

Sociological Study on the Economic Invisibility of Women Agricultural Labourers: A Descriptive Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Women agricultural labourers, a major part of India's workforce, are essential for both agricultural productivity and rural health. They undertake soil preparation, sowing, seed insertion, weeding, crop picking, post-harvest treatment, animal care, and ensuring a family's food supply. Their efforts, though considerable, are overshadowed economically because their work is frequently unpaid or underpaid, and they are often excluded from official statistics and decision-making. The current descriptive sociological study examines the economic disregard faced by women agricultural labourers in the Ramanagara district of Karnataka. The study relies on primary data obtained from 300 agricultural labourers through structured interviews. For data analysis, methods such as frequency distributions, percentages, and cross-tabulation were employed in the descriptive research methodology. The findings indicate that economic invisibility is closely associated with landlessness, lack of education, wage gaps, and limited access to productive resources. Insufficient participation in household matters and limited access to governmental assistance programmes. Multiple participants indicated that their agricultural activities were not properly acknowledged either within the family or by governmental bodies. The research suggests that improving women's access to land, ensuring wage parity, and boosting social security benefits are crucial. To effectively combat economic invisibility and promote gender-equitable rural development, efforts should focus on strengthening welfare access programmes and formally recognising women's roles as agricultural labourers.

Keywords: Economic Invisibility, Women Agricultural Labourers, Gender Inequality, Rural Livelihoods, Ramanagara District, Karnataka.

INTRODUCTION

A significant portion of India's agricultural labour force is composed of women, who are vital for maintaining rural living standards. In Karnataka, particularly in Ramanagara district, women agricultural labourers participate in almost every stage of agricultural production, including seed selection, nursery preparation, sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, harvesting, threshing, post-harvest processing, livestock management, and household food security. Though their significant contributions are well-known, their work is often viewed as an extension of domestic duties rather than as productive economic activity. As a result, a significant portion of their work continues to be economically unrecognised.

Economic invisibility is defined as the failure to acknowledge and assign value to women's agricultural labour. Women's labour is frequently uncounted, undervalued, or overlooked in official employment records and agricultural data. Gender-based wage disparities, unequal rights to land and productive assets, restricted access to financial institutions, diminished participation in decision-making, and insufficient social protections all serve to deepen their disadvantaged situation. Economic independence for women is compromised, and their participation in rural development is restricted due to these structural inequalities.

Sociologically speaking, economic invisibility can be attributed to patriarchal social norms, gender-specific labour division, imbalanced allocation of productive assets, and systemic discrimination. Women's substantial role in agricultural productivity and income often goes unrecognized, even though they are rarely considered

independent agricultural labourers. Their contributions are frequently considered auxiliary to those of men, leading to unequal pay, suboptimal working environments, and restricted access to governmental support programmes.

This research study focus the economic neglect of women agricultural labour in the Ramanagara district of Karnataka. Using primary data gathered from 300 female participants, the research examines the connection between chosen socio-economic factors and various aspects of economic invisibility via descriptive cross-tabulation. The study assesses the subjects' perspectives on income inequality, honour for work, availability of material assets, and participation in family planning. The results are aimed at enriching sociological understanding of gender and rural work, while offering policy suggestions for advancing gender equality and economic empowerment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Bina Agarwal (1994) contends that women's restricted possession of land and productive assets is a key factor contributing to their economic subjugation and marginalization. She shows that secure property rights bolster women's leverage, economic stability, and involvement in domestic planning. Nussbaum elucidates that gender inequality hinders women's abilities and chances to fully engage in economic and social activities. According to her, it is imperative to recognize women's productive work to achieve equality and human development. The research indicates that collaborative agriculture and women's involvement in farming organizations enhance economic independence, acknowledgment of labour, and acquisition of essential resources. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2023), the report underscores that women play a crucial role in agricultural production yet persistently face wage discrimination, limited access to land, financing, technological resources, and agricultural advisory services. It suggests gender-sensitive agricultural strategies and better acknowledgment of women's labour. International Labour Organization (ILO) (2018), the report shows that unpaid domestic labour carried out by women continues to be overwhelmingly unacknowledged within national economies. It suggests acknowledging, minimizing, and reassigning non-compensated caregiving labour, alongside bolstering social welfare and secure employment prospects. The Indian government notes that while women extensively participate in agriculture, they retain little to no ownership or operational control over agricultural land, which remains predominantly in the hands of men. This difference impacts women's ability to obtain institutional financing, subsidies, and agricultural assistance services.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to feminist theory, patriarchal systems undervalue women's contributions, whether they are productive or reproductive. In agriculture, women often contribute equally or more labour than men but frequently receive lower wages, little recognition, and fewer opportunities to own land and productive assets. From a Marxist perspective, labour inherently creates economic value, but unequal access to productive resources leads to exploitation. Most of the women agricultural labours exchange their labour for income, without control over land or other resources. As a result, their contributions are often underappreciated and inadequately rewarded. Societies establish labour divisions based on gender, assigning tasks considered productive and those related to reproduction. Women engage in agricultural labour alongside their unpaid household responsibilities, which encompass cooking, childcare, water retrieval, firewood collection, and caring for elderly family members.

Research Gap

The existing literature provides important information on gender inequality, land ownership, unpaid labour, wage discrimination, and women's involvement in agricultural activities. However, most research tends to focus on national or state trends rather than specifically examining the economic marginalization of women agricultural workers in the Ramanagara district of Karnataka. Moreover, fewer studies have utilized primary data from rural women agricultural labours to explore the connections between education levels, land possession, wage disparities, participatory power, and economic marginalization via descriptive cross-tabulations.

This study aims to address the gap by gathering primary data from 300 women agricultural labourers in the Ramanagara district. It conducts a sociological examination of their daily life and views concerning economic non-existence, and it proposes policy suggestions grounded in empirical data.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the socio-economic profile of women agricultural labourers in the Ramanagara district of Karnataka.
2. To analyse the economic visibility issues faced by female agricultural labours.
3. The aim is to study the link between educational standing and economic invisibility.
4. To analyse the impact of land possession on the economic position and societal acknowledgment of women agricultural labourers.

Research methods

For this study, a descriptive research design was employed to investigate the economic marginalization of women agricultural labours in the Ramanagara district of Karnataka. A descriptive design was chosen. It facilitates a thorough delineation and examination of socio-economic scenarios, occupational habits, wage disparities, control over productive assets, and women's views on the acknowledgment of their agricultural labourers.

Study Area

The study was performed in the Ramanagara district of Karnataka, with the inclusion of taluks such as Ramanagara, Channapatna, Kanakapura, and Magadi. Women play a significant role in agriculture, participating in farming, raising livestock, and other related activities, which is the main source of livelihood in the district. However, a lot of their work continues to be undervalued economically and unrecognized socially. Women agricultural labourers were the core of the population, which resided in rural villages of Ramanagara district. A total of 300 women from the agricultural labour force were selected for the study. A multi-stage sampling technique was utilized. In the initial phase, four taluks in the Ramanagara district were used to select villages. Local leaders and self-help groups assisted in identifying households with women agricultural labourers during the second phase. Conclusively, a simple random sampling method was used to select respondents. A cross-tabulation was employed to investigate the connections between socio-economic attributes and the economic marginalization faced by female agricultural labourers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This cross-tabulation table summarizes data from 300 women agricultural labourers in the Ramanagara district of Karnataka. The purpose of the study is to explore how certain socio-economic traits impact the economic marginalization experienced by women agricultural labourers. To reveal relationships and variations among respondent groups, cross-tabulation is a commonly employed descriptive statistical method.

The study examines factors including educational background, property ownership, income disparity, family involvement in financial matters, and the attribution of economic marginalization. These variables were chosen as they reflect crucial aspects of women's socio-economic status and their acknowledgment in agricultural production. Descriptions accompany the tables, interpreting observed patterns and elucidating their sociological importance. The views of the respondents offer extra qualitative information regarding the difficulties encountered by female agricultural labours and their suggestions for enhancing their socio-economic standing.

Table 1: Education and Attitudes towards Economic Exclusion

Educational Status	High Invisibility	Moderate Invisibility	Low Invisibility	Total
Illiterate	60	24	6	90
Primary	50	30	10	90
Secondary	30	32	13	75
PUC and Above	10	20	15	45
Total	150	106	44	300

The table shows that women with lesser educational backgrounds reported greater economic invisibility. Respondents without formal education were more inclined to report that their agricultural activities were undervalued and not formally acknowledged. Those with a secondary education or higher exhibited comparatively lesser perceptions of invisibility, indicating that schooling enhances recognition of labour rights, governmental programmes and avenues for economic engagement.

Table 2: Ownership of Land and Economic Concealment

Land Ownership	High	Moderate	Low	Total
Landless	118	40	22	180
Marginal farmers	24	36	15	75
Small farmers	8	30	7	45
Total	150	106	44	300

The results reveal that landless women faced the most financial invisibility. Relying on casual labour and lacking control over productive assets diminished their negotiating leverage and economic security. Women who had small or minimal land holdings reported being more recognized, as land ownership increased their involvement in agricultural decision-making and their access to institutional assistance.

Table 3: Classification of Agricultural Activities and Wage Equity

Nature of Work	Equal Wages	Unequal Wages	Total
Agricultural Labour	52	128	180
Agriculture and Livestock	30	45	75
Agriculture and Other Rural Activities	18	27	45
Total	100	200	300

The findings show that two-thirds of the participants encountered wage disparity. Many women confirmed they carried out agricultural activities alongside men but were paid less. This ongoing wage gap highlights systemic gender inequalities and contributes to the economic neglect of female agricultural labourers.

Table 4: Involvement in Household Economic Decisions

Decision-Making Status	Respondents	Percentage
Independent	54	18.0
Joint Decision	138	46.0
Male-Dominated Decisions	108	36.0
Total	300	100.0

Nearly half of the participants jointly made household financial decisions, whereas more than a third indicated that male family members dominated these decisions. A constrained ability to make decisions diminishes women's economic autonomy and helps keep them invisible both within the family and the broader rural economic sphere.

Table 5: Responses Regarding the Principal Factors Contributing to Economic Concealment

Major Cause	Respondents	Percentage
Unpaid Family Labour	84	28.0
Wage Discrimination	72	24.0
Lack of Land Ownership	60	20.0
Lack of Official Recognition	48	16.0
Limited Decision-Making Power	36	12.0
Total	300	100.0

The interviewees pinpointed uncounated familial labour as the principal reason behind economic opacity, followed by pay inequity and the absence of property rights. These results indicate that women's contributions to agriculture are underestimated not just in labour markets but also within family and societal contexts. The mix of unequal pay, restricted access to productive resources, and insufficient acknowledgment maintains women's unfavourable socio-economic status.

The respondents unequivocally stated that women are crucial to agricultural labour and rural life, yet they are not sufficiently economically recognized. It is believed that women's agricultural labour is often classified as domestic work rather than formal employment. Even with equivalent endeavours and outcomes, wage gaps persist. A lack of property rights restricts people's ability to secure institutional financing, subsidies, crop insurance, and government assistance programmes. Women demonstrate restricted participation in household financial decisions and local agricultural groups. Increased acknowledgment of women as self-sufficient agricultural labourers, fair pay for equivalent tasks, shared land tenure, better social welfare provisions, and enhanced skill enhancement. The proper execution of government assistance programmes is essential to diminish economic invisibility.

Based on the findings of the study, the following measures are suggested:

1. Ensure that women and men receiving equivalent agricultural work are paid equally through robust labour law enforcement.
2. Support women's ownership of land by promoting co-owned plots and making processes for inheritance and ownership clearer.
3. Acknowledge women as autonomous agricultural labourers in governmental records, agricultural databases, and development initiatives.
4. It is essential to enhance access to institutional credit, crop insurance, pension schemes, and social security programs for female rural workers.
5. Enhance the effectiveness of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and women's producer organizations to amplify income generation and foster greater financial independence.
6. Offer frequent training sessions and agricultural outreach programmes centered on sustainable agricultural practices, entrepreneurial skills, digital proficiency, and enhancing product value.
7. Raise consciousness about governmental support programmes via village-level initiatives and local organisations.

CONCLUSION

The recent descriptive sociological analysis reveals that women agricultural workers in the Ramanagara district contribute notably to agricultural productivity and rural prosperity, yet they continue to be economically underserved. The research indicates that low educational attainment, lack of land ownership, wage inequalities, limited decision-making power, and inadequate institutional assistance are the primary factors responsible for this invisibility.

Furthermore, it was revealed that women with limited education and lacking productive resources exhibit greater socio-economic disadvantages compared to other participants. Wage inequalities along with unpaid household labour continue to erode women's economic independence, despite their substantial involvement in agricultural activities. The participants highlighted the critical need for fair wages, secure land rights, social support, accessible formal loans, and official recognition of women as agricultural workers. Addressing these issues requires joint action by governmental agencies, local groups, civil society organizations, and rural communities.

The study highlights the necessity to reduce the economic secrecy of women agricultural labourers to promote gender equity, enhance rural conditions, and propel sustainable agricultural advancement. Recognizing the role of women in the economy, protecting their labour rights, and enhancing their access to resources will not only benefit women but also contribute positively to the overall development of rural Karnataka.

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