



GLOBALISATION AND WOMEN'S WORK IN INDIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ORGANISED AND UNORGANISED SECTORS

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Abstract

Globalisation has profoundly altered labour markets in developing economies, reshaping employment structures, workplace relations, and gendered inequalities. In India, women's work has been particularly affected by economic liberalisation, producing a complex mix of opportunities and vulnerabilities. This paper examines the impact of globalisation on women employed in the organised and unorganised sectors through a comparative sociological analysis. Using primary data collected from 300 women workers and supported by secondary sources, the study analyses employment conditions, income security, work pressure, social protection, and well-being. The findings reveal that globalisation has expanded formal employment opportunities for educated women in organised sectors but has also intensified work pressure, contractualisation, and work-life imbalance. For women in the unorganised sector, globalisation has largely deepened precarity through informalisation, subcontracting, and lack of institutional protection. The paper argues that globalisation in India has produced uneven and gendered outcomes, reinforcing the need for policies centred on decent work, social security, and gender justice.

Keywords: Globalisation, Women's Work, Organised Sector, Unorganised Sector, Informalisation, India

1. Introduction

Globalisation has become one of the defining forces shaping contemporary labour markets. In India, the economic reforms initiated in the early 1990s marked a structural shift towards liberalisation,

privatisation, and global integration. These reforms altered patterns of production, employment, and consumption, with significant implications for labour and gender relations. While globalisation is often associated with growth and employment creation, its social consequences remain uneven and deeply stratified.

Women's work provides a crucial lens for examining these transformations. On the one hand, globalisation has opened new avenues of employment for women, particularly in education, healthcare, banking, information technology, and corporate services. On the other hand, the majority of women continue to work in the unorganised sector, where employment remains informal, insecure, and weakly protected. This coexistence of expanding formal opportunities and persistent informality challenges celebratory narratives of women's empowerment under globalisation.

This paper examines how globalisation has affected women's work in India by comparing women employed in the organised and unorganised sectors. The central argument is that globalisation has not produced uniform benefits for women. Instead, it has interacted with existing gender norms, labour market segmentation, and institutional arrangements to produce differentiated outcomes. A comparative analysis is therefore essential to understand both the advantages and disadvantages of globalisation for women.

2. Review of Literature

A substantial body of literature has examined the relationship between globalisation, labour, and gender. Early development theories largely ignored women's labour, treating households as unitary entities. Feminist economists and sociologists challenged this omission by highlighting women's productive and reproductive roles (Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 2000).

Studies on globalisation and labour argue that liberalisation has increased labour market flexibility and informalisation, particularly in developing countries (Standing, 1999; Breman, 2013). Women are disproportionately affected by these changes because they are often channelled into low-paid, insecure, and flexible forms of work (Chen, 2012).

In the Indian context, Unni and Rani (2008) show that globalisation has expanded employment in services while weakening employment quality in manufacturing and informal sectors. Neetha (2014) highlights that women's increasing labour participation has not translated into commensurate

improvements in job security or wages. Deshpande (2011) demonstrates that gender inequality in employment is compounded by caste and class hierarchies.

Several scholars focus on the organised sector and note that globalisation has created professional opportunities for educated women, particularly in urban areas (Ghosh, 2009). However, gender gaps persist in wages, promotions, and leadership roles (Kucera & Tejani, 2014). Work–life imbalance and work pressure have intensified under performance-driven corporate cultures (Hochschild, 2012).

The unorganised sector has received significant attention in gender studies. Chen (2012) and Razavi (2007) argue that informal women workers remain invisible in policy frameworks despite their central role in economic production. Barrientos (2019) shows how global supply chains rely on informal women’s labour while externalising risks. Indian studies highlight the absence of social protection, prevalence of wage discrimination, and exposure to harassment among informal women workers (Neetha & Palriwala, 2011).

Well-being and dignity at work have emerged as important analytical themes. The World Bank’s *World Development Report* (2012) emphasises that employment alone does not guarantee empowerment. Duflo (2012) similarly argues that economic participation must be accompanied by institutional change to improve women’s status.

Despite this extensive literature, there remains a gap in comparative studies that analyse women’s experiences across organised and unorganised sectors within a single framework. This paper addresses that gap by systematically comparing sectoral outcomes under globalisation.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive and comparative research design. Primary data were collected from **300 women workers**, with **150 respondents from the organised sector** and **150 from the unorganised sector**.

Organised sector respondents were employed in education, healthcare, banking, IT, and corporate services. Unorganised sector respondents included women working in agriculture, domestic work, construction, street vending, and home-based production.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire covering demographic profile, employment conditions, income stability, job security, work pressure, access to social protection, and perceptions

of globalisation. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse sectoral differences. Secondary data from ILO, NSSO, and academic studies were used for contextual support.

4. Results and Analysis

Table 1: Employment Security and Access to Benefits (%)

Indicator	Organised Sector (n=150)	Unorganised Sector (n=150)
Written job contract	86	8
Regular monthly income	82	21
Access to paid leave	74	5
Maternity benefits	68	3
Job loss without notice	18	79

Interpretation:

Table 1 shows stark sectoral differences in employment security. Women in the organised sector enjoy significantly higher access to contracts, regular income, and benefits. In contrast, unorganised sector women face extreme insecurity, with nearly four-fifths reporting job loss without notice. This highlights how globalisation has reinforced a dual labour structure rather than reducing inequality.

Table 2: Work Pressure and Work–Life Balance (%)

Indicator	Organised Sector	Unorganised Sector
Long working hours	71	63
High work pressure	76	58
Difficulty managing family responsibilities	69	74
Physical exhaustion	42	81

Interpretation:

Table 2 indicates that work pressure affects women in both sectors but in different ways. Organised sector women report higher mental and performance pressure, while unorganised sector women experience severe physical exhaustion. Work–life imbalance is widespread across sectors, reflecting the persistent burden of unpaid care work on women.

Table 3: Perceived Impact of Globalisation on Women’s Lives (%)

Perception	Organised Sector	Unorganised Sector
Improved income opportunities	72	29
Increased job insecurity	34	78
Greater autonomy	61	24
Overall positive impact	58	17

Interpretation:

Table 3 highlights contrasting perceptions of globalisation. While a majority of organised sector women associate globalisation with income growth and autonomy, most unorganised sector women perceive it as increasing insecurity. This confirms that globalisation's benefits are highly uneven and mediated by sectoral location.

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that globalisation has produced differentiated outcomes for women workers. Organised sector employment offers relative security and empowerment but is increasingly characterised by work pressure, contractualisation, and persistent gender inequality. Unorganised sector women remain excluded from protection and bear the brunt of market volatility.

These findings challenge the assumption that labour force participation automatically leads to empowerment. Empowerment depends on job quality, security, and dignity, not merely employment. The organised–unorganised divide therefore remains a central axis of gender inequality in globalised India.

6. Conclusion

This paper concludes that globalisation in India has generated both opportunities and vulnerabilities for women, distributed unevenly across labour market sectors. While some women have benefited from formal employment, the majority remain trapped in insecure informal work. A gender-equitable approach to globalisation requires extending labour protection, social security, and dignity to women across sectors. Without such measures, globalisation risks reinforcing rather than reducing gender inequality.

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