions after retirement, providing them with a steady income. The pension system is based on the 7th Pay Commission recommendations, ensuring that retired health workers receive a reasonable monthly income. Additional retirement benefits include gratuity payments, which are lump-sum amounts given to employees upon retirement, calculated based on their length of service and last drawn salary.

Paid Leave and Maternity Benefits: Government health care workers receive various forms of paid leave, including casual leave, earned leave, and medical leave. These leave policies ensure that employees can take time off without financial penalties. Female health workers are entitled to maternity leave of up to 26 weeks, in line with the Maternity Benefit Act. This leave is fully paid, ensuring financial stability during the period of childbirth and recovery.

Other Benefits: Government employees receive additional benefits such as housing allowances, travel allowances, and access to government housing facilities. These benefits contribute to their overall financial security and well-being. The government also provides family pension schemes, ensuring that the families of deceased employees receive financial support.

Private Health Care Workers: Private health care workers in Bihar generally have less comprehensive social protection compared to their government counterparts. The level of social protection varies widely depending on the size, reputation, and financial stability of the private health care provider.

Health Insurance: Larger private hospitals often provide health insurance to their employees, but the coverage may not be as extensive as government schemes. The insurance typically covers basic hospitalization and outpatient care but may not include specialized treatments. Smaller private clinics and hospitals may not offer any health insurance, leaving employees to arrange their own coverage.

Pensions and Retirement Benefits: Few private health care institutions offer pension plans. Some large private hospitals may provide retirement benefits through schemes like the Employee Provident Fund (EPF), but these are not as generous or comprehensive as government pensions. Many private sector workers rely on personal savings and investments for their retirement, which can lead to financial insecurity in old age.

Paid Leave and Maternity Benefits: Paid leave policies in the private sector vary widely. While larger private hospitals may offer paid leave, smaller clinics often provide limited or no paid leave options. Maternity benefits are less consistent in the private sector. While some hospitals offer maternity leave in line with the Maternity Benefit Act, others may provide shorter leave periods or unpaid leave, impacting financial stability for female workers during childbirth.

Other Benefits: Additional benefits like housing and travel allowances are rare in the private sector. Some larger hospitals may offer subsidized housing or transport, but these benefits are not standard. Family pension schemes are uncommon, and the families of deceased private sector workers may not receive financial support, increasing their vulnerability.

Comparative Analysis

Table 3. Comparative Analysis of Government and Private Sector Workers with respect to Social Protection

Basis of Comparison	Government Sector	Private Sector
Health Insurance:	Comprehensive health insurance through CGHS orESIS, covering employees and dependents with extensive benefits.	Variable coverage, with larger hospitals providing basic health insurance and smaller clinics often offering none.
Pensions and Retirement Benefits:	Guaranteed pensions and gratuity payments, ensuring financial security in retirement.	Limited or no pension plans, with reliance on personal savings and EPF where available.
Paid Leave and Maternity Benefits:	Comprehensive benefits package including DA, HRA, medical benefits, pensions, and other allowances.	Inconsistent leave policies, with some institutions offering limited paid leave and variable maternity benefits.
Other Benefits:	Additional benefits like housing allowances, travel allowances, and family pension schemes.	Rare additional benefits, with some larger hospitals offering limited subsidies but generally lacking comprehensive support.

The disparity in social protection between government and private health care workers in Bihar highlights significant challenges in ensuring financial security and well-being for all health workers. While government employees benefit from extensive protections, private sector workers often face gaps in coverage and support. Addressing these disparities through policy reforms and better enforcement of labour standards is crucial for improving the overall quality of life and security for health care workers in Bihar. Continuous professional development is essential for maintaining a skilled healthcare workforce. In Bihar, opportunities for training and education are limited, particularly for lower-level health workers. This lack of professional development can impede career advancement and affect the overall quality of healthcare services provided (WHO, 2020).

Social Dialogue

Social Dialogue and Participation in Decision-Making Process of Health Care Workers in Bihar

Government Health Care Workers: Government health care workers in Bihar generally have more opportunities for social dialogue and participation in the decision-making process compared to their counterparts in the private sector. This is facilitated through formal structures and mechanisms designed to involve employees in discussions regarding their work conditions, policies, and other relevant matters.

Formal Unions and Association: Government health care workers are often members of formal unions and associations that represent their interests. These bodies include the Bihar Health Services Association (BHSA) and the Bihar State Nurses Association. These unions regularly engage in dialogue with government authorities to advocate for better working conditions, salary revisions, job security, and other issues affecting health care workers. They play a crucial role in negotiating collective bargaining agreements. **Participation in Policy Making:** Government health care workers, through their unions and associations, are sometimes involved in policy-making processes.

For instance, they may be consulted during the formulation of health policies, labour laws, and other regulations that impact their work environment. Advisory committees and task forces may include representatives from these unions, allowing health care workers to contribute to decisions that affect their professional lives.

Grievance Redressal Mechanisms: The government sector has established grievance redressal mechanisms where employees can voice their concerns and seek resolution. These mechanisms include internal complaint committees, ombudsman services, and labour courts. Workers can file complaints regarding workplace issues, harassment, unfair treatment, or policy grievances, and expect a formal process for resolution.

Regular Consultations and Meetings: Regular consultations and meetings are held between health department officials and representatives of health care workers' unions. These meetings provide a platform for discussing ongoing issues, future plans, and implementing changes based on feedback from health workers.

Private Health Care Workers: In the private health care sector in Bihar, opportunities for social dialogue and participation in the decision-making process are generally more limited. The extent of involvement depends heavily on the size and management practices of the individual private health care provider.

Limited Unionization: Unionization among private health care workers is less prevalent due to various factors, including management resistance, fear of job loss, and lack of awareness. While some larger private hospitals may have employee associations, many smaller clinics do not. Without strong unions or associations, private health care workers often lack a collective voice to negotiate for better working conditions or address grievances.

Top-Down Management Structures: Private health care institutions often have hierarchical, top-down management structures where decisions are made by senior management with little input from lower-level employees. This centralized decision-making process limits the ability of health care workers to influence policies and decisions that affect their daily work environment.

Informal Channels and Limited Participation: In the absence of formal mechanisms, some private health care workers rely on informal channels to express their concerns, such as speaking directly with supervisors or using suggestion boxes. However, these methods are less effective and often do not lead to substantial changes. Participation in decision-making is generally limited to higher-level staff, with frontline workers having minimal input.

Grievance Redressal Mechanisms: Grievance redressal mechanisms in the private sector are often less structured. While some larger hospitals may have HR departments and formal complaint procedures, smaller clinics might lack clear processes for addressing employee grievances. The effectiveness of these mechanisms varies, and many workers may feel that their concerns are not adequately addressed.

Comparative Analysis

Table 4. Comparative Analysis of Government and Private Sector Workers with respect to Social Protection

Basis of Comparison	Government Sector	Private Sector
Unionization and Representation	Strong union presence and representation through formal associations. Unions actively engage in negotiations and policy discussions.	Limited unionization and collective bargaining, with many workers lacking formal representation.
Participation in Policy Making	Inclusion in advisory committees and task forces, allowing for direct input into policy-making processes.	Limited to no involvement in policy-making, with decisions made primarily by senior management.
Grievance Redressal Mechanisms	Established grievance redressal mechanisms with formal processes for complaint resolution.	Varies widely, with many smaller institutions lacking structured grievance redressal systems.
Consultations and Meetings	Regular consultations between health department officials and worker representatives, fostering ongoing dialogue.	Limited formal consultations, with most communication occurring through informal or hierarchical channels.

The disparity in social dialogue and participation in the decision-making process between government and private health care workers in Bihar underscores the need for reforms to improve worker engagement in the private sector. Strengthening unionization, establishing formal grievance redressal mechanisms, and fostering inclusive management practices can help bridge this gap. Ensuring that all health care workers have a voice in decisions that affect their work environment is essential for creating a fair and supportive health care system in Bihar.

CONCLUSION

The health sector in Bihar is at a critical juncture. While there have been improvements in healthcare infrastructure and accessibility, significant challenges remain in ensuring decent work conditions for health workers. Addressing issues related to wages, job security, social protection, professional development, and gender disparities is essential for creating a sustainable and effective health workforce. Policymakers, health institutions, and civil society must collaborate to develop and implement strategies that promote decent work in the health sector, ultimately improving healthcare delivery and health outcomes in Bihar.

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