

Coping with precarious work: A case of rampant use of Tetanus Toxoid (TT) injection by the workers in unorganized e-waste sector in the slums of a South Indian city

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Abstract: That precarious work undermines workers' health is well documented. It is also well established that in urban slums of developing economies, such work coexists with poor access to good quality occupational health services. This paper documents the rampant practice of Tetanus Toxoid (TT) injection and its implications by a group of workers (hence forth study respondents) in the unorganised e-waste sector living in the slums of a South Indian city.

We used exploratory sequential mixed-method approach in conducting this study. In the first phase, we conducted in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and informal conversation with the study respondents. In the second phase of the study, a cross-sectional survey was conducted using an interview schedule (consisting of both closed-ended and open-ended questions), among 248 respondents. Injuries at the workplace were the most common health problem, for which TT injection, even as frequently as every two months, was singled out as a common form of treatment. Despite its free availability in the public health-centres, workers chose to get it from charitable/private clinics by paying for it. Here, the use of TT injections signifies performance of a social role in the exchange between doctors and patients. The phenomenon needs to be seen as something co-created by workers and healthcare providers since the public healthcare system appears to be largely irrelevant to their needs. Precarity in the work sector restrains them from taking a break from work to heal their injuries. We suggest that resorting to frequent TT injections may be seen as a coping mechanism, and thus an active choice for the workers in the particular eco-system in which the study was located.

Key words : precarity, injuries, occupational health, slums, TT injection, workers