

Understanding the Current Scenario Concerning the Issues of Working Women in India: A Systematic Review of Available Literature

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review examines the contemporary challenges faced by working women in India, focusing on labor force participation, gender-based discrimination, work-life balance, and socio-cultural barriers. Drawing from quantitative and qualitative studies published between 2015 and 2025, the review identifies persistent issues such as low female labor force participation (FLFP), gender wage gaps, workplace harassment, and the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic work. Despite economic growth and policy interventions, structural and cultural factors continue to hinder women's economic empowerment. The findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive policies, improved workplace protections, and societal shifts to address these challenges. Recommendations include enhanced vocational training, enforcement of equal pay legislation, and infrastructure improvements to reduce domestic burdens.

Keywords: *Working women, India, current scenario of working women, female labor force participation, gender discrimination, work-life balance, systematic review.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, India has witnessed significant socio-economic transformation, including a noticeable rise in the participation of women in the workforce. From corporate boardrooms to grassroots entrepreneurship, women are increasingly asserting their presence in various professional spheres. However, despite these advancements, working women in India continue to face numerous challenges that hinder their full potential and equal participation. India's economic growth since the 1990s has transformed opportunities for women, yet the female labor force participation rate (FLFP) remains low, stagnating at around 23–30% and even declining in some periods (Fletcher et al., 2017; World Bank India, 2020). Working women in India face multifaceted challenges, including gender-based discrimination, unequal pay, sexual harassment, and the burden of unpaid domestic work. These issues are compounded by patriarchal norms, limited access to suitable jobs, and inadequate policy implementation. Addressing these issues is crucial not only for achieving gender equality but also for ensuring inclusive and sustainable economic growth. This systematic review aims to synthesize recent literature (2015–2025) to understand the current scenario of working women in India, identify key barriers, and propose evidence-based solutions.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

Khetrapal, A. (2015) conducted a study on "The Status of Working Women in India". This paper outlines a complex landscape of challenges that working women in India face, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to promote equality and justice in the workplace. It found challenges such as wage discrimination, gender stereotyping, cultural barriers, lack of social security, inadequate family support and so on.

Bhadury, A. & Mukherjee, A. K. (2015) researched on "THE STATUS OF INDIAN WORKING WOMEN IN PRESENT ERA". This study explores the status of Indian working women today, showing how their role has evolved by highlighting the ongoing struggles they face due to societal and gender inequalities. The study's findings showed that Indian working women have made substantial progress in various fields, proving their capabilities across diverse sectors such as banking, IT, armed forces, and more. Despite this, they continue to face significant challenges, including social stigma, domestic violence, gender inequality, and health issues related to stress and lifestyle diseases.

Tripathy, M. (2018) carried out a research study on "Breaking the Code of Gender Barrier to Leverage the Position of Women in Indian Workplaces". The paper emphasizes the significant challenges women face in Indian workplaces due to deeply rooted gender barriers, which include discrimination, stereotypes, and cultural expectations. These barriers hinder women's career advancement and overall participation in the workforce. The paper also points out the issue of unequal pay, where women earn significantly less than their male counterparts for similar work. This wage gap is a persistent problem that reflects broader societal discrimination against women. Thus the paper concludes that both women and organizations must collaborate to create a supportive environment that fosters gender equality. Organizations should implement policies that promote women's advancement and actively work to eliminate gender discrimination.

Fletcher, E. K., Pande, R. & Moore, C. (2019) conducted a study on "Women and Work in India: Descriptive Evidence and a Review of Potential Policies". This paper aims to understand why women's participation in India's labor force remains low—under 30%—despite economic growth. It investigates the main constraints women face, such as difficulty matching jobs, social norms, and access to training. The study reviews existing evidence and policies to identify what works and what doesn't in increasing female employment. In brief, the paper suggests that improving access to information, training, and supportive policies can help raise women's participation in the labor market.

Gupta, R. (2019) made a study on "Workplace Sexual Harassment of Women Domestic Workers: Issues and Challenges in the Legal Framework in India". The paper begins by acknowledging that while rape and sexual assault are widely recognized forms of gender-based violence, workplace sexual harassment is often overlooked. The study specifically addresses the challenges faced by women domestic workers in the unorganized sector. The paper offers critical insights into the challenges faced by women domestic workers regarding workplace sexual harassment and provides actionable recommendations for improvement.

Sivasankar, V. (2019) has done a study on "Status of Women Workers in India". The purpose of the study is to analyze the current status, participation, and challenges of women workers in India. It aims to understand the socio-economic factors impacting women's employment and assess their working conditions across different sectors. The findings of the study highlight that women's participation in the workforce is increasing but still faces significant barriers such as social norms, limited access to education, and employment opportunities. The study emphasizes the need for policy interventions to improve working conditions and promote gender equality, ultimately recommending measures to empower women and enhance their participation in the economy.

Gupta, P. & Jaiswal, S. (2019) performed a research study on "Working Environment for women in India: Impact on their Personality and their Legal Rights". The main aim of the study is to examine the current working environment for women in India, analyze the various problems they face such as discrimination, harassment, and lack of awareness about their legal rights, and understand how these factors influence their personality and overall well-being. The findings revealed that despite legal provisions aimed at protecting women, many remain unaware of their rights and continue to face workplace discrimination, harassment, and unfavorable working conditions.

In 2020, Dr. Srinivas & Dr. Thiippana conducted a study titled "Socio-Economic Status of Organised Working Women in India: A Study of Raichur City". The main objective of the study is to understand the problems and challenges faced by organized working women in Raichur City, India, and to identify socio-economic factors that influence their status, safety, and security. Additionally, the study aims to explore their involvement in family, community, and societal activities, as well as to suggest possible solutions to overcome workplace and societal obstacles. The results reveal that women in Raichur face multiple challenges, including discrimination, social restrictions, gender biases, work-family balance issues, and harassment.

Bongale, A. & Sabana, T. (2023) have done a study titled "Problems Faced by Working Women in India: An Obstacle for Women Work Participation". The main focus of the study is to identify the factors responsible for the low participation of women in the Indian workforce and to analyze how these problems affect their work participation rate. It reveals that the female work participation rate (FWPR) has been gradually increasing at a growth rate of approximately 12.5%, indicating some progress. However, overall, Indian women still face significant challenges due to traditional social roles, lack of awareness about their rights, and limited access to education, especially in rural areas. The study underscores the need for societal, policy, and educational interventions to improve women's participation in the workforce.

A study performed by Bhat, S. U & Naikoo, S. A. (2025) titled "Problems and Challenges Faced by Working Women in India: An Overview in the Context of Social Security" with the purpose of the exploring the real conditions of Indian working women, identify factors preventing their advancement to higher posts, and analyze the problems and challenges they face in employment. The study aims to provide policy recommendations to overcome these issues. The findings of the study highlight pervasive gender bias in recruitment and pay, lack

of control over earnings, and various social and institutional barriers that hinder women's career progression and economic independence in India.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

1. To explore the current scenario of working women in India.
2. To examine the trends and patterns of FLFP in India.
3. To identify the primary socio-economic and cultural barriers faced by working women in India.
4. To evaluate the impact of existing policies and interventions.
5. To recommend strategies for improving women's economic participation and workplace equality.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

4.1 Search Strategy:

A systematic literature review was conducted by using databases such as PubMed, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The search query included terms like "working women India", "female labor force participation", "gender discrimination workplace India", "current status of working women in India", "work-life balance and women in India" and so on.

4.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

Inclusion: Peer-reviewed articles, reports, and working papers published between 2015 and 2025; studies focusing on working women in India; quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research addressing FLFP, workplace issues, or socio-cultural barriers.

Exclusion: Studies before 2015, non-English publications, or those not directly addressing working women's issues in India are excluded from this study.

4.3 Data Extraction:

On the basis of methodological rigor and relevance, 20 of the 50 identified relevant papers were chosen for further in-depth analysis. Information about the current state of working women in India, FLFP trends, workplace discrimination, work-life balance, the effects of policies, and sociocultural factors were retrieved.

5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Current Scenario of Working Women in India:

The current scenario of working women in India shows both progress and ongoing challenges. While more women are getting educated and entering the workforce, the overall female labour force participation rate remains low, especially in urban areas. Many women are employed in informal or unorganized sectors with little job security and lower wages compared to men. Despite growing opportunities, social and cultural barriers such as early marriage, family responsibilities, and gender norms continue to limit their career growth. Women in rural areas often work more in agriculture or unpaid family work, while urban women are slowly entering

formal sectors and entrepreneurship. Government schemes and workplace policies are helping, but the impact is uneven. The COVID-19 pandemic also had a negative effect, causing many women to lose jobs or leave the workforce. However, with increasing digital access and awareness, more women are exploring new avenues like remote work, freelancing, and startups.

5.1 Trends in Female Labor Force Participation:

Despite economic growth, FLFP in India has declined from 32% in 2005 to 23% in 2018, with rural women experiencing a sharper drop (90 minutes less daily work from 1998–2019). Key findings include-

- Significant demand for jobs among women not currently in the labor force, but difficulty matching to suitable roles due to skill mismatches or geographic constraints
- Vocational training correlates with higher employment likelihood, yet access remains limited
- Agriculture remains the dominant sector for women's employment, often as low-paid or unpaid laborers, with little occupational diversification

5.2 Workplace Discrimination and Gender Gaps:

Working women face pervasive gender-based discrimination-

- Gender Wage Gap: In all industries, women make less money than males. The huge unexplained salary difference is frequently ascribed to discrimination.
- Harassment and Bias: Sexual harassment and gender bias are rampant, with women in male-dominated fields (e.g., engineering, construction) facing hostility or exclusion.
- Unequal Pay: Despite the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, women are frequently underpaid compared to male colleagues.

5.3 Work-Life Balance and Domestic Burdens:

The disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic work severely constrains women's labor market participation:

- Cooking, cleaning, and childcare occupy 85% of women's time spent on unpaid work, contributing to "gendered time poverty."
- Working women perform significantly more household tasks than working men, reducing leisure time and career advancement opportunities.
- Rural women face additional burdens, such as fetching water and fuelwood, which could be alleviated by infrastructure improvements

5.4 Socio-Cultural Barriers:

Patriarchal norms and conservative values limit women's mobility, career choices, and autonomy:

- Social norms discourage women from entering “unsuitable” jobs, reinforcing occupational segregation
- Rising violence against women, including sexual crimes, deters workforce participation, particularly in conservative households.
- The lack of knowledge about women's rights and employment protections contributes to risks.

5.5 Policy Interventions and Gaps:

Policies like employment quotas and skilling programs have increased female participation in some sectors, but implementation is inconsistent. Key gaps include-

- Limited enforcement of anti-discrimination laws.
- Inadequate child care facilities and maternity benefits.
- Insufficient focus on rural women’s access to training and jobs.

6. Discussion:

The systematic review reveals that working women in India face interconnected challenges rooted in structural, economic, and cultural factors. The decline in FLFP, despite economic growth, contradicts the expected “U-shaped” relationship between GDP growth and female employment, suggesting non-economic factors like social norms play a significant role. The persistence of gender wage gaps and workplace harassment underscores the need for stronger enforcement of existing laws, such as the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013

The heavy burden of unpaid domestic work highlights the urgency of infrastructure improvements (e.g., piped water, clean energy) to reduce time poverty. Moreover, the correlation between vocational training and employment suggests that expanding access to skill development programs could boost FLFP, particularly in non-agricultural sectors. However, policies must address demand-side constraints, such as the lack of “suitable” jobs, to ensure training translates into employment.

Socio-cultural barriers, including patriarchal norms and violence against women, require long-term societal interventions. Initiatives targeting men and boys to shift attitudes toward gender roles could complement existing women-focused policies. The rise in reported sexual crimes, as seen in cases like the 2012 Nirbhaya incident, underscores the link between safety concerns and low FLFP, particularly in conservative families.

Limitations: The review is limited by the heterogeneity of study methodologies and a paucity of longitudinal data. Additionally, underreporting of women’s work in surveys may skew FLFP estimates. Future research should prioritize standardized survey instruments and qualitative studies to capture nuanced experiences.

7. Conclusion:

This systematic review highlights the persistent challenges faced by working women in India, including low FLFP, workplace discrimination, domestic burdens, and socio-cultural barriers. While policies like quotas and skilling initiatives show promise, their impact is limited by weak enforcement and structural constraints. Addressing these issues requires a multi-pronged approach: strengthening legal protections, expanding vocational training, improving rural infrastructure, and challenging patriarchal norms through education and awareness. By prioritizing gender equity in economic planning, India can unlock the potential of its female workforce, contributing to both social progress and economic growth.

8. Recommendations:

- **Policy Enforcement:** Enforce equal pay and anti-discrimination legislation more strictly by conducting frequent audits and enforcing fines for noncompliance.
- **Vocational Training:** Expand access to skill development programs, particularly for rural women, targeting high-growth sectors like technology and manufacturing.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Invest in piped water, clean energy, and childcare facilities to reduce women's domestic burdens.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Launch programs to educate men and boys on gender equality and women's rights to shift societal attitudes.
- **Safety Measures:** Enhance workplace and public safety through better policing, helplines, and fast-track courts for gender-based violence cases.
- **Research Agenda:** Conduct longitudinal studies and develop culturally adapted survey tools to accurately measure women's work and experiences.

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