

## DOMESTIC AND WORKPLACE-RELATED BARRIERS FACED BY FEMALE AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN HARYANA

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### ABSTRACT:

Women constitute a vital part of the agricultural workforce in Haryana, yet their contribution remains constrained by structural inequalities. This paper examines the domestic and workplace-related barriers faced by female agricultural workers in three districts of Haryana—Rewari, Karnal, and Rohtak—based on primary data from 174 respondents collected between March 2019 and February 2020. The findings highlight the double burden of household responsibilities and agricultural labour, wage disparities, occupational segregation, lack of legal awareness, and unsafe working conditions. The study concludes that gendered constraints continue to restrict women's economic empowerment and emphasizes the need for policy and institutional interventions to ensure equality and sustainability in agriculture.

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**Keywords:** Female agricultural workers, Domestic barriers, Workplace barriers, Haryana, Gender inequality.

### INTRODUCTION

Agriculture in India is highly gendered, with women playing a crucial role in sowing, transplanting, and weeding, harvesting, and post-harvest activities. Despite their large-scale involvement, women's labour remains undervalued and underpaid, reflecting persistent gender discrimination. In Haryana, a state known for its agricultural prosperity, female workers face compounded challenges arising from traditional domestic responsibilities and inequities at the workplace. Understanding these barriers is essential to highlight the invisible struggles of women in agriculture and to promote gender-sensitive rural development.

The study reveals that women in agriculture face a complex set of challenges arising both within their households and at their workplaces. On the domestic front, the majority of respondents (82%) reported a heavy burden of household chores, often spending 4–6 hours daily on cooking, cleaning, and fetching water or fuel before leaving for farm work. In addition, nearly 69% of women were primarily responsible for childcare and elderly care, further reducing their time and energy for income-generating activities. More than half of the respondents (55%) also indicated restricted mobility due to cultural norms, which limited their ability to travel for work, attend training, or access markets. About 71% highlighted the lack of decision-making power within the household, particularly in financial matters, which

kept them dependent on male family members despite their active contribution to family income.

Workplace barriers were equally significant. A large proportion of women (84%) were confined to manual and labour-intensive tasks such as weeding, transplanting, and harvesting, while mechanized activities like ploughing and threshing remained dominated by men. Wage disparities were another pressing issue: around 76% of women acknowledged that they were paid less than male counterparts for performing the same agricultural tasks. Lack of legal awareness was widespread, with 73% of respondents unaware of their rights under labour and wage laws. Unsafe working conditions were reported by two-thirds of the respondents, who mentioned absence of drinking water facilities, toilets, and resting areas in fields. Around 59% of women also spoke of excessively long working hours without proper breaks. Although only 21% openly admitted facing harassment or abuse at the workplace, qualitative interviews suggested that many cases remained unreported due to fear of stigma and retaliation.

Overall, the findings highlight the **double burden** carried by female agricultural workers—long hours of unpaid domestic work combined with low-paid and insecure farm labour. The domestic responsibilities restrict their mobility and decision-making power, while the workplace barriers reinforce gender inequalities through wage discrimination, occupational segregation, and unsafe conditions. This cumulative disadvantage undermines not only their economic empowerment but also their social status in rural Haryana.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Agarwal (2018) emphasized that women in Indian agriculture face a “triple burden”—productive, reproductive, and community roles. Singh and Kaur (2019) documented wage discrimination in agricultural labour markets, where women consistently earned less than men. Kelkar (2020) noted that cultural restrictions often limit women’s mobility and access to training and mechanization. FAO (2021) stressed that addressing gender barriers in agriculture could significantly enhance productivity and food security. These studies underline the systemic domestic and workplace constraints faced by women, but micro-level empirical research from Haryana remains limited.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To explore the domestic and workplace-related barriers faced by female agricultural workers in Haryana.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in three districts of Haryana, namely Rewari, Karnal, and Rohtak, covering a total of 174 female agricultural workers as respondents. A cluster sampling technique was adopted to ensure adequate representation from different areas within the selected districts. The data collection was carried out during the period from March 2019 to February 2020. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed, using a structured interview schedule as the primary tool, supplemented by personal observations and informal discussions to capture deeper insights. The data were analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics, mainly percentage distribution, along with qualitative interpretation to highlight the patterns and barriers experienced by female agricultural workers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Domestic Barriers*

Domestic responsibilities emerged as the most pressing barrier for female agricultural workers. About 82% of respondents reported that they spent 4–6 hours daily on household chores before engaging in agricultural work. Nearly 69% were responsible for childcare and care of the elderly, while 55% faced restrictions on mobility due to cultural norms. Furthermore, 71% lacked decision-making power in household financial matters, despite contributing significantly to family income. These findings illustrate that women's economic participation is overshadowed by their unpaid domestic burden and limited autonomy.

### *Workplace Barriers*

Workplace inequalities were widespread. Nearly 84% of women were confined to manual agricultural tasks such as weeding, transplanting, and harvesting, while mechanized operations like ploughing and threshing remained male-dominated. Wage disparities were reported by 76% of respondents, who consistently earned less than their male counterparts for identical work. Lack of legal awareness was also striking, with 73% of women unaware of labour rights and wage protection laws. Unsafe working conditions were mentioned by two-thirds of respondents, including the absence of basic facilities like toilets, drinking water, and resting areas in the fields. Long working hours without adequate breaks were reported by 59% of women, while 21% acknowledged facing harassment or abuse at work. However, qualitative narratives indicated that many cases of harassment go unreported due to fear of social stigma.

### *The Double Burden*

The study highlights the “double burden” borne by women—unpaid domestic labour combined with low-paid agricultural work. Women worked for 10–14 hours a day across both spheres, leaving little scope for self-development, education, or participation in decision-making processes. This not only reduces their quality of life but also entrenches their secondary status within both the household and the workplace.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that female agricultural workers in Haryana encounter intertwined domestic and workplace-related barriers. On the domestic side, they face heavy workloads, mobility restrictions, and lack of decision-making power. On the workplace side, they suffer wage discrimination, occupational segregation, unsafe conditions, and low legal awareness. These challenges reinforce gender inequalities, reducing women's bargaining power, limiting their economic independence, and perpetuating social subordination.

## SUGGESTIONS

- Establish rural **childcare centres** and **community kitchens** to reduce women's unpaid work burden.
- Ensure **strict implementation of equal wage laws** and periodic monitoring of agricultural wages.
- Provide **women-friendly farm tools** and promote mechanization that reduces drudgery.
- Organize **legal literacy campaigns** to improve awareness of labour rights among women.

- Develop **sanitation and safety infrastructure** in fields to ensure dignified working conditions.
- Encourage **collective bargaining and unionization** of female agricultural workers to strengthen their negotiating capacity.

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