Mohammad Khalid, a construction labour from Aligarh, works for a Delhi based contractor. Since the contractor belongs to the same community as Khalid, and knew Khalid’s father well, his employment has been continuous for the last few years. In the beginning, Khalid used to stay in a makeshift arrangements provided by the contractor at the construction sites, but later moved into a rented jhuggie for Rs. 1800 per month. A few months ago, he brought his wife Jameela Begham, his three year old son and one year old daughter to Delhi.

Khalid works for Rs. 151 per day, the fixed minimum wage in Delhi for a construction labourer. He was content with the money he earned through his hard work. His wife Jameela, an illiterate young village woman was also not over ambitious in life. Their ultimate aim was to provide basic education for their children and give them a better life.

Everything was fine in Khalid’s life until one fateful day – while carrying a head load of gravel, Khalid slipped and fell down on his back into a deep gorge. He fell unconscious and was immediately rushed to a nearby government hospital with a fracture on his hip bone and a hairline crack on the vertebra. Khalid was advised complete bed rest for at least 6 months, with no hope of resuming work in the near future. Upon his release from the hospital, the contractor paid the hospital fees and terminated his contract.... He did not inquire what happened to Khalid and his family after the accident.

Belonging to a family of landless agricultural labourers, Khalid’s family had no hope of seeking help from his poor family or relatives. “I have no clue how to go ahead. I need to buy my medicines, food for my family, the rent has to be paid. My wife is so naïve, and has not yet got used to city life. How will we survive?” laments Khalid.

He says he understands the attitude of the private contractor who dumped him when he as of no use, but wonders why the government cannot step in and help. “…Isn’t it their duty to help us? Aren’t we contributing in building this city?”, he asks.

He reiterates his frustration by stating that “Government only needs our vote, they are not bothered about people like us”.

When the much talked about Unorganized Workers Social Security (UWSS) Act, 2008 was passed, the working class had a lot of expectations. But, in reality, the Act does not address the real issues of workers. When worksite accidents are quite common, the Act does not have any scheme or provision laid out to cater to the need of workers on these issues.

The UWSS Act, 2008 should address the problems faced by the workers and their families during accidents. The government should introduce provision in the act to include accident and medical care, and not restrict it to BPL families. Besides full coverage of hospitalisation and medical expenses, there should be provisions to help families whose sole bread winner turns invalid.

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भभी मजदूरों को दुर्घटना और विकल्प सुविधा दैँ