

# A study on challenges faced by working women: A Sociological study

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**Abstract:** Women workers in India face a variety of challenges, influenced by cultural, social, economic, and structural factors. These challenges hinder their full participation in the workforce, limit their economic and social empowerment and perpetuate gender-based disparities in employment. Women have been trying to break away from norms and standards set by society. They have been marching for equal rights and fighting for their rightful place in the world. Women have played just as important a role in the shaping of human history as men have. Higher status for women in terms of employment and work performed in society is, in reality, a key measure of a country's overall growth. There are numerous reasons and issues that have compelled Indian women to work. The financial pressures on Indian families are growing by the day. In India, the cost of life, expenses for children's education, and the cost of housing properties have all increased, forcing every family to look for ways to supplement their income. As a result, women in India who were previously known for being homemakers are being driven to do employment that is more acceptable for men, such as working even in night shift.

Working women, or those who work for a living, confront challenges at work just because they are women. Due to the fact that they are female, the public perception of women's roles lags far behind the law. The assumption that women are only suitable for specific tasks leads to discrimination among those who work with them. Employees should be recruited. As a result, women can readily find work as nurses, doctors, teachers, secretaries, or in other fields. Even when well-qualified women are available, a male candidate with equal qualifications is given preference. Gender bias poses a barrier during the recruitment process. Even while the law declares equality in remuneration, it is not always followed. The ingrained belief that women are incapable of doing difficult work and are less effective than males has an impact on the payment of differential salaries and compensation for the same job.

**Key words:** Working women, Gender discrimination, Wage differential, Challenges at work.

## INTRODUCTION

Since India's independence in 1947, the country's economy has seen significant changes. Agriculture currently accounts for only one-third of GDP, down from 59 percent in 1950, and a wide range of modern businesses and services are now available. There are currently support services available. Agriculture continues to dominate despite these changes. Two-thirds of all workers are employed by this industry. In the 1990s, India experienced economic difficulties. The Persian Gulf Crisis compounded the problems in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Beginning in, India began implementing trade liberalization measures in 1992. The economy has improved. During that time, the annual GDP growth rate was between 5% and 7%, and Significant progress has been achieved in easing government rules, particularly in the financial sector. Private businesses are subject to regulations.

Women's labor and contributions have been valued since time immemorial, but their worth has never been recognised. Because India is such a diverse society, no single generalization can be applied to all of the country's many geographical, religious, social, and economic groupings. Nonetheless, several general circumstances in which Indian women live have an impact on their economic participation. India's society is very hierarchical, with almost everyone ranked in relation to others based on their caste (or caste-like group), class, wealth, and power. This rating exists even in places where it is not explicitly acknowledged, such as some business environments.

Women have been sidelined in economic activities as a result of technical inputs introduced by globalization, while men have typically been afforded greater opportunities for learning and training. As a result, more women than ever before are entering the

informal sector or casual labor force. For example, while new rice technology has boosted the usage of female labor, the increased workload for women is in unrecorded and frequently unpaid operations that fall under the category of home production activities. The weaker groups, particularly women, are denied the medical attention they require. As a result, the bulk of Indian women have little ability to undertake useful work; the “ability” to pick among alternatives is evident by its lack.

#### CHALLENGES AT WORK PLACE AND GENERAL CHALLENGES

1. **Gender Wage Gap: Unequal Pay for Equal Work:** Despite laws like the Equal Remuneration Act (1976), women in India consistently earn less than men for similar work. Studies have shown that women in India earn 19-30% less than their male counterparts in many sectors. There will be lack of pay transparency. Limited access to information about wages prevents women from advocating for fair pay, often resulting in a pay gap that remains unaddressed.
2. **Precarious Employment and Informal Work:** There is high concentration in informal sector. A significant proportion of women in India work in informal jobs, such as domestic work, agriculture, construction, and small-scale manufacturing, where there is limited or no job security, social protection, or benefits.
3. **Lack of Employment Contracts: Informal work** often involves verbal agreements rather than formal contracts, exposing women to exploitation, unpaid wages, and arbitrary termination. **Seasonal and Part-Time Employment:** Many women are engaged in seasonal work (especially in agriculture) or part-time jobs, which offer lower pay, few benefits, and little protection under labour laws.
4. **Occupational Segregation and Limited Career Advancement: Gender Stereotypes in Job Roles:** Women are often concentrated in specific roles (such as teaching, nursing, caregiving, and administrative work) due to gender-based stereotypes that limit their access to diverse occupations. In both the formal and informal sectors, women face barriers to promotion and leadership roles. Male-dominated corporate

structures and biases in management can prevent women from advancing to higher positions.

5. **Workplace Harassment and Lack of Safety: Prevalence of Sexual Harassment-Workplace harassment** is a widespread issue, affecting women’s safety and mental well-being. Despite the enactment of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013), enforcement remains weak, especially in informal sectors. Sexual harassment is an abominable reality for Indian women on a daily basis. Every day, their greatest challenge is to retain their holiness in their homes, on the road, in their educational institutions, and at work. Despite the increase in numbers, women are finding that their complaints are not being adequately addressed by their employers. Employers are either uninformed of the law’s provisions or have only partially implemented them, and those that do set up internal panels have members who are poorly trained. According to the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act of 2013, every commercial or public organisation with 10 or more employees must have an internal complaints commission (ICC).
6. **Unsafe Working Conditions:** Women working in construction, factories, or remote agricultural areas are often exposed to unsafe conditions without adequate protective measures, making them more vulnerable to physical harm and harassment. **Fear of Reporting-Fear of retaliation** and social stigma prevents many women from reporting harassment or abuse, perpetuating a culture of silence around these issues.
7. **Work-Life Balance and Care Responsibilities: Unequal Distribution of Domestic Work:** In most Indian households, women are primarily responsible for domestic duties and caregiving, making it challenging for them to balance work and family life.
8. **Limited Maternity and Childcare Benefits:** Despite the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act of 2017, which extended paid maternity leave, many sectors (especially the informal sector) do not offer maternity leave, affordable childcare, or flexible working hours.
9. **Career Breaks and Impact on Career Progression:** Many women leave their jobs due to caregiving

responsibilities, facing challenges when they try to re-enter the workforce. Career breaks can impact their seniority, skill relevance, and income levels.

10. **Lack of Skill Development and Training Opportunities: Limited Access to Vocational Training:** Women in India have fewer opportunities for skill development, especially in technical and vocational fields, which can limit their access to high-paying jobs and professional growth.
11. **Gender Bias in Training Programs:** Existing training programs and skill development schemes may prioritize traditionally male-dominated sectors, excluding or discouraging women from participating in these fields.
12. **Legal and Structural Barriers: Complex Labour Laws and Lack of Awareness:** India's labour laws are complex, and women workers, especially in informal sectors, may lack awareness of their rights, leading to unreported violations and exploitation.
13. **Underrepresentation in Labour Unions:** Women workers are underrepresented in trade unions and labour organizations, limiting their ability to negotiate for better working conditions, fair wages, and other benefits.
14. **Barriers in Sectors with Legal Restrictions:** Some industries, such as mining and heavy manufacturing, have legal restrictions on women's work hours or duties, which limits their participation and growth in these sectors.
15. **Gender-Based Discrimination and Cultural Barriers: Cultural Norms and Gender Bias:** Cultural expectations often place restrictions on women's employment, particularly in rural areas where traditional gender roles are more deeply entrenched. Women in these regions may face family resistance or social stigma when they seek work outside the home.
16. **Discrimination in Hiring and Retention:** Gender biases in hiring and promotion can prevent women from accessing higher-paying jobs or securing stable employment. Discrimination may be particularly severe for women from marginalized communities or those with lower educational backgrounds.
17. **Increased Domestic Burden:** During the pandemic, women faced a significant increase in

unpaid domestic and caregiving responsibilities, which further limited their ability to pursue or retain paid work.

18. **Economic Vulnerability:** Women in low-income households faced severe economic hardships as they were forced to bear the brunt of layoffs and reductions in work hours. The pandemic widened existing inequalities, pushing many women further into poverty.
19. **Lack of Financial Independence and Economic Empowerment: Limited Access to Credit and Financial Resources:** Many women in India lack access to financial resources, including credit, loans, and other forms of economic support, which restricts their ability to start or grow businesses.

#### LAW RELATED TO WOMEN PROTECTIONS

The Indian Constitution, as a "Fundamental Right," the Constitution guarantees equality. Article 15 includes provisions for women, children, and individuals who are socially and educationally disadvantaged. These provisions are not discriminatory in any way. In matters of public employment, Article 16 guarantees equal opportunity. Women are guaranteed one-third seats in Panchayats under the 73rd Amendment Act of the Constitution, and one-third seats in Municipalities under the 74th Amendment Act.

The National Commission for Women Act, 1990: Creates a National Commission for Women to review existing statutory protections for women, prepare periodic reports to the Central Government on matters relating to safeguards for women's rights, investigate complaints of deprivation of these rights, and provide financial assistance in the litigation of issues affecting women.

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 - The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 is a legislative act in India that seeks to protect women from sexual harassment at their place of work. This statute superseded the Vishakha Guidelines for prevention of sexual harassment introduced by the Supreme Court of India. The Bill lays down the

definition of sexual harassment and seeks to provide a mechanism for redressing complaints. It provides for the constitution of an 'Internal Complaints Committee' at the workplace and a 'Local Complaints Committee' at the district and block levels.

A District Officer (District Collector or Deputy Collector), shall be responsible for facilitating and monitoring the activities under the Act. prohibits sexual harassment of women at work. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 is an Indian law that aims to protect women at work from sexual harassment. The Supreme Court of India's Vishakha Guidelines for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment were superseded by this Act. The bill establishes a definition of sexual harassment as well as a procedure for dealing with complaints. It establishes a 'Internal Complaints Committee' within the workplace, as well as a 'Local Complaints Committee' at the district and block levels. A District Officer (District Collector or Deputy Collector) is in charge of facilitating and overseeing the Act's functions.

The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2016: On March 9, 2017, the Indian Parliament passed a law offering women working in the organized sector compensated maternity leave of 26 weeks, up from the current 12 weeks, a decision that will benefit approximately 1.8 million women. The law will apply to all businesses with ten or more employees, and the benefit will be limited to the first two children. The entitlement for the third child will be 12 weeks. As a result, India now has the third-highest maternity leave in the world. Canada and Norway offer 50 weeks and 44 weeks of paid maternity leave, respectively.

### CONCLUSION

The challenges faced by women workers in India are complex and deeply rooted in socio-economic structures, cultural norms, and institutional biases. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, involving stronger legal protections, policy reforms, social awareness programs, and efforts to improve access to education and vocational training. Empowering women workers through fair pay, safe working environments, and equitable opportunities will not only benefit individual women but also

contribute significantly to India's economic growth and social progress. When a woman is given the correct opportunities to develop her gift and explore her potential, she has a world of options open to her. Let us treat women with the respect they deserve, and they will provide us with endless reasons to be proud of them.

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