

Unveiling the Gap: Exploring Gender Inequality in Economic Empowerment Across India

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Abstract

Gender inequality in economic empowerment remains a pervasive issue across the globe, manifesting in various forms such as unequal pay, limited access to economic resources, and disparities in employment opportunities and career advancement. This systemic imbalance stifles not only individual potential but also hampers overall economic growth and development. While this inequality exists universally, it is particularly pronounced in Indian society, rooted in deeply embedded cultural norms and historical gender roles. Traditionally, women's subordinate position has deprived them of asset ownership and participation in financial decision-making. Additionally, they have been denied employment opportunities and face discrimination in the labor market. These factors have led to a significant gender gap in economic participation at both household and societal levels. In this context, this study attempts to examine the gender inequality in economic empowerment in India through the lens of asset ownership, wage disparity, and labor force participation. This study is based on secondary data taken from the reports of the National Family Health Survey and the Periodic Labour Force Survey of the Government of India. The study found that, the female labour force participation rate was 46.2 per cent less than the male labour force participation rate and on an average, women earned Rs. 136.32 less than men in daily wage earnings. The study concludes that addressing gender inequality in economic empowerment requires a comprehensive approach at the policy, organizational, and societal level, including implementing and enforcing gender-sensitive labor laws, promoting equal pay for equal work, and providing affordable childcare and parental leave to level the playing field.

Keywords— *Economic Empowerment, Gender Inequality, Gender Wage Gap, Labour Force Participation, Women Empowerment*

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality in economic empowerment remains a significant global issue, despite ongoing progress towards equality. This inequality manifests in various ways, hindering women's full participation in the economy and limiting their potential to contribute and thrive. Under the prevailing patriarchal system, women have been historically denied economic independence and were made to rely on male family members for their financial needs. This patriarchal system granted exclusive inheritance rights to male members, leaving women with no control or ownership of family income and assets, thus limiting their economic participation. Access to economic resources also remains unequal along gender lines. Women often face greater challenges in accessing credit, land ownership, and financial services, limiting their ability to invest, start

businesses, or participate fully in the economy. Cultural and societal norms, as well as discriminatory practices within financial institutions, further compound these barriers. Additionally, the prolonged denial of education hindered women's acquisition of skills and knowledge required by the labor market, leading to significantly lower female labor force participation compared to men. Even when women enter the job market, they face discrimination in the form of lower wages and limited access to high-power positions. These factors have collectively contributed to a significant gender gap in economic participation at both household and societal levels. In this context the study aims to unveil the gender inequality in economic empowerment across India by conducting a state level analysis.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Traditionally, societal structures have limited women's participation in the economy, both within their homes and in the broader world. This manifests in restrictions on owning property and making financial decisions. Women have also faced fewer job opportunities and ongoing prejudice in the workplace. Women are often underrepresented in leadership positions and industries traditionally dominated by men, perpetuating the stereotype of certain roles being "unsuitable" for women. Discrimination and biases in recruitment, promotion, and performance evaluation processes contribute to this glass ceiling effect, hindering women's professional growth and economic empowerment. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing gender inequalities in economic empowerment. Women, especially those in low-wage and informal sectors, have been disproportionately affected by job losses, reduced working hours, and increased caregiving responsibilities. The lack of affordable childcare facilities and support systems further compounds these challenges, pushing many women out of the workforce or into precarious employment situations. This ongoing discrimination has led to a significant gender gap in economic participation, affecting both individual households and society at large.

III. OBJECTIVES

- To identify the gender gap in economic empowerment in terms of asset ownership in India
- To assess the gender inequality in labour force participation and wage earnings across India

IV. METHODOLOGY

This research utilizes secondary data exclusively, sourced from reports generated by the Government of India's National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). Employing a descriptive and analytical approach, the study investigates gender inequality in economic empowerment across three key dimensions: (i) Difference between women and men in asset ownership, (ii) Difference between Women and Men in Average wage earnings, (iii) Difference between Women and Men Labour Force Participation Rate. To achieve these objectives, the research employs appropriate variables and conducts analysis utilizing basic statistical tools and graphical representations.

V. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1. Gender Inequality in Asset Ownership

Historically, women's subordinate position in public and private spheres has deprived them of the right to hold assets in their names and participate in financial decision-making. Thereby the Table 1 portrays the gender inequality in economic participation among the Indian states.

Table 1: Gender Inequality in Asset Ownership

States	Percentage of women owning a house and/or land (alone or jointly with others) (%)	Percentage of men owning a house and/or land (alone or jointly with others) (%)	Difference between Women and Men Asset Ownership
Andhra	45.6	67.1	-21.5
Arunachal	68.7	76	-7.3
Assam	42.2	74.2	-32
Bihar	54.4	67.8	-13.4
Chhattisgarh	45.1	71.7	-26.6
Delhi	21.9	37.2	-15.3
Goa	22.8	21.2	1.6
Gujarat	42.2	63.7	-21.5
Haryana	38.6	50.4	-11.8
Himachal	22.4	52.8	-30.4
Jharkhand	63.6	82.6	-19
Karnataka	66.2	67.9	-1.7
Kerala	24.5	53.6	-29.1
Madh Pradesh	38.9	57.3	-18.4
Maharashtra	21.5	44	-22.5
Manipur	57.3	76.8	-19.5
Meghalaya	64.1	48	16.1
Mizoram	19.4	50.4	-31
Nagaland	25.5	52.1	-26.6
Odisha	42.5	73.1	-30.6
Punjab	63.2	58.2	5
Rajasthan	26	55.9	-29.9
Sikkim	52.4	75.6	-23.2

Tamil Nadu	47	60.4	-13.4
Telangana	63.6	74.3	-10.7
Tripura	15.8	53.4	-37.6
Uttar Pradesh	51.2	65.5	-14.3
Uttarakhand	23.8	52.3	-28.5
West Bengal	22	51.6	-29.6
India	42.3	60.1	-17.8

Source: National Family Health Survey 5, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India

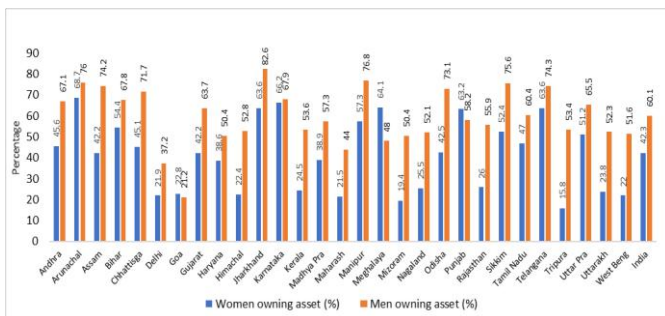


Fig. 1: Gender Inequality in Asset Ownership

Data presented in Table 1 reveal a significant disparity in asset ownership between genders. At the national level, only 42.3 per cent of women own assets compared to 60.1 per cent of men, a difference of 17.8 percentage points. Interestingly, only three states – Goa, Meghalaya, and Punjab – exhibit a higher percentage of female asset ownership compared to males. Conversely, all other states demonstrate a considerably lower rate of female asset ownership. The most pronounced gender gap exists in Tripura, Assam, and Mizoram, where women's asset ownership falls behind men's by 37.6 per cent, 32 per cent, and 31 per cent, respectively. Furthermore, excluding four states, the percentage of male asset ownership surpasses 50 per cent across the nation. Conversely, only nine states exhibit female asset ownership exceeding 50 per cent. These findings highlight a substantial gender disparity in asset ownership across India.

5. 2. Gender Inequality in Wage Earnings

One of the most glaring manifestations of gender inequality in economic empowerment is the gender wage gap. Despite advancements in legislation and increased awareness, women continue to earn less than their male counterparts for performing the same work.

Table 2: Gender Inequality in Wage Earnings

States	Women Average wage earnings (Rs.) per day from casual labour work other than public works	Men Average wage earnings (Rs.) per day from casual labour work other than public works	Difference between Women and Men Average wage earnings
Andhra	293.57	498.3	-204.73
Arunachal	387.52	426.54	-39.02
Assam	245.05	387.85	-142.8
Bihar	299.61	400.62	-101.01
Chhattisgarh	207.17	279.81	-72.64
Delhi	NA	548.89	NA
Goa	298.39	736.6	-438.21
Gujarat	249.81	327.19	-77.38
Haryana	382.83	451.49	-68.66
Himachal	412.63	471.18	-58.55
Jharkhand	288.59	326.83	-38.24
Karnataka	279.78	442.89	-163.11
Kerala	424.47	844.28	-419.81
Madh Pradesh	246.35	291.84	-45.49
Maharashtra	229	368.89	-139.89
Manipur	421.12	513.33	-92.21
Meghalaya	386.32	426.48	-40.16
Mizoram	460.83	421.88	38.95
Nagaland	496.82	468.66	28.16
Odisha	242.77	340.78	-98.01
Punjab	353.8	410.62	-56.82
Rajasthan	383.94	414.57	-30.63
Sikkim	535.35	597.17	-61.82
Tamil Nadu	309.2	560.64	-251.44
Telangana	350.01	526.88	-176.87
Tripura	348.69	418.55	-69.86
Uttar	263.44	396.99	-133.55

Pradesh			
Uttarakhand	334.64	432.67	-98.03
West Bengal	224.19	349.46	-125.27
India	271.66	407.98	-136.32

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey, National Sample Survey Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India

Note: Based on wage earnings during April to June 2022

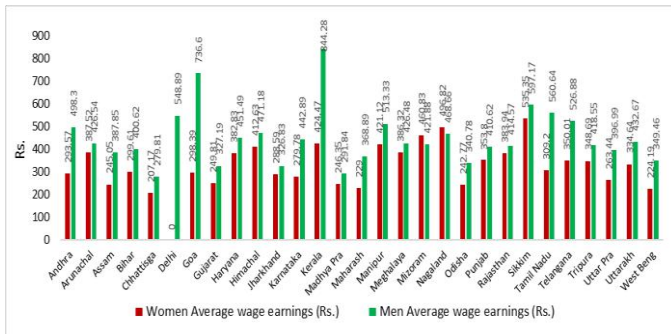


Fig. 2: Gender Inequality in Wage Earnings

Table 2 underscores the prevalence of gender inequality in average daily wage earnings for casual laborers across Indian states. Apart from Meghalaya and Mizoram, all other states exhibit a gender pay gap, with Goa demonstrating the most pronounced disparity. In Goa, men earn a significantly higher daily wage (Rs. 736.6) compared to women (Rs. 298.39). Kerala follows closely, where the daily wage gap is Rs. 419.81, with men earning Rs. 844.28 compared to women's Rs. 424.47. Notably, Kerala boasts the highest average daily wage for men (Rs. 844.28), while Sikkim offers the highest average daily wage for women (Rs. 535.35). This highlights the uneven distribution of wages across genders. Furthermore, only two states report an average daily male wage below Rs. 300, while twelve states show a female average daily wage below this level. Overall, the national picture reveals a substantial gender pay gap, with men earning Rs. 407.98 per day compared to women's Rs. 271.66. This translates to a daily wage disparity of Rs. 136.32, highlighting the persistence of significant gender inequality in wage earnings despite legislative and awareness efforts.

5.3. Gender Inequality in Labour Force Participation

Women's participation in the formal labor force is lower than men's, often due to societal expectations for childcare and domestic responsibilities, which fall disproportionately on women. This limits their earning potential and career advancement.

Table 3: Gender Inequality in Labour Force Participation

States	Women Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) (age 15-59 years)	Men Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) (age 15-59 years)	Difference between Women and Men LFPR
Andhra	47.9	85	-37.1
Arunachal	32.3	72	-39.7
Assam	30.9	84.6	-53.7
Bihar	11	75.6	-64.6
Chhattisgarh	55.6	85.2	-29.6
Delhi	14.2	79.5	-65.3
Goa	25.7	85	-59.3
Gujarat	37.5	84.7	-47.2
Haryana	21.4	76.9	-55.5
Himachal	71.2	86.4	-15.2
Jharkhand	47.7	83.2	-35.5
Karnataka	35.3	84.1	-48.8
Kerala	42.1	80.9	-38.8
Madh Pradesh	44.1	85.2	-41.1
Maharashtra	41.9	81.5	-39.6
Manipur	25.3	72	-46.7
Meghalaya	51.1	75.8	-24.7
Mizoram	37.5	73.4	-35.9
Nagaland	53.1	81.4	-28.3
Odisha	36.4	84.5	-48.1
Punjab	26.7	82.2	-55.5
Rajasthan	43.3	78.4	-35.1
Sikkim	61.6	87.1	-25.5
Tamil Nadu	44.4	84.1	-39.7
Telangana	49.8	82.7	-32.9
Tripura	29.6	84	-54.4
Uttar Pradesh	27.4	79.2	-51.8
Uttarakhand	34.6	76.1	-41.5
West Bengal	30.5	86	-55.5
All India	35.6	81.8	-46.2

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey, National Sample Survey Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India

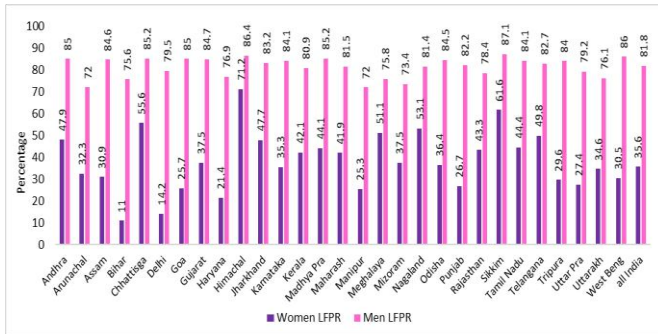


Fig. 3: Gender Inequality in Labour Force Participation

Table 3 exposes a significant gender disparity in Labor Force Participation Rates (LFPR) across Indian states. In all states except Himachal Pradesh, women's LFPR falls considerably below that of men. Notably, Delhi exhibits the most pronounced gap, with a male LFPR of 79.5 per cent compared to a mere 14.2 per cent for women, translating to a differential of 65.3 percentage points. Bihar follows closely, where the male LFPR stands at 75.6 per cent, while the female rate is a significantly lower 11 per cent. This pattern holds true throughout the country, with Bihar and Delhi boasting the lowest female LFPRs. Interestingly, Himachal Pradesh is the only state where women's LFPR surpasses 70 per cent, while all other states demonstrate female rates below this threshold. Conversely, male LFPR exceeds 70 per cent in every state. At the national level, the data reveals a substantial gender gap, with a male LFPR of 81.8 per cent compared to a female rate of only 35.6 per cent, representing a disparity of 46.2 percentage points. These findings unequivocally demonstrate a glaring gender imbalance in labor force participation across India.

VI. ROOT CAUSES FOR GENDER INEQUALITY IN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The major root causes for gender inequality can be said as follows:

Social Norms and Stereotypes: Deep-rooted gender stereotypes and societal expectations confine women to specific roles, limiting their educational and career aspirations.

Lack of Access to Quality Education and Skills Training: Women often lack access to quality education and skills training, limiting their employability and career choices.

Workplace Discrimination and Harassment: Women face discrimination and harassment in the workplace, hindering their career progression and job satisfaction.

VII. POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Tackling this issue requires a multi-pronged approach and some of the potential solutions include:

Empowering Girls with Education: Investing in girls' education and skill development is crucial for breaking the cycle of inequality and expanding their economic opportunities.

Promoting Equal Pay and Fair Labor Practices: Implementing policies that ensure equal pay for equal work and address discriminatory practices in the workplace are essential.

Sharing Unpaid Care Work: Encouraging men to take on a more equitable share of unpaid care and domestic work is essential for enabling women to participate fully in the labor market.

Financial Inclusion: Expanding access to financial services, including credit and loans, for women entrepreneurs and business owners is crucial for boosting their economic participation.

Addressing the Digital Divide: Bridging the digital gender gap by providing women with access to technology and training is critical for their participation in the digital economy.

Challenging Social Norms and Stereotypes: Challenging harmful gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality through education and awareness campaigns is crucial for long-term change.

Data and research: Collecting robust data on gender disparities and conducting in-depth research are crucial for designing effective interventions.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Gender inequality in economic empowerment is a complex and multifaceted issue with far-reaching consequences. As evidenced by the preceding analysis, this discrimination was found across all the variables studied right from the asset ownership to labour force participation and wage earnings. This pervasive disparity necessitates a multi-sectoral, holistic approach to uplift the economic empowerment of women. Addressing gender inequality in economic empowerment in India requires a sustained efforts at individual, community, and national levels that tackles the root causes and empowers women to reach their full economic potential. By investing in girls'

education, promoting equal pay, sharing unpaid care work, and fostering financial inclusion, can help empower women economically and create a more equitable and prosperous world for all.

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