

Socio-Economic Profile of Working Women in Ranchi City: A Review of Secondary Evidence

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Abstract: *The participation of women in paid work is a crucial indicator of social progress, economic development, and gender equality. Ranchi, the capital city of Jharkhand, presents a distinctive setting in which a growing service-sector economy coexists with a large informal workforce and a substantial tribal population. This paper reviews and synthesizes secondary evidence to examine the socio-economic profile of working women in Ranchi city. Data have been drawn from the Census of India, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), IWWAGE factsheets, and relevant scholarly studies. The review focuses on demographic characteristics, educational attainment, marital status, caste and tribal affiliation, occupational distribution, income patterns, and working conditions. The findings reveal that women's labour force participation remains significantly lower than men's, while a considerable proportion of employed women are concentrated in informal, low-paid, and insecure occupations such as domestic work, petty trade, and street vending. Scheduled Tribe women exhibit relatively higher participation rates, but their work is often unpaid, subsistence-oriented, or informally organized. The paper concludes that the principal challenge in Ranchi is not merely increasing women's participation in the workforce but also improving the quality, security, and remuneration of the work available to them. The review further identifies a shortage of recent city-specific empirical studies and highlights the need for primary field research on the well-being and employment experiences of working women in Ranchi.*

Keywords: working women, Ranchi, Jharkhand, female labour force participation, informal employment, socio-economic profile, and gender inequality.

1. Introduction

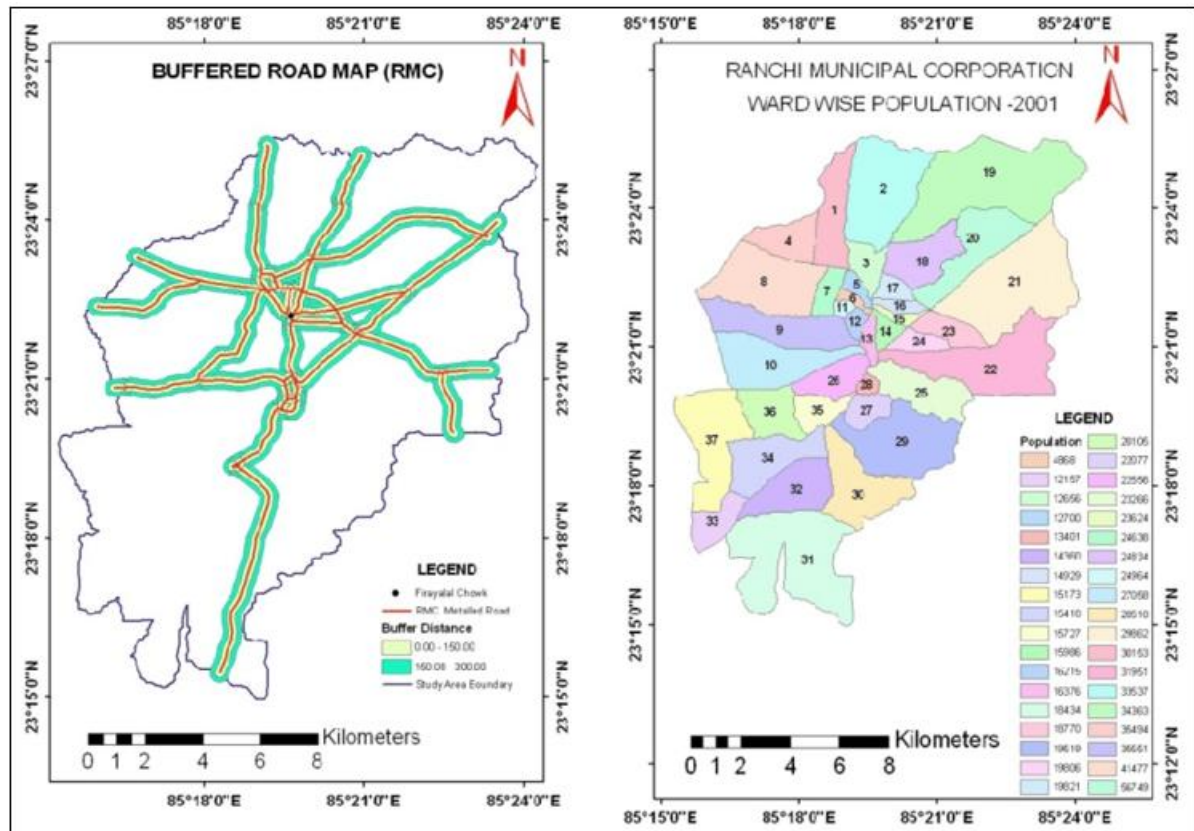
Women's participation in economic activity has long been regarded as a fundamental measure of both development and social transformation. In many developing countries, rising levels of education, urbanization, and economic growth are expected to increase women's engagement in paid employment. India, however, presents a more complex picture. Despite substantial improvements in female literacy and educational attainment over the past two decades, female labour force participation has not increased at the same pace and has, in several periods, shown stagnation or decline. Jharkhand reflects this national paradox in a particularly pronounced manner. Created in 2000, the state is characterized by abundant mineral resources, a large indigenous population, and persistent socio-economic disparities. Ranchi, as the state capital and its principal urban center, combines expanding administrative, educational, healthcare, and commercial activities with a vast informal economy that absorbs a significant share of the workforce. Consequently, the experiences of working women in Ranchi cannot be understood solely through national averages; they are shaped by the interaction of tribal demography, caste relations, educational opportunities, household responsibilities, and the structure of urban employment. Understanding the socio-economic characteristics of working women is essential for designing effective policies related to

employment generation, skill development, social protection, urban infrastructure, and gender welfare. Variables such as age, education, marital status, family structure, caste or tribal background, occupation, income, and workplace conditions influence not only women's access to employment but also the quality and sustainability of their work. This paper therefore seeks to construct a comprehensive profile of working women in Ranchi by systematically reviewing available secondary evidence and situating local patterns within the broader literature on female labour participation in India.

2. Objectives

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- 1) To examine the demographic and social profile of working women in Ranchi city, including age, education, marital status, caste or tribal affiliation, and family structure.
- 2) To analyse the occupational and sectoral distribution of women workers and assess the nature and security of their employment.
- 3) To evaluate income patterns and the economic status of working women.
- 4) To identify the major structural, social, and workplace constraints that shape women's participation in the labour market.



3. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive review-based methodology. It relies exclusively on secondary sources of data and published literature. The principal statistical sources include the District Census Handbook: Ranchi (2011), the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21), Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) estimates reported by government agencies, and the IWWAGE Jharkhand factsheet on women's workforce participation. In addition, relevant academic articles, working papers, and micro-level studies- particularly those examining women street vendors in Ranchi- have been reviewed to supplement the macro-level data. The collected evidence has been synthesized thematically to develop an integrated understanding of the socio-economic position of working women in Ranchi. Since updated census data for city and district-level workforce participation are not yet available, the 2011 Census remains the principal enumerated benchmark. This limitation is acknowledged, and more recent NFHS and PLFS estimates are used to capture subsequent trends wherever possible.

1) Socio-Demographic Context of Ranchi:

According to the 2011 Census, Ranchi district had a population of 2,914,253, comprising 1,494,937 males and 1,419,316 females, yielding a sex ratio of 949 females per 1,000 males. Approximately 43.1 percent of the district population lived in urban areas, indicating that Ranchi is both a major urban center and the hub of a district with substantial rural linkages. One of the most distinctive features of Ranchi is its large Scheduled Tribe (ST) population, which constituted 35.8 percent of the district population in 2011, while Scheduled Castes (SCs) accounted for 5.2 percent. This demographic composition has important implications for labour market participation because tribal communities in

Jharkhand often exhibit different gender norms and economic practices from those observed in many other Indian states. The literacy profile reveals a substantial gender disparity. Overall literacy in the district stood at 76.1 percent, but male literacy was 84.3 percent, compared with 67.4 percent for females. The gap of nearly 17 percentage points indicates that women continue to face disadvantages in acquiring the educational credentials typically required for skilled, formal, and salaried employment. The workforce statistics further highlight the gender imbalance. Of the 1,142,867 workers recorded in Ranchi district in 2011, only 398,900 were women, whereas 743,967 were men. Women therefore represented roughly one-third of the recorded workforce, establishing a clear baseline of gender inequality in labour market participation.

2) Age and Educational Profile:

Research on female labour force participation in India consistently demonstrates a strong life-cycle pattern. Participation tends to rise during the early twenties, decline during the years associated with marriage and childbearing, and increase again for some women during later adulthood. This pattern is particularly relevant for Jharkhand, where the median age at first marriage for women remains relatively low. Early marriage often interrupts education and delays or prevents entry into paid employment. Educational attainment is one of the strongest predictors of women's employment opportunities. Women with secondary and higher education are more likely to obtain salaried or skilled work, while those with limited schooling are disproportionately concentrated in casual labour and informal self-employment. In Ranchi, the sizeable female literacy deficit restricts the pool of women eligible for professional and administrative occupations.

Evidence from micro-level studies of vegetable vendors in

Ranchi supports this conclusion. Female vendors were found to have substantially lower literacy levels than their male counterparts, limiting their access to credit, market information, digital transactions, and higher-value trading opportunities. The interaction of early marriage, educational disadvantage, and limited skill development thus contributes to the persistence of low-quality employment among a large section of working women in the city.

3) Marital Status and Family Structure

Marital status is a critical determinant of women's labour market participation in India. Married women frequently bear the primary responsibility for childcare, cooking, cleaning, and elder care, which reduces the time and flexibility available for paid work. Empirical studies have shown that marriage often has a stronger negative effect on women's employment than the mere presence of children. Family structure also influences employment decisions. In larger joint households, women may receive some support with domestic responsibilities, but traditional gender norms can also restrict their participation in paid work. In contrast, women in nuclear households may experience greater pressure to contribute financially, especially when household income is unstable. NFHS-5 data for Jharkhand indicate that employment among married women aged 15–49 declined between 2015–16 and 2019–21, suggesting that the constraints associated with marriage and domestic responsibilities may have intensified in recent years. For Ranchi, this implies that marital status remains a highly sensitive factor shaping women's ability to enter, remain in, or advance within the work force.

4) Caste, Tribal Affiliation, and Social Background:

The relationship between caste, tribal affiliation, and women's work is complex. Nationally, Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste women tend to exhibit higher labour force participation rates than women from many general-caste groups. This pattern is often linked to greater economic necessity and comparatively less restrictive norms regarding women's mobility and participation in productive activities. In Ranchi, the large tribal population makes this relationship especially significant. Studies of tribal households in the district suggest that women's participation in economic activities is frequently integrated with household survival strategies, including agriculture, forest-produce collection, livestock care, and petty trade. However, higher participation rates do not necessarily imply better employment outcomes. A substantial proportion of ST women are engaged in unpaid family labour, subsistence-oriented activities, or informal work with very low returns. Survey-based studies of women street vendors in Ranchi have shown that many belong to low income tribal households with minimal start-up capital and limited access to institutional credit. Thus, caste and tribal background influence not only whether women work but also the type, security, and remuneration of the work available to them.

5) Occupational and Sectoral Distribution:

The occupational structure of Jharkhand remains heavily influenced by agriculture and allied activities. State-level data indicate that agriculture, forestry, and fishing account for nearly half of total employment, followed by services, construction, and manufacturing. Women are concentrated in

a narrower range of occupations than men. IWWAGE data show that women workers in Jharkhand are distributed across health-related services, trade and retail activities, financial and real-estate services, domestic work, and a large segment of agricultural and self-employed activities. In urban centers such as Ranchi, formal salaried employment opportunities for women remain limited. Even among women classified as regular salaried employees, a significant proportion lack written contracts, social security coverage, or entitlement to paid leave. At the informal end of the labour market, street vending constitutes an important source of livelihood. Surveys conducted in Ranchi's markets and weekly Hat reveal that women often enter vending because of acute household poverty, irregular earnings of male family members, unemployment of spouses, or the diversion of household income toward alcohol consumption. These findings indicate that women's entry into informal self-employment is frequently driven by economic compulsion rather than entrepreneurial choice. Overall, the occupational pattern of working women in Ranchi is characterized by a concentration in low-productivity, low-protection, and low-income activities, with limited pathways for upward mobility into secure formal employment.

6) Income Levels and Economic Status

Reliable city-level income data for women workers are scarce, but available evidence points to substantial gender disparities. A survey of vegetable vendors in Ranchi found that women earned markedly lower average monthly incomes than men engaged in the same occupation. The income gap was attributed to women's smaller working capital, lower bargaining power, reduced mobility, and concentration in lower-value commodities. NFHS-5 data for Jharkhand reveal an additional concern: fewer than one-fifth of working women received direct cash payment for their labour. Many women were compensated through in-kind payments, shared household income, or unpaid family work, limiting their financial autonomy and control over resources.

The survey also showed that 74.4 percent of women aged 15–49 in Jharkhand had not been employed during the year preceding the survey, compared with 21.2 percent of men. This indicates that the majority of women remain outside both formal and informal income-generating activities. Furthermore, female labour force participation tends to decline as household income rises, reflecting the persistence of social norms that associate women's withdrawal from paid work with improved household status. For many poor and tribal women in Ranchi, therefore, labour market participation is primarily a strategy for economic survival rather than a pathway to upward mobility.

7) Working Conditions and Constraints

Working women in Ranchi face multiple, overlapping constraints. Informal workers, particularly street vendors, frequently operate in environments with inadequate sanitation, limited access to drinking water and toilets, exposure to weather extremes, and vulnerability to harassment by authorities or local actors. The absence of secure vending spaces and weak collective organization further increases their insecurity. Women in both formal and informal sectors also experience the well-documented double burden of paid work and unpaid domestic labour. After

completing their working hours, many continue to perform the majority of household and caregiving tasks, resulting in long working days, physical exhaustion, and restricted opportunities for skill development or career advancement. Structural factors reinforce these individual burdens. Lower female literacy and skill levels reduce access to formal employment; inadequate enforcement of labour laws leaves many salaried workers without contracts or social protection; and entrenched social norms concerning marriage, caste, and women's mobility continue to influence employment decisions. Consequently, improving the socio-economic status of working women in Ranchi requires not only expanding employment opportunities but also enhancing the safety, legality, stability, and remuneration of existing work.

4. Conclusion

The review demonstrates that the socio-economic profile of working women in Ranchi is shaped by the combined effects of gender, education, marital status, caste and tribal affiliation, and the predominance of informal employment. Women's labor force participation remains substantially lower than men's, and those who do participate are disproportionately concentrated in low-paid and insecure occupations. The persistent female literacy gap limits access to professional and formal-sector jobs, while marital and household responsibilities continue to constrain - women's employment continuity and career progression. Scheduled Tribe women display comparatively higher participation in economic activities, yet this participation is largely concentrated in unpaid family labour, subsistence production, and informal self-employment rather than secure salaried work. Income disparities, limited access to cash earnings, and inadequate workplace protections further weaken women's economic autonomy. Although these patterns reflect broader trends observed in Jharkhand and India, they are intensified in Ranchi by the city's unique tribal demographic composition, extensive informal markets, and uneven educational opportunities. The review also exposes a significant research gap: recent, comprehensive, city-specific empirical studies on working women in Ranchi are extremely limited. Future research should therefore prioritize primary field investigations into women's employment trajectories, workplace experiences, health and safety conditions, and subjective well-being. Such evidence is essential for developing targeted and effective policies aimed at improving both the quantity and quality of women's employment in Ranchi.

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