

A photograph of a desk with crumpled white and blue paper, two white coffee cups on saucers, a smartphone, and a pen. The scene is lit with soft, warm light, creating a professional yet cluttered atmosphere.

DECENT WORK

Concept, Theory and Measurement

NAUSHEEN NIZAMI
NARAYAN PRASAD



Decent Work: Concept, Theory and Measurement

Nausheen Nizami • Narayan Prasad

Decent Work: Concept, Theory and Measurement

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Nausheen Nizami
Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University
Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India

Narayan Prasad
School of Social Sciences (SOSS)
Indira Gandhi National Open University
New Delhi, India

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This book is dedicated to our families whose untiring support was statistically significant in the making of the book!

To practice decency is to follow human integrity.

Foreword

Work in the twenty-first century is breaking the traditionally defined lines of labour market and is redefining itself given the impetus by technological dynamism and near-perfect information via growing degrees of communication. The conditions of work have however deteriorated over time given the increasing demands of rising population and labour force and the gaps in skill demand and supply. As remaining unemployed is not a viable option for people living in developing countries due to lack of financial support from the government's end, the majority of the workforce is often found to be working in the informal sector. Although conditions of work are pitiable in the informal sector, there is a need to examine them in the formal sector as well with a view to find status of decent work therein. Decent work as an agenda of International Labour Office has been one of its foundational concerns since 1919 and has emerged as an exclusive agenda only since 1999. To further the value addition, decent work is not just an agenda having mass appeal; it is also an aspiration of every human being and a responsibility of every nation. It is a part of the broader debate of human well-being. Well-being is a multidimensional concept and refers to the economic, social, psychological, social and health well-being as components of holistic well-being. Provision of decent work ensures a worker's well-being.

This book brings a holistic perspective of decent work keeping in view the changes creeping in regularly in the world of work. It has outlined

the concept, theory and methodology for measuring decent work in an industry and provides useful guidelines to researchers to investigate further in this area. The book has introduced the different perspectives on work with a special focus on decent work. It has linked the effect of stages of development on a country's labour market and industry's growth with the well-being of the workers.

The book has also conceptualised few indicators of decent work in the Indian context and has attempted to use one of them in the measurement study of decent work. The industry chosen for the study is information technology, which is a young industry growing rapidly nationally and internationally and has carved out a niche for itself. The industry employs relatively younger workforce, offers sophisticated work conditions and higher remunerations and is technologically advanced. A case study on the IT industry has been undertaken by the authors at micro-level by an extensive exercise of data collection and analysis. Right from methodology to results, the study on measurement of decent work is interesting as it paves the way for the use of mixed-methods research on a qualitative phenomenon like decent work.

The theme of the book does justice to its content and is a positive contribution to the literature of decent work given the limited work on measurement at micro- and meso-level.

Dr. Ravindra Kumar
Vice-Chancellor (In-Charge)
Indira Gandhi National Open University,
New Delhi

Preface

Economics is a social science and deals with human behaviour. At the macro-level, it is closely connected to the hopes, aspirations and fears of the people and at the micro-level it deals with the sense of fulfilment, utility, contentment and well-being of an individual not just in economic terms but in a utilitarian manner. In this sense, it is much similar to social psychology and human development than to any other discipline of social science. Work being an integral part of human life, decent work is a necessity to maintain this sense of fulfilment, dignity and well-being of an individual. Primarily, there are four factors of production in an economy. Labour is embodied in human beings and is a unique feature of labour market. Labour may be physical (manual) or non-manual. Most of the economies today are stocking up human capital which is the stock of knowledge, talents, skills, abilities, experience, intelligence, training, judgment and wisdom possessed individually and collectively by individuals in a population (Wikipedia). In this context it becomes important to examine the inter-personal relationships between the supply and demand of labour. Work may be undertaken to sustain livelihood, to secure future earnings, to earn dignity in the society or for non-economic reasons too. However irrespective of the motive for work, it is important to ensure that work done by workers is in decent parameters and so there is a need to understand what constitutes decent work and what the parameters of decent work are.

‘Decent work’ in its essence was conceptualised by the International Labour Office (ILO), Geneva, to ensure provision of decent and productive work opportunities to both men and women, in conditions of equity, freedom, security and dignity. ‘Decent work’ is a multidimensional concept and applies to both formal and informal sectors of an economy. This book has examined the status of decent work in India’s information technology industry. Information technology is the new face of India’s growth story. Information technology, in its essence, refers to ‘acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of vocal, pictorial, textual and numerical information by a micro-electronics based combination of computing and telecommunications. IT professionals perform a wide range of tasks, such as from installing applications to designing complex computer networks and information databases, networking, management and administration of entire systems.’¹ The goal of decent work is to create better jobs in the global economy without imposing burdens on those who work for it.

Holistically, the definition of decent work goes beyond the ILO’s four core labour standards embodied in the decent work agenda. It is imperative that the definition of decent work must address all kinds of jobs, all people and all families. In order to do so, it must recognise the inter-dimensional nature of people’s lives because these aspects are interdependent and indivisible and so must be addressed in a holistic human rights framework.

In the Indian context, it is important to note some key characteristics of the IT industry’s growth story. The IT industry in India is primarily export driven and accounts for roughly 5.19% of the country’s GDP. It provided direct employment to two million labour forces by the end of financial year 2008–09. Export revenues from IT service increased from a mere 5.8% in 2001–02 to 26.5% in the year 2008–09 witnessing a compound annual growth rate of 23.2%. The Indian government has exempted IT and outsourcing companies from the provisions of its labour law, that is, The Industrial Employment (Standing orders) Act, 1946, for two years (2009–11) to help firms cope with the challenging business climate. In the financial year 2008, India’s IT industry was

¹ Retrieved from Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia.

catered by 60 % of the US market, 31 % of the European market (including UK) and the remaining 9 % with the rest of the world. Future trends would further diversify the IT markets in different countries of the world. However, the IT industry in India despite its peculiar features continues to be an opportunity-driven volatile sector vulnerable to global business trends because of its massive dependence on developed countries for its projects and work. Globalisation has thus played the role of driver as well as halter in its growth story.

Employees of this industry have redefined the characteristics of labour force vis-à-vis other sectors and the emerging labour market. The IT industry is being driven by a relatively younger, technically skilled labour force dominating the sector vis-à-vis other sectors by its higher remuneration, disposable income and consumption spending having a circular impact on the generation of demand for goods and services of other sectors. Some of the peculiar features of this emerging labour market are high skill intensity, rapid skill obsolescence and continuous re-skilling, flattening of job hierarchies, hastening of climbing up hierarchies, highly individualised and flexible nature of wage fixation and so on. An excerpt from an IT employee was taken to understand his meaning about decent work. He revealed that for him decent work is a job that respects one's working hours, personal space and personal integrity and does not constitute anything illegal either. However, work in every industry takes different forms and so employment is diverse.

Employees are the face of any industry, besides its performance and growth story. Human resource has been the driving force behind this. In the philosophy of human resource development, labour is a resource to development. Although the employees of the IT industry are being paid relatively higher remuneration, disposable income, better work environment and competent atmosphere in general, it is important to examine the extent of decent work being observed by the employees in the IT sector.

The decent work phenomenon in this book has been assessed on the basis of indicators developed by ILO's working papers. Generally, with the growth of the IT industry, the following questions arise in the mind of researchers:

1. What are the indicators of decent work at macro-, meso- and micro-level? Are they universally relevant?
2. How far are the decent work indicators developed by ILO relevant to the IT industry in India?
3. Does the structure of competition in the IT industry affect the decent work practices in countries like India?
4. Is there trade-off between decent work and economic growth, decent work and employment generation, and decent work and productive employment?
5. Which challenges are being encountered by employers in the IT industry in provision of decent work to their employees?
6. Is there any gender discrimination in decent work practices by employers in the IT industry?
7. Is a job in the IT industry decent simply because it provides higher wages?
8. Does a decent workplace equally translate into provision of decent work?

Decent Work: Responsibility of Employers or Law-Enforcing Agencies?

Provision of decent work is the responsibility of the employers. Since work takes place at a workplace in general, the creation of decent workplace can go a long way in ensuring decent work provision. A workplace which is decent essentially addresses some of the basic insecurities in the minds of workers such as income security, employment security, job security, work security, skills reproduction security, voice representation security and labour market security. Although some of these terms appear to be inter-changeable, a fine line distinguishes them and has been explained in detail in subsequent chapters. Standing and Tokman² have noted that labour market security is high when job changing involves only modest personal costs and reasonable prospects of subsequent benefits and is typically inversely related to the level of unemployment. Hence, if the level

²'Towards social adjustment' (Standing and Tokman).

of unemployment is high, then labour market security would be low. In the context of IT industry, labour market security is less because of the contractual nature of employment and vast dependence of the company's business on foreign clients. Employment security is high when workers cannot be dismissed without either costs to employers or the satisfaction of pre-specified conditions. In the context of IT industry, employment security is essential but is generally low because of sufficient supply of technically skilled labour pool. So many a times, during downturns or company losses, employers tend to fire some proportion of employees in the lower run who have scored less in annual appraisals. Job security is high when workers have rights to particular niches within enterprises and where unions or other institutions safeguard craft barriers or skill levels. Unions and workers' organisations are virtually absent in the IT industry, which lowers the job security of employees. Except for gold-collar employees, the rest of the employees do not find their expertise sufficient enough to climb up the job ladders in their companies (Source: Primary study). Work security is high when working conditions are safe and healthy. It is important to consider not only the safety of the physical environment at the workplace but also ensure that the work provision and the nature of work are safe for the employee in the long term. This dimension has been examined separately in this book as an important indicator of decent work. Labour representation security is high when employment-related changes are subject to negotiation between equally strong, representative groups or when workers are able to influence the pace and direction of change. Again, in the IT industry representation, security is bound to be low because of the absence of any unions, worker organisations and forums for grievance redressal. Finally, income security is high when workers have their wages or income protected from fluctuations either by indexation, collective bargaining or other institutional protection (copyright approved). On a comparative basis, IT employees stand better in income security, although still the primary reason of their job change has been found to be 'better salary'. An important point to note in this context is the fact that remuneration to IT employees working in India is much less than their counterparts working abroad for the same designation and work.

Keeping in view the multidimensional nature of decent work and the global nature of IT industry work culture, an attempt has been made in this book to answer some tricky questions. This research study has assessed and analysed several realistic facts about the IT industry along the lines of some stipulated 'decent work' indicators and some newly developed indicators in the Indian context. However, the broad objectives of the study have been to *develop a methodology for measuring decent work status in any industry and provide empirical results to test the general perceptions related to work culture in that industry.*

The empirical analysis of decent work status in the IT industry has also examined three research hypotheses:

- (a) *Adequacy of earnings and productive work are directly associated with decent work.*
- (b) Deficit in decent work leads to work-life imbalance.
- (c) The age and social class of employees influence their status of decent work.

This book has been neatly divided into five parts, and each part has been subdivided into a set of chapters. Part I broadly deals with different perspectives on the notion of work and the conceptual frameworks of decent work, its underlying philosophy and ILO's principles on decent work. The first chapter discusses the different perspectives on decent work and then introduces the concept of decent work. The second chapter explains the multidimensional concept of decent work in detail, examines what lies in the decent work paradigm and discovers the underlying philosophy behind this major revolutionary agenda of ILO. The third chapter takes a review on ILO's take on decent work and looks into its core principles, aims and objectives. The fourth chapter examines the inter-linkage between decent work, stage of development of a country and growth of an industry in such an economy.

In Part II, Chaps. 5 and 6 hold an important bearing as they introduce decent work indicators at micro-, meso- and macro-level suggested in various working papers of ILO. Chapter 7 provides and proposes a set of new decent work indicators developed by us in the Indian context and logically argues why they need to be included in any research study on

decent work carried for India. Chapter 8 provides a global perspective of decent work and Chap. 9 examines the various challenges and trade-offs that exist in the provision of decent work by employers.

Part III of the book empirically investigates decent work by measuring it at industry level. For illustration purposes, Information Technology industry has been chosen to measure decent work. The rationale for choosing this industry is because it has been one of the fastest growing industries in the service sector since two decades and engages in global business operations as its vast clientele exist in US, Europe and Asia. Given the global outlook of this industry and the nature of work (computerised) it would be interesting to examine whether the industry conforms to the decent work standards or not. Further, measurement of decent work can be undertaken in any industry and the indicators of decent work must be chosen in accordance to the work-culture of a particular industry. In order to do so, it is important to understand the industry, its history, characteristics of its labour market, nature of work and other related things thoroughly. Chap. 10 discusses the emergence of global information economy and introduces to the readers the key features of the information technology industry. Chapter 11 reviews the historical journey of the growth of the IT industry and India and examines the latest trends in the industry. Chapter 12 discusses the trends setting in the workplace culture of the IT industry while Chap. 13 analyses the IT industry in detail from the perspective of economics. Chapter 14 examines at length those distinguishing features of the IT industry's labour market that have served as a motivation to find the current status of decent work in this industry. It carries an interesting and debatable discussion on other issues as well as the nature of work in the IT industry, job designations and the labour law practices, flexi-time work, employment generation prospects in the long run and so on. Chapter 15 introduces the concept of decent ergonomics and discusses its importance in the provision of decent work in an industry. Chapter 16 examines the inter-linkage between job hopping, on-the-job search, the different recruitment practices in the IT industry and decent work. Finally, Chap. 17 forecasts the road ahead for the IT industry in India.

Chapter 18 presents a lucid literature review of some noteworthy studies undertaken by prominent authors and researchers about the various

features of the IT industry which have served as a background to conduct the research study and by demonstrates how the indicators of decent work can be applied to work in the information technology industry too.

Chapters in Part IV can be identified as the crux of the book as they guide how to conduct empirical research of decent work in any industry and bring to light the empirical findings of the study on the assessment of the current status of decent work in the IT industry. Chapter 19 begins with an introduction to the methodology of the study and introduces the tools and techniques of data collection and data analysis. It also introduces the indexation approach followed in the study using a range equalisation method, thus introducing the method of constructing decent work indices for each indicator. The subsequent chapters have been arranged to specifically discuss the key findings of the study on each indicator. Chapter 28 presents the compilation and aggregation of all decent work indices into a single decent work index, referred here as decent work index aggregate, and Chapter 29 presents the decent workplace index status of the IT industry.

Chapter 30 presents the results of chi-square test for finding independence between different categories of decent work. Chapter 31 uses techniques of correlational analysis for finding out whether there is a correlation between different decent work indicators or not (on the basis of respondent data). Chapter 32 makes use of factor analysis approach to examine the most relevant decent work indicator in the Indian context and further examines the most relevant sub-indicators under each decent work indicator. Chapter 33 makes use of multinomial regression technique to examine whether the socio-economic attributes of employees have an impact on their decent work status.

Part V summarises the main conclusions of the study, policy implications, policy suggestions and scope for further research in this area. Chapters 34 and 35 also provide the methodological prescriptions for future research. The Appendix contains the questionnaire format as well as some data tables and charts. Finally, the list of references mentions all the sources referred to during the course of this research study.

Decent work that sums up the aspirations of the people in their professional life is the revolutionary agenda of International Labour Office. Work essentially is the primary means of earning a livelihood. Work may

be regular or contractual, precarious or non-standard, wage employment, self-employment or even non-wage employment and child labour. In this context, it is essential to ensure that provision of work should maintain the dignity of the worker besides other things. Decent work is any such work which ensures provision of fair and free employment to all men and women of economically productive age group in conditions of fairness, equity, security and dignity. It is a multidimensional concept that applies to both formal and informal sectors of an economy. Holistically, the definition of decent work goes beyond the ILO's four core labour standards embodied in the decent work agenda. It is imperative that the definition of decent work must address all kinds of jobs, all people and all families. In order to do so, it must recognise the inter-dimensional nature of people's lives because these aspects are interdependent and indivisible and so must be addressed in a holistic human rights framework.

This book has examined and measured the status of decent work in the information technology industry of India. Choice of IT industry has an underlying logic. Technically qualified youth as well as the general public perceive employment in the IT industry as highly remunerative, productive, stable and safe and as a key to secure the future. Today, the IT industry is one of the fastest growing sectors of the Indian economy and has been increasingly contributing to India's GDP and export revenues since almost two decades. In view of this development, a question arises that whether work in the IT industry is decent, what 'decency of work' means, what its indicators are, how it can be quantified and how it can be assessed in the context of IT industry. These various aspects of work in the IT industry often go ignored, unrecorded, unmeasured and also unanswered. All these questions have been addressed in the present book because the IT industry holds a promising future for the younger and technically skilled generation at least as of now. As citizens, we are aware that economies are growing, technologies are diffusing and becoming user-friendly, and international trade is flourishing in the twenty-first century—all because people work! And so, it is important to ascertain whether the nature of work provided by such leading industries of a developing country is decent or not.

NASSCOM quoted financial year (FY) 2012–13 as the year of transformation for the IT industry as the total revenues earned by IT-BPM

industry were US \$ 108 billion out of which US \$ 56 billion was contributed by the IT industry. In FY 2012, total revenues were US \$ 101 billion out of which the IT industry's share was of US \$ 69 billion. Simultaneously, it achieved sixfold rise in direct employment with the share rising from 2300 to 2400 in thousands. The IT-BPM industry exports revenue is expected to grow 10–12% to \$119–121 billion in constant currency terms in fiscal 2017. With the growth of the IT industry and conceptualisation of decent work, few questions arise: What are the indicators of decent work at macro-, meso- and micro-level? Are they universally relevant? How far are the decent work indicators developed by ILO relevant to the IT industry in India? Does the structure of competition in the IT industry affect the decent work practices in countries like India? Is there trade-off between decent work and economic growth, decent work and employment generation, and decent work and productive employment? Is there any gender discrimination in decent work practices by employers in the IT industry?

The book has identified the relevant indicators of the decent work for India in general and the Indian IT industry in particular. An appropriate methodology has been developed to measure the phenomenon of decent work on the basis of indicators developed by ILO. The book also tests the applicability of indicators of 'decent work' in the context of developing countries in general and India in particular. It would be of interest to academicians, employees, employers, researchers as well as policy-makers.

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Contents

Part I	Concept and Theory	1
1	Perspectives on Work	3
2	Concept and Theoretical Framework of Decent Work	13
3	Decent Work Agenda and ILO	23
4	Decent Work, Stages of Development, and Industry Growth	27
Part II	Measurement, Applicability and Relevance	33
5	Indicators of Decent Work at Macro-Level	35
6	Indicators of Decent Work at Meso-Level and Micro-Level	49
7	Decent Work Indicators Specific to India	67

8	Global Perspective on Measurement and Applicability of Decent Work	75
9	Challenges and Trade-Offs in Decent Work Provision	85
Part III	Empirical Investigation of Decent Work	89
10	Global Information Economy and Information Technology	91
11	India's IT Industry: Historical Review and Recent Trends	97
12	New Trends at the Workplace	107
13	Economics of IT Industry	113
14	Characteristics of IT Industry's Labour Market	125
15	Decent Ergonomics: Meaning and Importance	141
16	Job Hopping, On-the-Job Search, Recruitment Practices, and Decent Work	145
17	IT Industry: The Road Ahead	153
18	Empirical Review of IT Industry	157
Part IV	Technical Analysis of Decent Work	181
19	Research Methodology and Sample	183

20	Adequacy of Earnings, Productive Employment, and Decent Work	197
21	Decent Work and Stability and Security of Work	207
22	Decent Work and Flexi-time Work	215
23	Decent and Safe Work	221
24	Decent Work and Work-Life Balance	229
25	Decent Work, Employment Conditions, and Fair Treatment for Employees	237
26	Social Security, Dialogue, and Decent Work	245
27	Decent Work and Complacent Work	255
28	Status of Decent Work in India's IT Industry	261
29	Decent Work Status at Meso-level	271
30	Application of Chi-square Test to Decent work	285
31	Correlational Analysis of Decent Work Indicators	291
32	Factor Analysis and PCA Analysis on Decent Work Indicators	299
33	Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis	315

Part V Methodological Prescriptions for Future Research	321
34 Discussion and Conclusion	323
35 Methodological Prescriptions for Future Research	337
Appendix 1	343
Appendix 2	399
Bibliography	431
Index	443

List of Abbreviations

BFSI	Banking, Financial Services and Insurance
BPM	Business Process Management
BPO	Business Process Outsourcing
CIO	Chief Information Officer
FY	Financial Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
HR	Human Resource
ILO	International Labour Office
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
IT	Information Technology
ITES	Information Technology Enabled Services
ITI	Industrial Training Institutes
NASSCOM	National Association of Software and Services Companies
NCR	National Capital Region
PF	Provident Fund
R & D	Research and Development
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
UNDP	United Nation's Development Programme
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States

List of Figures

Fig. 6.1	Vicious circle of longer working hours (Part-1)	54
Fig. 6.2	Interlinkages of disrupted work-life balance	59
Fig. 14.1	System Development Lifecycle model	128
Fig. 16.1	Impact of recession on IT industry	146

List of Graphs

Graph 32.1	Scree plot of factor analysis of decent work indicators	305
Graph 32.2	Scree plot of decent work sub-indicators	305

List of Tables

Table 11.1	Mid-tier versus top-tier revenue growth (%)	100
Table 11.2	Employment generation by IT industry in tier-I and tier-II cities	103
Table 11.3	Geographical spread of workforce and operating centres	103
Table 11.4	IT-BPO export revenues by geography in financial year 2010	103
Table 11.5	Experiences of the IT industry in the past and estimates for future	104
Table 11.6	Location-wise export revenues	104
Table 11.7	Impact of recessions on IT segments	105
Table 13.1	Input-output analysis of IT industry	116
Table 13.2	Economies of scale in IT industry	121
Table 14.1	Job titles, nature of work, and minimum time-span required for promotion	129
Table 14.2	Designations relevant to IT industry and skill requirements as per NIC 2004	130
Table 20.1	DWI-1 (adequate earnings and productive work)	201
Table 21.1	DWI-2 (stability and security of work)	210
Table 22.1	DWI-3 (decent hours)	218
Table 23.1	Health problems among IT employees owing to nature of work	222
Table 23.2	Number of health problems among IT employees	223
Table 23.3	Type of harassment faced by IT employees	225

Table 23.4	DWI-4 (safe work)	226
Table 24.1	DWI-5 (work-life balance)	232
Table 25.1	Parameters of discrimination at workplace	238
Table 25.2	Discriminatory grounds	239
Table 25.3	DWI-6 (fair treatment at employment)	241
Table 26.1	Methodology of coding social security schemes	246
Table 26.2	Number and beneficiaries of social security schemes	246
Table 26.3	DWI-7 (social security)	247
Table 26.4	DWI-8 (social dialogue)	251
Table 27.1	DWI-9 (complacent work)	257
Table 28.1	Composite decent work index	262
Table 28.2	Gender classification of composite decent work index	263
Table 28.3	Composite DWI results as per marital status	264
Table 28.4	Composite DWI results as per age group of IT employees	265
Table 28.5	Background-wise results of composite DWI	266
Table 28.6	Composite DWI as per social class of IT employees	267
Table 28.7	Composite DWI results as per size of company	268
Table 29.1	Decent workplace index	275
Table 29.2	Gender classification of IT employees	276
Table 29.3	Classification as per marital status of employees	277
Table 29.4	DWPI: classification as per age group of employees	278
Table 29.5	Classification of DWPI as per background of IT employees	279
Table 29.6	Classification of DWPI results as per social class	280
Table 29.7	Classification of DWPI results as per size of company	281
Table 30.1	Application of chi-square to decent work categorisation and DWI-1	286
Table 30.2	Application of chi-square to decent work categorisation and DWI-2	286
Table 30.3	Application of chi-square to decent work categorisation and DWI-3	287
Table 30.4	Application of chi-square to decent work categorisation and DWI-4	287
Table 30.5	Application of chi-square to decent work categorisation and DWI-5	288
Table 30.6	Application of chi-square to decent work categorisation and DWI-6	288
Table 30.7	Application of chi-square to decent work categorisation and DWI-7	288

Table 30.8	Application of chi-square to decent work categorisation and DWI-8	289
Table 30.9	Application of chi-square to decent work categorisation and DWI-9	289
Table 31.1	Phi correlation analysis of age group and composite DWI	294
Table 31.2	Phi correlation analysis of size of company and composite DWI	294
Table 31.3	Phi correlation analysis of educational qualifications and composite DWI	295
Table 31.4	Phi correlation analysis of gender and composite DWI	296
Table 31.5	Phi correlation analysis of social class and composite DWI	297
Table 32.1	Factor analysis of indicators of decent work	300
Table 32.2	Component matrix of factor analysis	301
Table 32.3	Indicators and sub-indicators of decent work	302
Table 32.4	Factor analysis of decent work indicators	304
Table 32.5	Factor analysis of decent work sub-indicator	306
Table 32.6	Rank-wise most relevant sub-indicators of decent work	307
Table 32.7	Factor analysis of DWI-1	309
Table 32.8	Factor analysis of DWI-2	310
Table 32.9	Factor analysis of decent hours	311
Table 32.10	Factor analysis of safe work	312
Table 32.11	Factor analysis of work-life balance	312
Table 32.12	Factor analysis of social security	313
Table 32.13	Factor analysis of social dialogue	313
Table 32.14	Factor analysis of complacent work	314
Table 33.1	Likelihood ratio test of variable selection	316
Table 33.2	Goodness of fit	317
Table 33.3	Model fitness information	317
Table 33.4	Component matrix of socio-demographic attributes	317
Table 33.5	Analysis of variance of socio-demographic attributes	318
Table 34.1	Rank-wise most relevant indicators of decent work	325
Table A.1	Gender-wise sample results	344
Table A.2	Marital status wise sample results	345
Table A.3	Age-group wise sample results	346
Table A.4	Background wise sample results	347
Table A.5	Social class wise sample results	348
Table A.6	Company-size wise sample results	349