
Feminization of Poverty In India

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Abstract

Poverty is defined as a person's inability to satisfy fundamental human requirements, including food, housing, and clothes. Even though India's poverty rate is decreasing, the number of people living in poverty remains high due to various variables such as population growth, unemployment, a lack of opportunity, and other social problems. Gender bias contributes significantly to the feminization of poverty, which means that women endure a greater rate of poverty due to being women than males. The constitution outlaws discrimination based on sex, yet sex discrimination, among other things, is commonly present and often prevents women from reaching their full potential. The purpose of the paper is to explore the nexus between the phenomenon of feminization of poverty and the social factors affecting it.

The feminization of poverty is rooted not only in gender discrimination but also in a lack of sufficient or higher education as a result of early marriage or in being unable to work owing to safety concerns. All of these issues are interconnected and must be handled more severely. Changes

in current regulations, more social awareness, and improved educational opportunities are all approaches to lessen the feminization of poverty and poverty in general. This paper emphasizes the gender dimension of poverty, which leads to rising female poverty rates in the country. Gender-based challenges and isolation exacerbate Poverty-related vulnerabilities. Analyzing women's demographics, educational, and work situations revealed the combined outcome of gender and poverty.

A woman with a voice is, by definition, a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult. Melinda Gates.

Introduction

Feminization of poverty is a much-debated concept with several meanings and dimensions. "The Feminization of poverty is the term given to the phenomenon in which women experience poverty at far higher rates than men. "The nexus between gender and poverty is a complicated and contentious issue that is now being discussed more than ever before. Poverty among women and girls continues to be a global social justice and health issue that limits women's life potential and freedom. Many women and girls are routinely restricted to a life that strips them of their inherent rights to determine their future and is instead forced into a life of perpetual suffering, violence, social exclusion, and, eventually, impoverishment, due to the presence of mechanisms that disproportionately generate poverty among females. (Melo,2019)

Many women's rights activists have argued that

women have been poorer than males over the last three decades. The concept of "feminization of poverty" is the most prevalent empirical embodiment of this theory. This concept has gained momentum in poverty analysis and poverty alleviation efforts. As a result, targeting women has become one vehicle for gender-sensitive poverty alleviation. Poor women have become the explicit focus of policy making, for example, in microcredit programs and income generation activities. Poor women have been the explicit focus of policymakers in sectors such as microcredit and income production initiatives. However, the "feminization of poverty" general validity is empirically questioned. While the concept of gender variations in poverty experiences isn't going to disappear, a more nuanced and complicated view of poverty and gender inequality is taking shape. As a result, a more gender-aware approach to poverty alleviation measures is emerging. (Chant, 2015)

The Feminization of poverty is linked to widening differences in quality of life between men and women. He also touches on the gap between male and female household roles. (Medeiros & Costa, 2008) "Women are the world's poor," according to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (2000). Women have greater poverty rates than males in practically all nations (Casper et al. 1994); women and children make up the bulk of the 1.5 billion people living on \$1 a day or less (United Nations 2015). After observing how, over time, women and children have grown disproportionately represented within the population of

low-income persons in the United States and across the world, American sociologist Diana Pearce coined the phrase "feminization of poverty." Pearce discovered that in the United States, women made up two-thirds of the impoverished over the age of 16. (Pearce 1978).

Methodology

The author used secondary data to conduct the research. The secondary method, known as desk research, involves using existing data. To increase the effectiveness of research, existing data is analyzed and compiled. Extensive help was drawn from newspapers, research articles, and governmental and non-governmental websites to complete the study.

Historical Background

The term "feminization of poverty" was coined in the 1970s and became popular in the 1990s through various UN documents. After the publication of a study focusing on gender trends in the evolution of poverty rates in the United States, by 1983, about half of all poor people lived in poverty. Thus, the concept dates back to the 1970s. It became prominent. Feminization of poverty is a relative term based on a male-female comparison. For example, the Feminization of poverty occurs when poverty is significantly decreased among males but marginally reduced among women in a country. (Costa, 2008)

According to a UN study from 1992, "the number of rural women living in poverty in developing nations has surged by about 50% in the last 20 years to an incredible 565

million, with 374 million in Asia and 129 million in Sub-Saharan Africa." The term has several connotations, some of which are incompatible with its implicit notion of change. According to UNIFEM, It is "the burden of poverty borne by women, especially in developing countries," attributing the cause to a lack of women's capacity building on a global scale. The United Nations Development Programme describes 'feminization of poverty,' as does much of the research on the issue, as a state where changes in poverty levels are skewed toward women or female-headed families. Put another way; it's the widening gap between female and male poverty or between female-headed and male-headed families. Since Feminization implies change, the Feminization of poverty does not simply mean more poverty among women or female-headed families. In other words, it is the rise of indifference in poverty levels between female and male poverty or between female-headed and male-headed households. To be clear, Feminization is a process, whereas 'greater poverty level' is a condition. Feminization of poverty is a relative notion based on comparing males' and women's poverty levels. The concept of 'Feminization of poverty has been used to depict the distinctions between male and female poverty. This technique tends to overestimate female poverty by assuming that female-headed homes are poorer than other households regardless of definition. However, this does not provide an exact picture because the generalization of such a trend in poverty throughout the globe is predicated on a specific description of the term (Sen. 2008). A single-minded

focus on female-headed families narrows our attention and understanding of what goes on within them.

Nonetheless, the Feminization of poverty is becoming a global problem. According to the UNDP, women account for 70% of the world's poor. "More than one billion people in the world today, the vast majority of whom are women, live in intolerable conditions of poverty, especially in developing countries," according to the Platform for Action agreed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995. (UNDP).

Factors Contributing to Feminization of Poverty

There are a diversity of factors that contribute to women's poverty. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNWOMEN) has highlighted many important factors contributing to women's greater poverty rates. The hardship opening and gender predispositions, and dearth of salary contributor to the Feminization of poverty. (Fernandes, 2019) Therefore, It is critical to examine the social and economic elements that contribute to the Feminization of poverty to understand the problem and gain a thorough understanding of the phenomena. This section goes through all of these variables in-depth and how they affect the Feminization of poverty in India.

1. Women's labor is frequently in the form of family care and home responsibilities, for which they are not paid. Women in developing countries may also be counted on to assist their families' and villages' lives by performing agricultural labor on their land. Due to these obligations,

women have less time to devote to paid employment than men and earn less money, even if they perform more labor. In addition, the nature of the work they conduct in the home also differs.

2. When employment possibilities are few, women may be forced to relocate to different places searching for work. However, if a woman has children, she may be unable to work at a location that is far from her home. As a result, she has fewer possibilities, which leads to less education for her children, a lack of sufficient nutrition and health care, and further diminished opportunities for her children. As a result, a cycle of poverty is frequently perpetuated.
3. Informal work, which occurs in tiny, unregistered businesses and is not protected by government regulation, is more common among women's occupations than men's. Teaching, caring for children, domestic care, and other professions have long been associated with women. These kinds of employment lack stability and security and the opportunity to earn greater wages. They are vulnerable to exploitation, and women keep silent and continue to work in these conditions for fear of losing their jobs, even if they are exploitative and low-paying.
4. In a similar spirit, women's unpaid labor in caring for family members and performing other domestic tasks is seen as significantly less valuable (economically) than jobs that need formal education or training. If women

work outside the house, there is frequently no support from their families.

5. An increased rate of male death following wars and periods of conflict has long been one of the long-term reasons for an increase in the number of single-mother households. Many women in Western nations are single moms who must sustain a home financially, as divorce is prevalent and women choose not to marry.
6. Upward economic mobility through higher-skilled work is almost impossible in a few nations where school is not compulsory, or girls face different education hurdles. Even if women and girls want to develop their abilities or expand their knowledge, most opportunities remain barred.
7. Deep-seated proclivities and intra-family unit inequalities result in lower utilization levels and fewer benefits for women and girls than their male counterparts. This is a common occurrence among those with low economic levels.
8. A significant share of the legal and standard structures do not consider women self-governing natives. They are sometimes referred to as minors or dependents.

Women are also subjected to Inequalities in wages, benefits, property rights, and other areas. Poverty is feminized not just as a result of a lack of cash but also as a result of a lack of opportunity and gender prejudices in both cultures and governments. Poverty has various facets and is studied by disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, history,

demography, and economics. The situation will undoubtedly intensify as the economic disparity between the affluent and the poor expands unless significant progress is achieved in reorganizing the conditions that lead to extreme inequality

Nexus between Poverty and Feminization

In every country, women experience poverty at a greater rate than males. Poverty is a multi-dimensional lack of resources that varies from family to family, although females are the most vulnerable to poverty. When a family's wages are reduced or non-existent, the first thing to be sacrificed is the ladies' needs. Single working family members are the primary reasons for the feminization of poverty. Typically, women are assigned the burden of housework and caregiving, which entails a significant amount of effort for little monetary reward. According to Spicker (1999), poverty is defined as "serious deprivation" where people are considered poor when their "material circumstances are deemed to be morally unacceptable." This definition involves a moral obligation and a value judgment, implying that action must address the issue. While the main aspects of poverty definitions may change, the underlying idea is that this deprivation is harmful to the well-being of people who are subjected to it. The concept "feminization of poverty" necessitates an examination of the meaning of poverty as well as an understanding of how women experience it. Poverty exposes individuals to humiliation, rudeness, and harsh treatment from the public and private service providers. Poverty impacts every element of an individual's life, including family and community. The

inability to engage in community life and the development of basic infrastructure are significant factors in poverty. Poor individuals are more concerned with their assets than with their income. (Veeran,2000)

Poverty is quantified using a variety of indicators. The common practice of prioritizing monetary status as a poverty measure does not provide a complete picture. Because this is a multifaceted problem, it must be measured similarly. Two widely used indicators are the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). Apart from their financial situation, the Gender-related Development Index assesses men and women's living standards, educational attainment, and life expectancy. (Cingano, 2014) The Gender Empowerment Index measures women's earnings and representation in government and managerial roles. Aside from them, there's the Human Development Index, which is regarded as a crucial and fundamental evaluation. Single mother homes are where the head of the household is a woman, and there are no male wage earners. Even families in which the males have moved to other locations in search of work, become ill and are unable to work, or have died, fall into this group. Due to various factors, they are among the most vulnerable to rising poverty. The women in these households are hampered by familial obligations that prohibit them from finding better-paying work outside the home. Single-headed families are becoming more common worldwide, contributing significantly to the Feminization of poverty.

Feminization of poverty in India – Facts and Figures

Poverty is a global societal hindrance; nevertheless, women tend to be the most vulnerable. The impression of the Feminization of poverty is comparing men and women. For example, if poverty is notably reduced among men in a society, and on the other hand, there is slight diminution among women, there would be a feminization of poverty.

We live in a society where poor women face sickening disparities and injustice from the cradle to the grave. Globally too, the statistics on poverty are deadening. Women in India always remain at the receiving end of unequal treatment and suffer from injustice and bigotry. Moreover, Indian women are experiencing abject poverty and several other hardships, i.e., educational deprivation, inadequate food, lack of nutritious diet, sanitation, and poor developmental policies. (Rajagopal, 2003) Though our country's constitution guarantees equal rights, we hardly practice it. The majority of the female population in India is in fraught need of quality education and skill development. They are too subjected to an apparent disadvantage in the labor market, considering horizontal and vertical social mobility. In one of her reports, Annette Dixon argued (World Bank vice president of South Asia) regarding "how India can accelerate its growth through encouraging greater economic participation by women." She was of the view that, No doubt, India has shown a remarkable performance by lifting 133 million people out of poverty between 1994- 2012, which is an inspiring accomplishment in itself; still, this success could have been more satisfactory and

inspirational if the higher number of women could participate in the workforce. Women's unemployment rates are greatest in India, with a 52 percent disparity between male and female employment rates. This is attributable to various factors, including inequality in the availability of opportunities, since some jobs are linked with or explicitly defined for males. Only a few vocations, such as teaching, medicine, beauticians, and designers, are ideal women. Things have changed, and women are now attempting to succeed in various industries.

A recent study by two Harvard students, Rachel Leveson and Layla O' kan, titled "Gender Inclusion in hiring in India." reported that unemployment rates among women in India are double as compared to men, with similar qualifications; the study also revealed that 8.7% of working-age urban educated women in India are without employment. In contrast, only 4% of comparable men find themselves unemployed. (The Economic Times Aug 2019) Some reliable data sources suggested slightly more women than men in the world. About 52% of the world's total population is female. Still, men occupy most of the positions of power and prestige. The Late Kenyan Nobel peace laureate "Wangari Mathare." Put it bluntly when she said: "The higher you go, the fewer women there are." According to UNIFEM (2000), women account for 70% of the world's 1.3 billion poor, a number that is steadily rising. If this problem is not recognized and appropriate efforts are not addressed, all initiatives to empower women would be in vain because the aforementioned issues are ingrained in our system and affect all women, regardless of their social

status. Census data backed by the World Bank tells us that Indian women are leaving the workplaces and are falling off on the employment map. Ironically at the time of sustainable growth, the reports suggested that Indian women are leaving the workplaces at the world's fastest rate. Since 2005 the fraction of working-age Indian women in the labor force has dropped by 10%, the latest drop of any country in the world (ILO Data)

Feminization of Poverty is the culmination of many factors, such as a lack of education or health care for women. Even though access to education is the most important aspect, many parents still believe that it is preferable to invest in a male kid rather than a female child since the latter would eventually leave and join another family. As a result, even if women desire to work, they cannot meet the job's qualifying requirements, and they often wind up with a low-wage position or no employment at all. In many cases, women are advised not to work and take care of the household because their husbands are in good positions and can support them. In such situations, women become entirely reliant on their husband's income for the rest of their lives and have nothing of their own; they lose their self-esteem decision-making power and are sometimes completely controlled by others. They ask permission for anything they want to do, and if permission is granted, they can do everything they want; else, they just have to end their wants and desires. Many recruiters are hesitant to hire women because they believe they would be burdened by family obligations and will not do justice to

their careers. Aside from these issues, uneven pay is a major concern; most women are paid less than men doing the same tasks. Single moms, elderly women, women who have lost their breadwinners and have no alternative source of income, and women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are the ones that suffer the most. (Chaturvedi, 2021)

Apart from the causes for probable Feminization of poverty discussed previously in the article, a few others are unique to Indian society. Due to patriarchal ideologies, women's access to family inheritance and prolific assets is limited or non-existent in India. Furthermore, certain rituals and customs that signify women's subjugation to males are still practiced in India, making gender prejudice against women a societal concern. These behaviors deprive women of knowledge that may help them improve their circumstances. Family support is usually missing when increasing women's status because it would directly contrast patriarchal ideals. As a result of the overt bias against women and deeply established stereotypes, female-headed families in India where women are the key earners are more vulnerable to poverty. As a result, it should not surprise that female-headed families have lower incomes than male-headed households. The low economic conditions of female-headed families in India are exacerbated by a lack of access to family property and assets and inadequate microcredit facilities. Several studies have found that intra-household educational discrimination against girls, which results in females having fewer skills than boys, leads to

fewer economic prospects for women and greater poverty rates among female-headed families. Because of the cultural and societal stigmas associated with single women's marital status, single women's households may be at a higher risk of poverty. A widow or divorcee, for example, is unlikely to attend many social occasions or festivals since her attendance is seen as inauspicious. Furthermore, if an employer is very traditional in their attitudes and beliefs, as is typical in rural India, widows and divorcees may have less economic chances than married women, all other factors being equal. In India, the interaction of such beliefs with socioeconomic systems results in demographic indices for women that are significantly lower than those for men. As per the Census of India of 2001 and 2011, The percentage of females has consistently been less than males in rural and urban areas. This tendency might be caused by a preference for male children, which leads to more female foeticide and infanticide. However, comparing percentages from 2001 to 2011 reveals a movement toward an equal sex ratio, at least in metropolitan regions.

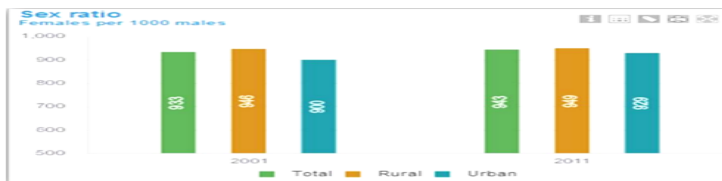


Figure 1: Sex Ratio – 2001 and 2011

Source; http://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/epgpdata/uploads/epgp_content/S000456WS/P001618/M019471/ET/1488175400

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Between 2001 and 2011, the sex ratio generally improved, as shown in the figure above. This improvement can be attributable to a significant increase in the female-to-male ratio in urban settlements from 900 in 2001 to 929 in 2011. The Gender Inequality Index compares men's and women's educational attainment and labor force participation rates. As a result, we analyze female and male literacy rates, salary differentials, and labor-force workforce participation rates in India to explain gender inequities better.

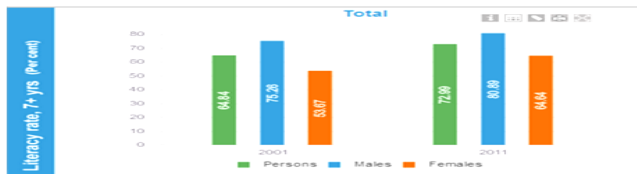


Figure 2: Total Literacy Rate (in %) – segregated into males/females

Source;http://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/epgpdata/uploads/epgp_content/S000456WS/P001618/M019471/ET/1488175400_quad-1feminization_of_poverty

Between 2001 and 2011, the literacy rate generally improved, as seen in Figure 2. Between 2001 and 2011, the total literacy rate increased by eight percentage points, from 65 percent to 73 percent, brought about by an increase in male literacy from 75 percent to 81 percent (6 percentage points) and female literacy from 54 percent to 65 percent (11 percentage points).

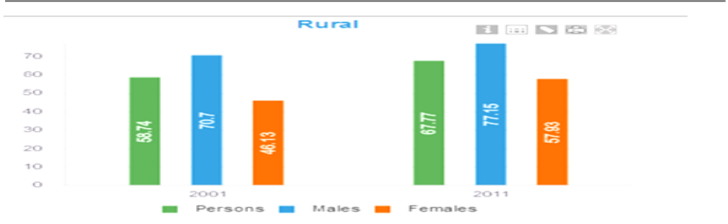


Figure 3: Literacy Rate in Rural areas – Males/Females
 Source; http://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/epgpdata/uploads/epgp_content/S000456WS/P001618/M019471/ET/1488175400QUAD-1 FEMINIZATION_OF_POVERTY

Between 2001 and 2011, the female literacy rate increased by 12 percentage points (46% to 58%). The divergence between male and female literacy rates narrowed as the male literacy rate increased by just 7% points. However, the male literacy rate remains significantly greater than the female literacy rate in absolute terms.

Overall, we can see that women perform poorly compared to men on socioeconomic indicators such as employee engagement and salary levels and demographics such as sex ratio and proportion of the total population. On the other hand, the Feminization of poverty is a long-term tendency in poverty discriminatory against women. Because this is not a transient occurrence, time-series data on poverty levels over a lengthy period will be required to determine whether the Feminization of poverty is genuinely occurring. (Rajaram, 2009) determined that the choice of poverty influences whether female-headed families are poorer than male-headed households following a thorough study of the literature and analysis of data from the

National Family Health Survey of India. Female-headed families are poorer than male-headed households only when poverty is measured using the standard of living index, not otherwise.

The way Forward

Poverty may be abolished by promoting equity, providing resources for women, and promoting gender equality in terms of income, which significantly influence the type of life a woman leads. If this issue is resolved, women will exercise and enjoy their rights, which just a few women currently practice. Ideological improvements that promote equality and chances for women's economic empowerment through macro socio economic development are significant issues that must be addressed. Feminist ideologies have been in practice for a few years now, promoting women's rights and improving the status of women in our society. However, it is still necessary for men to voice their concerns and encourage others to help bring about change, and it is necessary to understand patriarchy from a woman's perspective. Deeply ingrained ideas and beliefs that influence gender roles must be addressed and adjusted as needed. Intervention programs and policies meant for disadvantaged women do not always reach the women who need them; thus, more effective methods should be employed to ensure that these policies and programs are implemented successfully for people's empowerment.

Families must be educated on gender roles, gender norms, and new programs. Even though monetary assistance

is provided to the parents of girl children under various schemes, only 3 out of every four girls complete secondary education; it is believed that, in addition to monetary assistance, it is critical to explain the importance of educating girls to their parents. Young females should have access to education loans. It is necessary to establish skill training facilities that are easily accessible.

Women have access to a medical facility. To improve the living standards and status of women in our society, we must examine the system's underlying problems, as well as patriarchal beliefs instilled in our society, and correct them so that women can exercise their democratic rights and live lives with dignity, rather than being treated as second-class citizens. (Qazi & Isran, 2013)

Conclusion

The Feminization of poverty has long been a global phenomenon linked to three fundamental conceptions. The first is that women are poorer than men; the second is that poverty among women is rising over time. The third is that rising poverty among women is connected to the Feminization of family headship. However, there is no firm evidence of a global feminization of poverty. While it is considerably more frequent to discover more significant poverty levels among women or female-headed families than to find a gender bias in the evolution of poverty through time, it is not a universal phenomenon (Medeiros and Costa 2008). Researchers often calculate per capita estimates by dividing family income or consumption, or the fulfillment of fundamental requirements

by families, by the number of people living in these homes. As a result, the home is the unit of analysis for poverty. Inequalities between men and women, on the other hand, cannot be analyzed using homes solely as the unit of study since this tends to obscure much of the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. The majority of research is based on household income or consumption surveys. They invariably overlook any discrepancies in income distribution within households. Such an implicit assumption of perfect distribution may be contested from a gender viewpoint. There is no underlying principle to presume that the forces that cause gender inequality will not act inside families. Women are sometimes burdened twice as much as males, increasing their vulnerability enormously. Access to open provisioning and fundamental amenities is critical for poverty-stricken women's overall well-being.

The fact that the Feminization of poverty exists suggests that current economic progress is not gender-inclusive. Even though the international market has evolved into a global economy, women have been suffocated in various settings for centuries in developed and developing countries. Empowering women is easier said than done. However, in recent years, significant measures have been taken to improve the status of women across the country. Fundamental rights, essentially replicating libertarian ideas, assert the state's capacity to make verifiable moves in India's favor. Women's vocational training and entrepreneurship are emphasized in government programs established over time.

These plans also provide supplements and subsistence to low-income families, therefore playing an important role in women's empowerment (Hassan & Ahmed, 2014). The current situation necessitates a gender balance and a revision of the country's macro policies. Gender inclusion in the growth process is critical and an effective investment in women's development (health, training, and employment). Otherwise, the existing issues will worsen, and solving the problem of the Feminization of poverty would be a pipe dream for India.

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