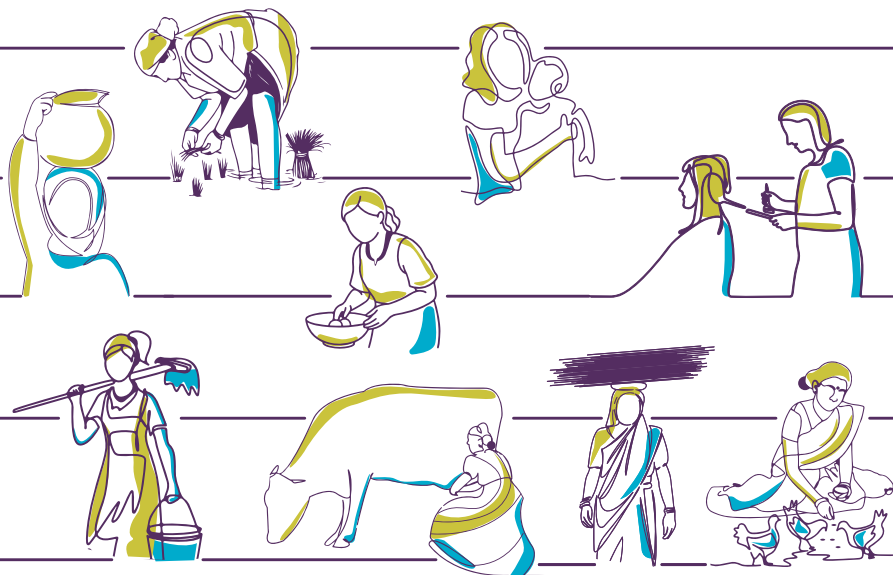


CAPTURING WOMEN'S WORK TO MEASURE BETTER



Background

Women's work is inherently more diverse and complex due to the significant component of unpaid work they perform. Conventional labour force surveys tend to rely on tools that do not sufficiently emphasise questions capable of uncovering the types of work women engage in. This leads to gaps in understanding the time spent and the magnitude of their contributions. As a result, such surveys often overlook or bypass the complexities associated with women's work, potentially undercounting it and contributing to the non-recognition of women as 'workers'.

Rationale of the Study

Women's labour—spanning paid, unpaid, and care work—is often misclassified or excluded due to survey design issues, rendering their economic contributions invisible in policy frameworks. This study addresses the systematic discrepancies in capturing women's work in conventional labour force surveys, which arise from methodological limitations such as narrow employment definitions, reliance on single-question assessments, and biases in proxy reporting.



Study Objectives

- Enhance data collection on women's work through innovative survey techniques and sampling frames.
- Develop a framework for conducting women's work surveys that can be aligned with the national labour force surveys.
- Identify and highlight the extent of respondent bias in underestimating women's contributions to the unpaid care economy.

Methodology

- The study employed an innovative survey framework across Karnataka and Jharkhand, covering 4,000 women and 800 men through a multi-stage stratified random sampling approach. The sampling design ensured proportional representation across rural and urban populations, as well as key age cohorts (18–24, 25–34, and 35–60). To assess perception biases in proxy reporting, men were surveyed in every fifth household. By aligning the sampling strategy with electoral rolls, the study enhanced representativeness while maintaining consistency with national survey frameworks.
- To more comprehensively capture women's work, the study adopted an expanded definition of measuring employment. Data were collected on up to five subsidiary activities undertaken over the past 365 days. The survey also included detailed probing into women's willingness to engage in paid work, alongside a parallel male survey designed to measure biases in proxy reporting.

Key Findings

- Results demonstrate that survey adjustments significantly improved the capture of women's workforce participation compared to traditional surveys.
- The time-use analysis revealed nuanced patterns in work distribution, while the parallel male survey identified a systemic underestimation of women's economic roles by 22-35 per cent in proxy responses. Men also tend to overestimate women's time use in socialisation and leisure. However, they were less likely to underestimate women's time spent on care work if they engaged in domestic duties themselves.
- Eight per cent and 14 per cent of 'not-working' women reported seeking work in Jharkhand and Karnataka, respectively. Among the 'not-working' women who were not seeking work, over 50 per cent of women in Jharkhand reported willingness to work. The proportion was slightly lower in Karnataka, attributable to the higher share of women already in the workforce.
- Women engaged in regular or casual work as their principal employment, were more likely to engage in subsidiary activities as compared to self-employed women.
- Women's subsidiary engagement was higher in Karnataka than in Jharkhand, and higher among rural women compared to urban women. These subsidiary activities consisted mainly of self-employment and casual work.

- In both states, women who identified as 'not working', reported spending from a few minutes to almost an hour daily on paid economic activities, particularly in remunerative work such as livestock management.
- Across both states, women spent the largest portion of their time on unpaid domestic services. Married women were observed to spend more time on care and domestic work.
- Returns to labour market skills were higher in Karnataka compared to Jharkhand—vocational training emerged as an enabler of Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP) in Karnataka.
- Domestic chores and child-care responsibilities remained major constraints for women's job search, their workforce participation and willingness to work.

The study's findings show that the survey innovations were effective in capturing a larger proportion of women in employment than conventional labour force surveys. They also provided valuable insights into women's time-use patterns and highlighted the significant impact of perception bias in proxy reporting.

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