

Challenges and Problems Faced by Working Women in India

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Abstract:

Working women in India face numerous challenges and problems in their work and personal lives. Despite progress in gender equality, women in India continue to face gender discrimination, wage gaps, harassment, and limited opportunities for career advancement. These challenges have a negative impact on women's health, well-being, and family life. Moreover, these challenges also have a detrimental impact on the overall economy of the country. This paper aims to explore the various challenges and problems faced by working women in India, examine their impact on women's lives and the economy, and recommend strategies to address these challenges.

Keywords: Women workers, Challenges, Problems, Gender discrimination, Wage gaps, Harassment, Training, Health and well-being, Economy, Gender equality, Strategies.

Introduction:

The role of women in the Indian workforce has been evolving over the years. Women in India have made significant progress in their participation in the workforce. Women constitute nearly half of India's population but their representation in the workforce is low. Women's participation in the workforce in India has been declining, from 35% in 1990 to 24% in 2020 (World Bank, 2021). Women's participation in the labour force in India is low compared to other countries in the region and the world. However, working women in India still face numerous challenges and problems, both in their professional and personal lives. Gender discrimination, wage gaps, harassment, and limited opportunities for career advancement are some of the significant challenges faced by working women in India. These challenges have a negative impact on women's health and well-being, their families, and the economy of the country. Therefore, it is essential to examine these challenges and recommend strategies to address them.

Challenges for Working Women in India:

Working women in India face a range of challenges that limit their participation in the workforce and their ability to advance in their careers. These challenges include gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, lack of access to education and training, inadequate maternity and child care policies, and societal expectations and norms that prioritize women's domestic responsibilities over their professional ambitions. Additionally, women working in the informal sector face greater vulnerability to exploitation and unsafe working conditions. While some progress has been made in recent years, such as the introduction of new labour laws and policies aimed at improving gender parity in the workplace, much more needs to be done to address these challenges and create a more inclusive and equitable work environment for women in India. Some of challenges are discussed below-

- **Gender Discrimination:** One of the most significant challenges faced by working women in India is gender discrimination. Women in India face gender discrimination in various forms, such as unequal pay, limited job opportunities, and biased hiring practices. According to a report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), women in India earn 20% less than men for the same work. Moreover, women are often relegated to low-paying, low-skill jobs with limited opportunities for advancement. Gender discrimination is prevalent across all sectors and levels of the workforce, including the corporate sector, government, and informal economy.
- **Wage Gaps:** Wage gaps between men and women in India remain a significant challenge for working women. Despite the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976, which mandates equal pay for equal work, women in India continue to earn less than men. Women in India earn on average 19% less than men (World Economic Forum, 2021). The gender pay gap in India is higher than the global average of 16%. Women's wages are generally lower than men's, even when they have the same qualifications and experience. The wage gap is even more pronounced in the informal sector, where

women are more likely to work. The wage gap limits women's purchasing power and affects their overall financial independence. Women in India also have limited access to formal employment, which results in lower wages and poorer working conditions.

- **Discrimination:** Discrimination is another significant challenge faced by working women in India. Women face discrimination in the workplace based on their gender, marital status, and age. Women are often paid less than men for the same work, are denied promotions, and are not given equal opportunities for career development. According to a survey conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), 60% of women in India face some form of discrimination in the workplace (ILO, 2018).
- **Harassment:** Harassment is another significant challenge faced by working women in India. Women are often subjected to verbal, physical, and sexual harassment in the workplace. According to a survey by the Indian Bar Association, 2018, 70% of working women in India have experienced some form of harassment at work. Unfortunately, many women do not report such incidents, due to the fear of losing their job or facing retaliation or social stigma. This lack of reporting and accountability perpetuates a culture of harassment in the workplace.
- **Limited Opportunities for Career Advancement:** Working women in India also face limited opportunities for career advancement. Women are often relegated to lower-level positions, and promotions are based on factors other than merit, such as gender or social connections. According to the World Bank, women in India are less likely to hold managerial positions, with only 11% of senior management positions held by women (World Bank, 2021). Additionally, women face challenges in accessing education and training opportunities, which limits their ability to acquire skills and knowledge required for career advancement. The lack of opportunities for career advancement limits women's earning potential and economic independence.
- **Impact on Health and Well-being:** The challenges faced by working women in India have a detrimental impact on their health and well-being. Women who experience harassment or discrimination often suffer from stress, anxiety, and depression. The lack of access to education and training opportunities limits their ability to access better-paying jobs with better working conditions, affecting their physical and mental health. These challenges also have a significant impact on women's families, particularly their ability to provide for their children's education and healthcare.
- **Impact on the Economy:** The challenges faced by working women in India also have a significant impact on the country's economy. Women's underrepresentation in the workforce results in a significant loss of potential talent and skills. The gender pay-gap limits women's purchasing power, resulting in a decrease in overall consumer spending. Addressing the challenges faced by working women in India can lead to increased productivity, economic growth, and overall social and economic development.
- **Lack of Support:** Working women in India also face a lack of support from their families and society. Women are often expected to prioritize their family responsibilities over their careers. Working mothers in India face significant challenges balancing work and family responsibilities, and there is a lack of affordable childcare facilities.

Problems at Workplace:

There are several problems that women workers in India face in the workplace. One of the most significant challenges is gender discrimination. Women often face unequal pay, restricted career growth opportunities, and a lack of representation in senior positions. According to a study conducted by Catalyst, a global non-profit organization, women in India earn 19% less than their male counterparts. This is despite the fact that women are often better educated than men. Additionally, women are underrepresented in leadership positions, with only 7% of CEO positions in Indian companies being held by women (Livemint, 2021).

This discrimination can also manifest in the form of sexual harassment, which is a prevalent issue in the Indian workplace. A survey conducted by the Indian National Bar Association

found that 70% of working women in India have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. This is despite the existence of laws and guidelines designed to prevent such harassment (The Hindu, 2021).

Another problem is access to formal employment opportunities. Women in India face significant legal barriers to accessing employment, including restrictions on working at night, in hazardous industries, and in certain occupations. According to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO), only 21% of women in India are employed in formal wage employment. This is significantly lower than the global average of 48% (ILO, 2021).

Workplace safety is also a concern for women in India. Women often work in hazardous or dangerous conditions, particularly in the informal sector, without adequate protection or safety measures. This can result in workplace injuries and health problems. A study conducted by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy found that women in the informal sector in India are more likely to work in hazardous conditions and without adequate safety measures. As a result, they are more likely to suffer workplace injuries and health problems (The Wire, 2019).

Overall, these problems and challenges create a hostile environment for women in the workplace and hinder their career growth and opportunities. Addressing these issues will be crucial in creating a more inclusive and equitable workplace for women in India.

Balancing work and family responsibilities is another challenge for women in India. Traditional gender roles often place the burden of caregiving and household duties on women, which can make it difficult for them to pursue their careers or take on leadership roles in the workplace.

Problems at Family:

In addition to the challenges and problems that women face in the workplace, they also face significant issues in their personal lives and families. These include:

- **Patriarchal Attitudes:** Traditional gender roles in Indian families often place women in subservient positions and limit their decision-making power. This can lead to women being denied opportunities, such as education or career advancement, that would enable them to improve their lives. According to the National Family Health Survey, around 30% of women in India have experienced physical or sexual violence by their husbands. This violence is often a result of patriarchal attitudes and the belief that women are subservient to men (IndiaSpend, 2019).
- **Domestic Violence:** Domestic violence is a pervasive issue in India, with women often experiencing physical, emotional, and sexual abuse within their homes. This violence can have a significant impact on their mental and physical health, as well as their ability to work and participate in society.
- **Lack of Support for Childcare:** In many Indian families, the responsibility of caring for children and elderly family members falls disproportionately on women. This can limit their ability to pursue their careers and can result in them leaving the workforce altogether. According to a report by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, only 9% of Indian companies offer childcare facilities to their employees. This lack of support for childcare can limit women's ability to participate in the workforce (Livemint, 2019).
- **Lack of Access to Healthcare:** Women in India often have limited access to healthcare, particularly in rural areas. This can result in health issues going untreated, which can impact their ability to work and provide for their families. According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), only 26% of women in India receive adequate prenatal care. This can lead to health issues during pregnancy and childbirth, which can impact their ability to work (WHO, 2021).
- **Lack of Control Over Reproductive Health:** Women in India often face restrictions on their reproductive health and have limited access to contraceptives and family planning services. This can impact their ability to control their own lives and careers. According to the National Family Health Survey, only 22% of women in India use modern contraceptives. This lack of access to family planning services can limit women's ability to control their own lives and careers (IndiaSpend, 2019).

Addressing these issues will be critical in creating a more equitable and supportive environment for women in India, both in their personal lives and in the workplace. This will require changes in societal attitudes, as well as policy changes to ensure that women have access to healthcare, childcare, and other support services.

Strategies for Addressing the Challenges:

To address the challenges faced by working women in India, several strategies can be adopted. Firstly, there should be policies to promote gender equality in the workplace. This can be achieved through affirmative action programs, such as reserved positions for women in the workplace. The government can also implement policies that promote equal pay for equal work and promote transparency in the recruitment and promotion processes.

Secondly, efforts should be made to increase women's access to education and training opportunities. This can be achieved by providing scholarships and other financial incentives to women who wish to pursue higher education or training. Moreover, there should be an emphasis on vocational training programs that provide women with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in various fields.

Thirdly, there should be initiatives to promote women's leadership in the workplace. This can be achieved by providing mentorship and leadership training programs that help women develop the necessary skills and knowledge to take on leadership roles.

Fourthly, there should be efforts to address the issue of harassment in the workplace. This can be achieved through the implementation of robust policies that prevent and address harassment, including training programs that raise awareness of the issue among employees.

Finally, there should be efforts to change the cultural and societal attitudes towards women in the workforce. This can be achieved through public awareness campaigns that promote gender equality and encourage men and women to work together towards this common goal.

Conclusion:

Working women in India face numerous challenges and problems, including gender discrimination, wage gaps, harassment, and limited opportunities for career advancement. These challenges have a significant impact on women's health and well-being, their families, and the economy of the country. These challenges are crucial for promoting gender equality and ensuring the full participation of women in the workforce. It is the responsibility of both the government and the private sector to take measures to address these challenges and promote gender equality in the Indian workforce.

To address these challenges, a multi-pronged approach is needed that includes legislative and policy reforms, greater investment in education and training, the promotion of gender-sensitive work environments, and efforts to challenge and shift societal norms and attitudes around gender roles and responsibilities. Ultimately, empowering women in India is not only a matter of basic human rights but also has important implications for sustainable development, poverty reduction, and economic growth. It is therefore imperative that policymakers, employers, civil society actors, and individuals all work together to create a more gender-equitable and supportive society that enables women to achieve their full potential and thrive.

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