

Life Amidst Mines: Psychosocial Challenges of Women in Jharkhand

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Abstract- The study delves into the challenges faced by women residing in the mineral-rich mining regions of Jharkhand, India. By examining existing literature, it uncovers the interactions between economic reliance, environmental deterioration and deeply ingrained cultural and social norms and how these factors collectively affect women's mental and emotional well-being. The research highlights the struggles evidenced by increased levels of stress, anxiety and depression primarily linked to the disruptions caused by mining activities on both economic and environmental fronts. It also explores the cultural impacts, such as role changes and exclusion from community decision-making processes that intensify women's vulnerabilities. The paper advocates for an approach in work practices and policy development, emphasising integrated efforts addressing environmental sustainability alongside gender-sensitive support systems. It emphasises empowering women in mining areas through enhanced decision-making abilities, accessible mental health services and active participation in shaping mining policies. By shedding light on the aspects of life in mining-affected regions, this research significantly contributes to fields like work, environmental justice and gender studies. It highlights the importance of implementing approaches to reduce the effects of mining on women, promoting a move towards fairer and environmentally friendly mining methods that prioritise the welfare of communities in the area.

Index Terms: Women, Mining, Psychosocial, Health, Social Work

INTRODUCTION

Jharkhand, a state in India, boasts mineral resources and has established itself as a prominent mining hub in the nation. The state's terrain is scattered with mines that extract minerals like coal, iron ore, and bauxite, which play a role in India's economy (Priyadardshi, 2008). Mining operations in Jharkhand have a history dating back to before independence. Have been crucial for generating revenue and employment opportunities. However, these economic

advantages have environmental repercussions, significantly affecting communities near mining sites. Women bear the burden of the effects caused by mining activities (Jenkins, 2014). They not only contend with degradation and displacement but also experience profound psychosocial impacts. The disruption of norms, loss of livelihoods, and pollution further compound the challenges faced by women, leaving them susceptible to various socio-economic and psychological stresses (Parmenter, 2011; Ullikashi, 2021). Adding to these difficulties are the ingrained patriarchal norms prevalent in the region that often sideline women's voices and needs when it comes to community decisions regarding mining activities (Mukherjee, 2014).

This research holds importance for reasons as the study fills a gap in the research by focusing on how mining affects women's mental and social well-being. This topic has yet to receive much attention in academic and policy discussions. It sheds light on the difficulties these women face advocating for an approach to managing mining activities that prioritizes the welfare of all community members, especially those at risk. The study results are also valuable for shaping mining regions' social work strategies and support programs. Lastly, it adds to the conversation about mining practices by emphasizing the importance of considering the aspects, particularly gender-related impacts alongside environmental concerns. It highlights the necessity for mining operations to be environmentally sustainable and socially just.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Throughout history, the rise of large-scale mining has often resulted in the displacement of communities, changes in landscapes and significant shifts in the socio-fabric of affected areas. For women, these transformations have frequently led to restricted access to resources for their livelihoods and an increased workload as traditional roles are disrupted. Understanding this context is essential for grasping the challenges faced by women in mining regions. Insights from studies conducted across regions like Africa, Latin America, and Asia offer a backdrop for evaluating the situation in Jharkhand.

The literature review summarises earlier studies on the effects of mining on communities, emphasising studies that looked specifically at the impact on women. Research has been conducted on the relationship between mining and environmental degradation, including deforestation and water pollution, and how these changes have disproportionately impacted women who frequently handle household fuel and water supplies (Baum, 2021; Azim, 2009; Bhanumathi, 2009). Research has also shown that mining has adverse social effects, such as upsetting traditional ways of life and community networks (Jenkins, 2014; Sincovich et al., 2018). This disruption may result in women feeling more social isolation and less social capital, essential for overcoming environmental and economic obstacles. Studies examining the economic impacts of mining on women have demonstrated that although mining can present economic prospects, women still need equal access to these opportunities. Women may not be able to take advantage of job prospects in the mining industry due to obstacles such as low education, unskilled, discrimination based on gender, and the weight of household duties (Parmenter, 2011; D'Souza et al., 2013; Kotsadam et al., 2017; Hinton et al., 2003).

Theoretical frameworks that illuminate the psychological and social effects of mining on women serve as the foundation for this research. The social vulnerability theory is one such concept that examines how societal structures, health, and livelihood constraints based on factors such as gender, age, race, and economic status affect various groups. This lens proves valuable in understanding how mining affects women differently in Jharkhand. Additionally, feminist political ecology theory merges perspectives with ecology to examine how gender shapes individuals' interactions with their environment. This theory explores how gender influences changes and resource availability in mining regions, showcasing how male-dominated systems worsen the challenges faced by women. This research, which focuses on the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and responsibilities, also heavily relies on environmental justice. This theory aids in comprehending the disparities in the allocation of risks and rewards among societal segments, such as women residing in mining areas.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

This study aims to bring to light the psychosocial challenges experienced by women residing in the mining regions of Jharkhand. This involves investigating how these challenges impact their well-being, social connections and overall quality of life. The research seeks to achieve the following objectives;

1. To determine and evaluate the main psychosocial challenges women face around mining regions of Jharkhand.

2. To comprehend the consequences of these challenges on these women's health and social welfare.

The descriptive study uses a secondary research approach and focuses on examining the literature to investigate the psychosocial viewpoints of women residing in Jharkhand's mining districts. This study intends to provide a thorough thematic analysis of the difficulties experienced by women in the context of mining activities in Jharkhand by utilising the data that is already available and supporting the conclusions with information from other mining regions of the world. Comprehensive reviews of institutional repositories, internet libraries, and academic databases were used to gather data for this secondary research project. Among the essential databases are Scopus, JSTOR, and Google Scholar.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS

Stress and Anxiety

The study revealed stress and anxiety among women living in mining areas. Various factors contribute to the increased levels of stress and anxiety, such as;

Environmental Degradation: The loss of surroundings, which are essential for indigenous groups' livelihood and cultural heritage, causes significant distress. Women responsible for gathering resources like food and water face added pressure due to pollution and depletion of natural resources. This constant concern affects their families' well-being (Ahern et al., 2011; Banerjee, 2017).

Financial Insecurity: The displacement from mining activities leads to instability and loss of land. Women heading households or engaged in small-scale farming experience uncertain prospects, heightening their stress levels (Meikle, 2002; Walter, 2010).

Health Issues: Exposure to contaminated air and water sources due to mining operations raises health worries. The fear of illness does not affect women themselves. It also extends to their children and families, adding to their anxiety (Mactaggart et al., 2016).

Social Upheaval: The fracturing of knit communities and traditional social structures caused by migration and conflicts linked to mining heightens the emotional strain (Downing, 2002). The unpredictability and shake-up in connections create an overarching feeling of unease and worry.

These pressures are worsened by the availability of health support in these areas, leaving women with few resources to manage their anxiety.

Depression (Feelings of Sadness)

Another significant psychological consequence is feelings of sadness, which have root causes;

Relocation and Loss of Home: Being forcibly uprooted from their homes and losing lands to mining ventures results in a sense of sorrow and bereavement that can lead to depression. The emotional bond with their land and residences and the uncertainty surrounding relocation contribute to despondency (Fullilove, 1996; Scudder, 2005).

Solitude: The breakdown of community ties due to mining operations leads women into social isolation. This seclusion and the stigma attached to health challenges intensify feelings of solitude and gloominess (Cernea, 2000; Oliver Smith, 2009).

Deterioration: Witnessing the deterioration of the environment, a place of spiritual and cultural importance for numerous indigenous groups has a profound emotional impact that cannot be underestimated (Keenan et al., 2016). This feeling of loss gives rise to a shared sense of sorrow commonly known as "grief" or "solastalgia."

Impact on Social Identity and Self-Worth

The activities related to mining significantly affect the identity and self-esteem of women within the communities. Notable discoveries in this field include;

Exclusion from Decision-Making: Women's perspectives are frequently sidelined in decision-making processes concerning mining activities, leading to feelings of powerlessness and reduced self-value (Jenkins, 2014). The patriarchal nature inherent in community dynamics and mining operations intensifies this exclusion.

Disruption of Traditional Roles: The disturbance caused by degradation and displacement disrupts ways of life like agriculture and crafts, resulting in the loss of identity for many women. The breakdown of these roles, which are often crucial to their sense of self and status within their community, contributes to self-esteem (Downing, 2002).

Social Stigma and Discrimination: Women who raised concerns about the effects of mining or showed signs of struggling with health issues encounter social stigma and discrimination. This exclusion from society further erodes their self-confidence and sense of belonging.

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Financial Dependencies

Jharkhand's mining operations have changed the region's landscape, creating a network of financial dependencies for local communities, especially women.

Job Opportunities: While mining offers job prospects, these opportunities are often gender specific, with men holding paying and more secure positions. Most of the time, women who do find employment take on lower-paid roles such as mine labourers or working in industries. Reliance on family members employed in mining can result in instability and stress for women, mainly when job security is uncertain.

Displacement of Traditional Livelihoods: The expansion of mining operations frequently results in the acquisition of forest lands for the survival of local communities. Women traditionally rely on these lands for farming, gathering resources and artisanal work, experiencing losses to their livelihoods. This impacts their stability and undermines their traditional duties and cultural customs associated with the land.

Impact of Market Changes: Relying on mining makes local economies vulnerable to fluctuations in mineral prices. Downturns can result in job loss, reduced wages and heightened economic insecurity for families, with women handling most household finances and dealing with financial challenges (Bainton et al., 2018).

Environmental Damage

The ecological consequences of mining in Jharkhand profoundly impact women's health, livelihoods, and economic pursuits in these regions.

Pollution and Health Hazards: The water, air and soil pollution from mining activities pose health risks to communities. Women bear a burden due to their involvement in water gathering, food preparation and caregiving responsibilities, exposing them to contaminated resources (Downing, 2002; Arsenal et al., 2015). Health problems linked to pollution, like issues, skin ailments and waterborne diseases, further strain families financially, often requiring women to care for family members.

Degradation of Natural Resources: Mining operations cause forests, waterways, and agricultural land to deteriorate, which results in the loss of natural resources and biodiversity that are vital to the survival of nearby communities. Due to their reliance on these resources for fuel, food, and medicinal plants, women are compelled to travel farther for collection, which adds to their labour and puts them in danger (Bhanumathi, 2009).

Socio-Economic Impact

The economic and environmental effects of mining have wider socio-economic repercussions for women by affecting their social standing, mental well-being and community roles.

Increased Work Burden and Accountability: The decline in resources and traditional occupations combined with the health consequences of degradation escalate the workload and responsibilities taken on by women (Mayes et al., 2018). This not only impacts their health but also leads to stress and mental exhaustion.

Social Displacement and Fragmentation: The economic disruptions caused by mining operations result in displacement and fragmentation. Women undergo challenges as traditional community support structures break down, impacting their emotional well-being.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL NORMS

Gender Roles and Expectations

In the society of Jharkhand mining regions, established gender roles strongly dictate task division, social duties and decision-making authority within families and communities.

Household Duties and Caregiving: Women mainly handle household chores, caregiving responsibilities, and the management of resources like water and firewood for family use. The environmental harm caused by mining intensifies these duties, adding to women's workload and physical strain (Ahmad & Lahiri Dutt, 2006; Bose O'Reilly et al., 2010).

Limited Influence in Decision Making: Despite their role in family and community welfare, women often have limited involvement in decisions concerning mining operations, land transactions or community negotiations with mining firms. This exclusion from decision-making procedures results in policies that may overlook their needs and difficulties (Jenkins, 2014; Eftimie et al., 2009).

Impact on Social Relationships

Mining activities impact communities' structure, altering relationships, community unity and support systems with repercussions for women.

Community Disruption: When migrant workers come in, and communities are forced to move because of mining, it can mess up how things work socially. For women, it gets tough to keep up with friends and get help from the community, which is essential for their feelings (Lahiri Dutt, 2012; Arellano Yanguas, 2011).

Higher Risk of Violence: With all the changes happening in mining areas, like problems and money issues, there is a chance of people turning to alcohol and drugs or getting involved in domestic violence. Women usually bear the brunt of these problems. Have to deal with danger. This violence causes much strain on women. Makes them feel less secure (Moodie et al., 2015; Bashwira et al., 2014).

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

The research results have significant ramifications for the social work profession, especially when developing plans and solutions for these women's various problems. This segment delves into how the knowledge acquired can shape social work practices and contribute to creating efficient support systems for women impacted by mining activities.

Blending. Social Justice: The intricate link between deterioration and psychosocial repercussions highlights the need for work to embrace a holistic approach that encompasses environmental and social justice. Social workers can engage in teams that handle the environmental concerns inherent in mining operations while simultaneously providing psychosocial assistance. This strategy resonates with the principles of environmental justice, stressing every individual's entitlement to an environment and addressing the effects of environmental degradation on marginalized groups.

Community Centered Intervention:: The study underscores the significance of community unity and solidarity as coping mechanisms for women in mining regions. Social work interventions should concentrate on fortifying community bonds and endorsing movements that empower women. Efforts could involve organizing community discussions for women to express their grievances, establishing platforms for sharing knowledge, and backing endeavours to advocate for their rights and well-being. Empowering women within communities does not boost their ability to cope with challenges. It also ensures that interventions are respectful of cultural norms and rooted in local realities.

Capacity Development and Empowerment: The economic uncertainties and limited decision-making authority faced by women living in mining regions highlight the need for tailored programs to enhance their skills. Social workers can play a role in organizing training sessions and workshops on literacy and programs to foster leadership among women. These efforts can help women achieve independence, explore alternative livelihood opportunities, and enable them to play significant roles in community affairs and decision-making processes related to mining operations.

Emotional Well-being and Support: Given the levels of stress, anxiety and depression experienced by women in mining areas, there is a pressing demand for mental health services and psychosocial support. Collaborating with health professionals and social workers can create sensitive counselling services, support groups, and campaigns to raise awareness about mental health issues. By addressing the stigma surrounding health concerns and providing spaces for

women to share their stories, social workers can contribute to these communities' overall well-being.

Advocacy for Policy Change: Social workers are uniquely positioned to advocate for laws protecting women's welfare and rights in mining areas. They can advocate for regulations that promote mining methods, safeguard community territories and guarantee equitable compensation and support for families who have been displaced. Moreover, social workers can advocate for the involvement of women in decision-making processes concerning mining activities, ensuring that their concerns and difficulties are appropriately considered when shaping policies.

CONCLUSION

The research highlights the economic, environmental, cultural and social obstacles women encounter in mining areas. It emphasizes the toll, with stress, anxiety and depression heightened by the environmental harm and financial uncertainties linked to mining activities. The rooted cultural and social traditions further complicate these difficulties by shaping gender roles, community interactions and women's involvement in decision-making processes. From a social work perspective, the study underscores the importance of a strategy that tackles both concerns and social equity while advocating for sustainable mining practices that prioritize the welfare of local communities. Community-focused programs, skill development initiatives, mental health assistance and policy advocacy are identified as areas where social workers can create change.

In summary, this research provides insights into the impacts of mining on women in the Jharkhand region. Laying the groundwork for well-informed policy decisions and targeted support measures. It requires collaboration among policymakers, social workers and community leaders to reduce the impacts of mining and promote the empowerment and welfare of women living in mining-affected regions. The strength shown by these women in overcoming obstacles serves as a source of inspiration and motivation for all parties engaged in this issue.

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