

## **A Comparative Study of In-Work Poverty for Women Participating in the Agriculture Workforce**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

In-work poverty is a significant issue in many of the world's economies, leading to a complex web of barriers and inequalities. The issue of in-work poverty, which affects women employed in agriculture, is a complicated and pressing one that transcends national borders. A multimodal strategy is needed to address in-work poverty among women in the agriculture workforce. The strategy should encompass wage gap-bridging regulation, land rights, resource access, and changes to cultural norms that limit women's economic engagement. This study provides a comprehensive comparative analysis to investigate the prevalence, causes, and consequences of in-work poverty among women working in the agriculture industry. This research paper compares the monthly expenditure on necessities to find out the condition of women who are poor while working.

Key-words: In-work poverty, expenditure, comparative, working women, agriculture

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The idea that having a job lowers one's risk of falling into poverty has been widely held since the inception of the Beveridgian paradigm (1). But, this idea underwent numerous revisions as time went on. Prioritizing "work first" in employment initiatives has been around for a while, the idea behind these tactics is that working reduces poverty (2-4). However, the idea that "the majority of the poor do not work" was not commonly accepted until the early 1990s (5). In-work poverty has emerged as a new social phenomenon brought about by the changing times and economy. A rising body of empirical research indicates that there is a class of people who are employed but are having difficulty making ends meet; these individuals are known as the "working poor".

The ILO emphasises that deficiencies in decent work have increased in light of the fragile state of the world economy. Lack of standard employment is the prime cause of in-work poverty. Standard employment is historically founded in a Fordist employment system where steady full-time male breadwinner positions supplied adequate income to maintain a family (Bosch, 2006). From the perspective of in-work poverty, part-time and temporary jobs are especially intriguing because they are typified by an incomplete attachment to the labour market (Crettaz, 2013). One manifestation of this is the rise in working poverty, particularly in low-income nations (ILO 2023). The issues of social inclusion

through employment are being caused by changes in labour markets worldwide. The growth of low-quality, unsecured, and unprotected employment is changing the nature of labour inequality. The percentage of the employed population that lives in poverty while having a job is known as the working poverty rate. It suggests that these individuals' employment-related earnings are insufficient to keep them and their families out of poverty and to provide appropriate living circumstances. It is undeniable that low wages are a major contributor to in-work poverty, even though the majority of research on the topic is careful to point out that not all low-paid workers are impoverished. Most impoverished workers will also be low-paid, even though many low-paid workers are not. This then, needs to be the first step in any governmental response to poverty among the working class. Our comprehension of the reasons behind poverty among those, who are employed, ought to begin with this as well.

India's expanding economy has resulted in employment and growth, but one factor that is frequently disregarded is the uneven distribution of national income, which gives rise to a host of issues including poverty among the working class. As per the 2022 World Inequality Report, the bottom 50% of Indian households possesses a mere 6% of the nation's total wealth. In the meantime, 65% and 33% of the nation's wealth are owned by the top 10% and 1% respectively (Mehta, 2023). Employment has long been a top priority in India, but in-work poverty is rarely discussed and researched. One of the fundamental problems with the Indian economy is that the minimum wage for 2019 is still in effect across the nation.

## **II. STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The goal of the current study, "Comparative Study of In-Work Poverty for Women Participating in the Agriculture Workforce" is to examine and assess the relationship between the two factors In-work poverty and women's workforce participation. When people or households are employed but yet live in poverty as a result of poor pay, uncertain jobs, unfavorable working conditions, and restricted access to social safety nets, it is referred to as the "in-work poverty problem." Employers, legislators, and society at large must all pay attention to this complicated and multi-dimensional subject. An overview of the issue of poverty among those who are employed is provided below

**Low Salaries and Income Inequality:-** A large number of workers, particularly in industries like retail, services, and agriculture earn salaries that are insufficient to cover essential expenses like housing, food, healthcare, and education. Because a sizeable section of the workforce gets disproportionately low pay when compared to the cost of living, income inequality exacerbates this issue.

**Informal and Precarious Employment:-** A significant portion of the labour force is employed in informal or precarious employment, which is typified by a lack of job security, little to no benefits, and restricted

access to social protection programmes like health insurance, pension plans, and unemployment benefits. This makes workers susceptible to changes in income and economic shocks.

**Lack of Social Protection:-** When social protection programmes such as unemployment benefits, sickness benefits, maternity/paternity leave, and disability support are inadequate or non-existent, it can exacerbate the financial risks and insecurity faced by workers and their families.

**Gender Disparities:-** Because of things like gender pay discrepancies, restricted access to formal employment options, and household caregiving responsibilities, women are disproportionately affected by in-work poverty. These differences impede women's economic empowerment and help to feminise poverty.

**Effect on Well-Being and Health:-** Poverty among those who work can harm one's physical and emotional well-being because it might be difficult for them to pay for housing, wholesome food, and medical treatment. This may result in a decrease in the general well-being of employees and their families as well as an increase in stress and chronic illnesses.

**Intersecting Factors:-** Age, disability, ethnicity and immigration status are a few more intersecting factors that might worsen in-work poverty in addition to poor pay and unstable employment. Marginalised populations are more likely to experience financial difficulties and additional obstacles to finding good jobs.

**Poverty Cycle:-** Children raised in low-income households may have less educational options, less access to healthcare, and a higher chance of taking up low-paying employment themselves, in-work poverty can start an intergenerational cycle of poverty.

### **III. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW:**

In-work poverty has always been perceived as primarily an Anglo-American Issue. International organisations like the International Labour Organisation emphasise the importance of resolving circumstances of in-work poverty in European countries (ILO, 2019). However, currently, the issue is not exclusive to European Nations. World Economic Forum, 2020 research states that 76% of Indian workers are in precarious positions (TOI, 2023). In Europe, hardly much research has been done on in-work poverty, work satisfaction, and working circumstances have received increased attention in studies on the well-being of the working population (Paoli and Merllie 2001).

Two unique but closely connected empirical definitions of the working poor can be found in the literature (AndreB and Lohmann, 2008; Maitrenet. Al., 2012; Pena-casas and Latta, 2004). In the first definition, which focuses on the person dimension, the working poor are defined as low-paid employees, or those whose income falls below a certain threshold of the national median. Despite research showing a weaker-than-expected association between low wages and in-work poverty, this definition suggests that income

production is the primary mechanism behind in-work poverty (AndreB and Lohmann, 2008; Lesson and Hallerod, 2011). Household characteristics are the subject of the second definition of in-work poverty. People residing in families with a total income of less than a certain level of the national median are considered working poor (Ponthieux, 2010). The household definition, suggests the linkages between labour market institutions and welfare generosity to the prevalence of in-work poverty. These results hold for all comparative studies (Brady, et al., 2010; Crettaz and Bonoli, 2011). The empirical results demonstrate that nations with relatively high levels of income inequality also tend to have greater rates of low-wage employment and in-work poverty. This is in line with other country research (Blau and Kahn, 1996; Keese et al., 1998; Lucifora, 1998). Trade-offs between labour market flexibility and financial security are frequently blamed for long-lasting experiences of in-work poverty (Fraser, et. al., 2011).

We can discuss the gender paradox due to the shift in gender distribution among poverty-stricken working individuals. Since all members of the households share the same disposable income the household is the unit of analysis and the individual is the income unit. This is predicated on the assumption which has been contested that all household incomes are distributed equally among all members, providing an equivalent quality of well-being for all (Boschini & Gunnars-son, 2018; Lundberg & Pollak, 2008; Ponthieux, 2013). This assumption (equal sharing) will result in a gender paradox. Despite being disproportionately overrepresented in less desirable jobs and at the bottom of the income distribution, women do not face higher risks of living in poverty when they are employed (Ponthieux, 2018; p.70). However, this is not the case with Indian women working in agriculture. No significant research on in-work poverty has been observed in India.

#### **IV. RESEARCH GAP:**

Though past studies have shed light on in-work poverty and its effects on the economy, there are still several gaps and limitations that call for more research. Various gaps in the research on in-work poverty require attention.

**Data Availability:-** the absence of thorough and current data on poverty among those who work is a major gap. Accurately assessing the current situation is difficult because many studies have been done in the past relying on small or out-of-date datasets.

**Regional Variations:-** there are notable regional differences in in-work poverty as a result of India's enormous geographic and socioeconomic variety. These subtleties are frequently missed in research leading to generalised conclusions that could not fairly represent particular areas or populations.

**Dynamics of the Informal Sector:** A significant section of India's labour force is engaged in the informal sector, characterised by lower salaries and restricted access to employee social security benefits. More targeted research is needed to comprehend this industry's dynamics of in-work poverty.

Gender Dimensions:- because of various socioeconomic variables and cultural norms, men and women are affected by in-work poverty differently. However, studies frequently ignore the difficulties faced by female workers and gender-specific experiences of poverty at work, particularly when it comes to paying gaps and access to decent jobs.

Impact of Policy Interventions:- Although India has put in place many laws and initiatives to lower poverty and enhance working conditions, it is important to evaluate how well these interventions specifically target poverty among employed people. Research should assess how legislation about the minimum wage, social security programmes, and skill development programmes affects the number of people living in poverty when employed.

## V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES:

These research topics are useful for initiating empirical studies and analysing the effects of in-work poverty on women who are engaged in the agriculture workforce and women who are not at all engaged in any workforce. The primary research questions of the study are as follows:

- a. What is the current level of in-work poverty in the world, and how has it evolved?
- b. Whether or not in-work poverty affects women working in rural India's agriculture industry?

The following are the research's main objectives:

- a. To examine the current status and trends of in-work poverty in the world.
- b. To assess the impact of in-work poverty among rural Indian women.

## VI. METHODOLOGY:

This research investigation is using both primary and secondary data. Secondary data from the World Bank and ILO is used to answer the first research question. In contrast, primary data were gathered from the participant using appropriately designed questionnaires in order to address the second research question. The researcher specifically chose rural women working in the agriculture industry to evaluate the effects of in-work poverty. The Karbi-Anglong district was chosen (the only district of Assam where the number of women farmers rose by 1.17 percent between 2001 and 2011) as the research region because the majority of the working women there are involved in agriculture. A total of 380 households were selected as samples by using the following sample selection formula.

$$\text{Necessary Sample Size} = (Z\text{-Score})^2 \times SD (1-SD) \div (\text{margin of error})^2$$

The impact of poverty on women employed in agriculture is being monitored through the application of the standard of living method. Deprivation is an illustration of the standard of living method – impoverished individuals are unable to meet their fundamental requirements and obtain necessities

(Atkinson, 1998a; 24-25). Should poverty equate to social exclusion, it ought to be evident in the manner in which the impoverished live (Ringgen, 1988; 361). Low income is a criterion that deprivation measures use to capture low consumption of goods and services. This means that people who have low standards of consumption for non-poverty-related reasons will not be included in the poverty category, nor will people who have low incomes but do not experience deprivation be included.

Analysing the mean and variability difference of monthly spending on food, clothes, shelter, and others requirements for women engaged in the agriculture sector and women not employed in any workforce, assists in estimating the impact of in-work poverty. Independent samples t-test is used to compare means of two mutually exclusive groups of people and large sample sizes are preferred (Christopher, A.).

$$\text{The test statistics} - t = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{S.E.(\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2)}$$

With Null-hypothesis,  $H_0: \mu_0 = \mu_1$  and the Alternative-Hypothesis,  $H_1: \mu_0 \neq \mu_1$ ; with  $n_1 + n_2 - 2$  degrees of freedom. SPSS software is used to analyse the data. The hypothesis of the study is mentioned below.

Hypothesis: The monthly mean expenditure of women working in the agriculture workforce is less than the women not engaged in any workforce.

## **VII. STATUS AND TRENDS OF IN-WORK POVERTY:**

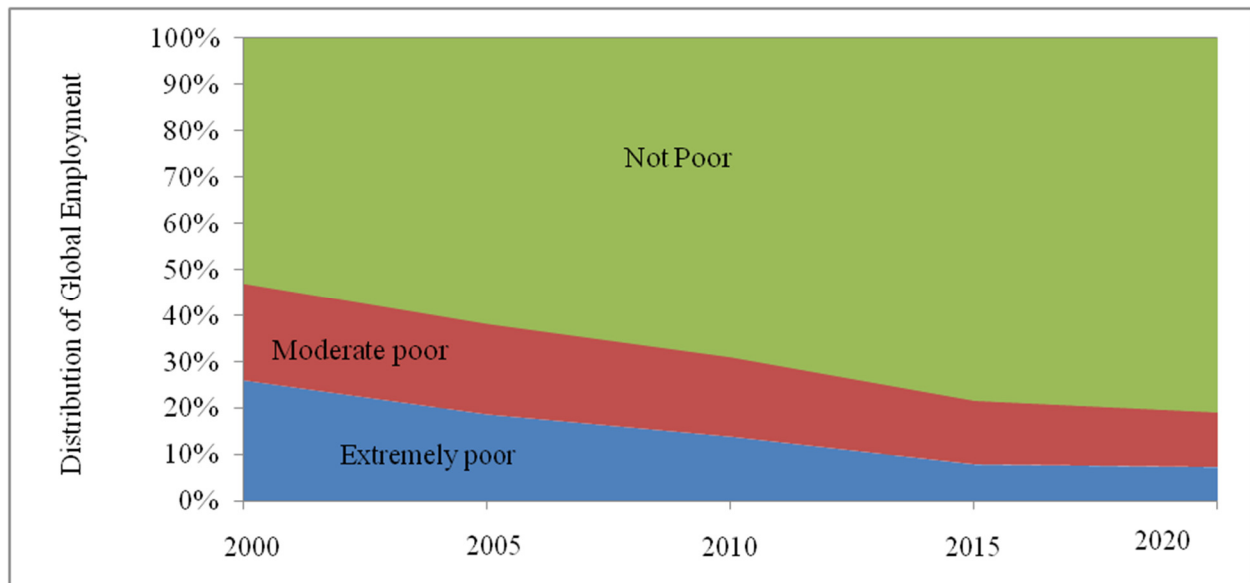
Work and poverty ought to be negatively correlated, according to common sense. In actuality, working is the best way to ensure one's welfare. People's earnings from paid job sustain their economic well-being. However, the rise in in-work poverty has come to the attention of policymakers, academics, and statisticians more and more. Low-paid employment, household income, problems with labour market organizations, and dual earner support programmes has all been linked to in-work poverty. People who work for little pay, yet are having financial difficulties are typically seen as 'unequivocally deserving' (Toynbee, 2003:234). The Global Financial Crisis that occurred between 2007 and 2008 has had a profound and enduring impact on employment and work.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) released the Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017 report, which states that 39% of young workers in emerging and developing nations experienced moderate to extreme poverty in 2018 (Mahapatra, 2017). The poverty line refers to the absolute international poverty line of US \$1.90 per capita at purchasing power parity, used for the measurement of this index, for purposes of international comparability. While the percentage of impoverished workers worldwide remains concerning, it is heartening that this percentage has been steadily falling since 2000, when it was 26%. Additionally, throughout the same period, the percentage of moderately poor workers has consistently declined. However, even as the overall decline in working poverty is encouraging, it's crucial to recognise that recent years have seen a slowdown in progress, which serves as a reminder of the

need to redouble efforts in this area. The following graph illustrates the world's progress in the slowdown of working poverty.

From a regional to a considerably more global level, in-work poverty research has changed. In Asian economies, such poverty challenges were acknowledge in 2010. Fields (2012) conducted study in 14 countries, including China, Vietnam, India, Brazil, the US, and Mexico on the issue of global poverty as it relates to the quality of employment. Approximately 534 million people or 25 percent of the employed labour force might be categorized as working poor in 1997, according to Majid's (2001) estimate of the working poor in developing countries. Since the 1980's, studies have examined the connection between working poverty and the informal sector, focusing on women. Owing to economic, demographic, and cultural considerations, the number of working-poor women increased rapidly. Among working-class families, single female heads with children had the highest rates of poverty (Klein and Roness, 1989).

### Assessment of the Worldwide Employment Distribution by Economic Class and the Working Poverty Rate (2000-2022)

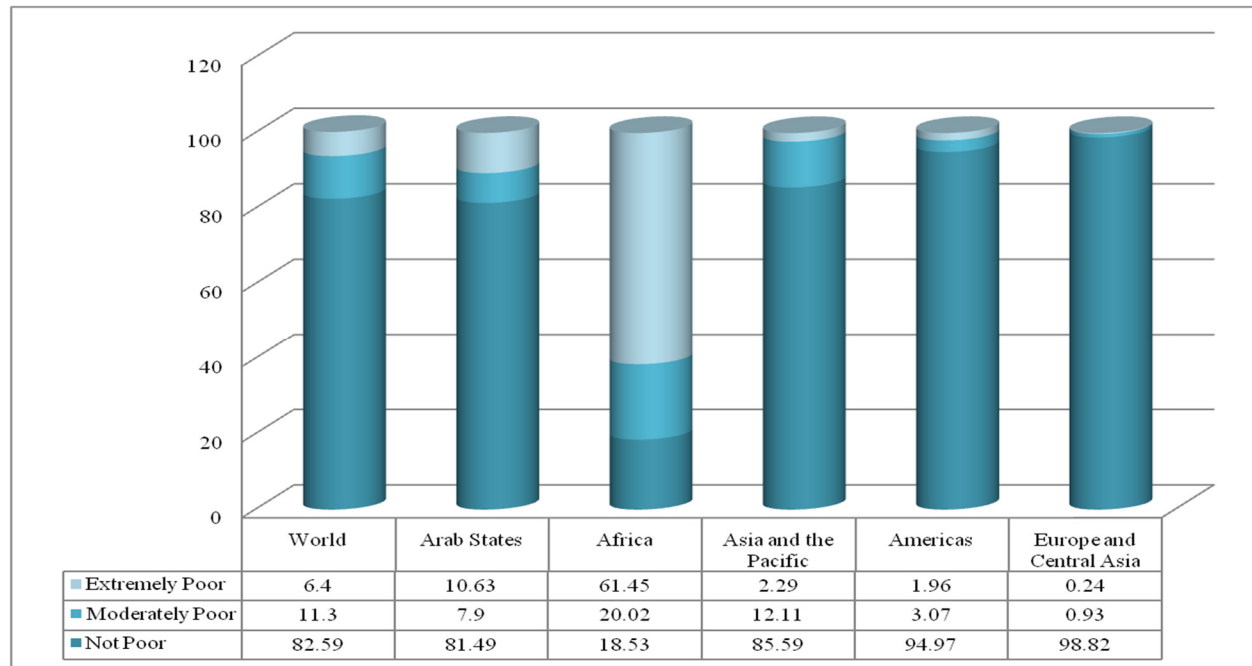


Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2022

In the figure in this brief, individuals are classified as extremely poor if they reside in households with daily per capita incomes of less than US \$ 1.90 purchasing power parity, moderately poor if such incomes are US \$ 1.90 purchasing power parity or high but under US \$ 3.10 ppp, and not poor if daily per capita incomes exceed US \$ 3.10 ppp. Almost 25 percent employed labours are living in extreme poverty.

Depending on the region, a distinct image was seen. There are significant regional differences in the proportions of workers living in extreme poverty and those who are moderately poor, according to ILO estimates of employment by economic class.

## Global and Regional Employment Distribution by Economic Class (2022)



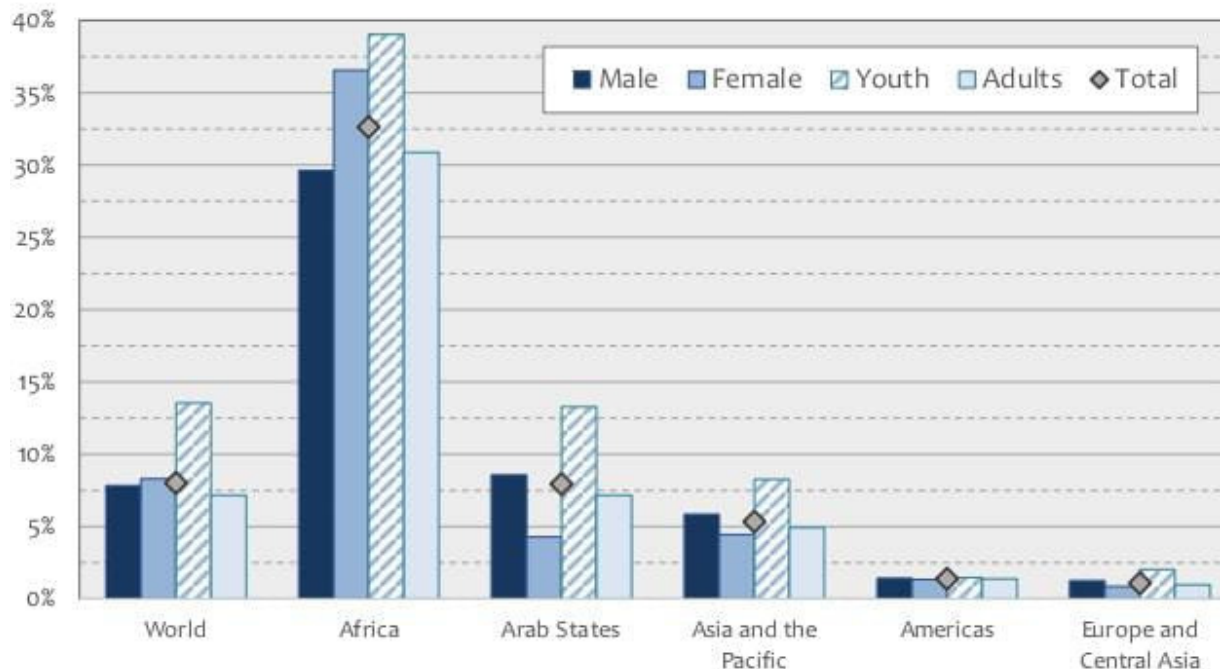
Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2022 (ANNUAL)

Note: The classification by region utilised for ILO modelled estimates, which can be found in ILOSTAT, is the basis for all statistics by region that are provided in this brief.

Fortunately, most working people in the Americas (95%) and Europe and Central Asia (98%), were not impoverished in 2020. In contrast, 81% of workers in the Arab States and nearly 85% in Asia and the Pacific lived above the poverty line with their families. Nonetheless, this suggests that roughly 21% of workers in the Arab States and 15% in Asia and the Pacific were either extremely or moderately impoverished, highlighting the necessity of taking action to enhance working conditions in these areas. When looking at global gender trends in working poverty, the findings become murkier. The difference between the international rates of working poverty for men (7.8 % in 2018) and women (8.3 % in 2018) is quite small, indicating that, at least globally, there aren't any significant gender-based factors at play regarding working poverty. However, examining the circumstances in each region independently reveals more distinct gender trends. In 2018, 37 % of working women in Africa were impoverished, compared to only 30 % of working men (presented in the figure below). On the other hand, male workers in the Arab States were twice as likely to be impoverished as female workers (in 2018, the working poverty rate for men was 9% as compared to 4% for women).



## Distribution of Working Poverty Rates by Region



Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modeled estimates, November 2018 for the working poverty rate and World Bank, World Development Indicators for the poverty rate.

Note: The poverty rate expresses the share of the total population who live in poverty, at US\$ 1.90 a day (in 2011 PPP). The income groupings presented here and in other figures in this brief refer to the World Bank classification of countries by income group.

Similarly, the rate of male working poverty was higher than the rate of female working poverty in Asia and the Pacific, the Americas, Europe, and Central Asia. In general, even though working women are more likely than men to be working poor solely in Africa, working poverty rates among African women are so high that they outweigh those of males worldwide.

## VIII. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

The table below shows the results of the independent t-test used in the study to evaluate the hypothesis that the monthly mean expenditure of women employed in the agriculture workforce is lower than that of women not employed in any workforce. The entire sample was split into two groups- one for women working in agriculture and the other for women not in the workforce to test the hypothesis. To determine the impact of in-work poverty on women in the community, the hypothesis is being tested again using two more groups- ST and NST women. At the 5% level, the mean monthly difference in food, clothing, shelter and other expenses for the families of working and non-working women is statistically significant. It is evident from the table below that a household with non-working women spends significantly more on average on food, cloth, shelter and other necessities than for a family with agriculturally employed women.

### Mean Monthly Difference on Expenditure

All Women								
Average Monthly family Expenditure	Women not in Workforce	Women in Workforce	Mean Difference	SE of Mean Difference	t- statistics	Effect Size		
						Cohen's d	Glass's Delta	Hedge's g
Food	10770.45	4625.17	6145.28	340.07	18.07	1.76	1.37	2.15
Clothing	485.96	316.66	169.3	12.64	13.39	1.46	1.27	1.59
Shelter and others	2044.47	498.6	1545.87	102.75	15.05	1.27	0.9	1.79

Source: Researcher's own computation based on the primary sample collected in the district of Karbi Anglong during 2022-23  
The value of t-statistics indicate that the mean difference is significant at 5% level

Now let's examine the study's hypothesis for ST and NST women. One important conclusion from the table below is that ST women spend significantly more on average than NST women do on food, cloth, shelter and other products. This indicates that ST women have a better economic situation than NST women.

### Monthly Average Expenditure Difference between ST and NST Women

ST Women								
Average Monthly family Expenditure	Women not in Workforce	Women in Workforce	Mean Difference	SE of Mean Difference	t- statistics	Effect Size		
						Cohen's d	Glass's Delta	Hedge's g
Food	10959.2	5346.58	5612.62	510.69	10.99	1.39	1.13	1.55
Clothing	470.28	349.46	120.8	15.9	7.60	1.01	0.89	1.07
Shelter and others	1901.92	67.76	1294.15	144.23	8.97	1.02	0.74	1.27
NST Women								
Average Monthly family Expenditure	Women not in Workforce	Women in Workforce	Mean Difference	SE of Mean Difference	t- statistics	Effect Size		
						Cohen's d	Glass's Delta	Hedge's g
Food	8153.33	4202.29	3951.04	451.34	8.75	1.74	1.39	2.39
Clothing	581.33	288.55	292.78	26.59	11.009	2.59	2.25	3.00
Shelter and others	2347.33	450.84	1896.49	184.43	10.28	1.27	0.897	2.80

Source: Researcher's own computation based on the primary sample collected in the district of Karbi Anglong during 2022-23  
The value of t-statistics indicate that the mean difference is significant at 5% level

Investigating the effects of in-work poverty on women engaged in agriculture workforce revealed that agricultural income is meager, and those women who are not participating in the workforce are either from better-off families or chose not to work in agriculture as wages is low (and no other employment options is available in the area). Instead of improving their financial status, women who work in agriculture are unable to make ends meet. It has been noted from the findings that women employed in the agricultural sector experience in-work poverty.

**IX. CONCLUSION:**

Research studies have not previously shown any evidence of racial, ethnic or gender inequalities in in-work poverty. This is the first study to examine caste based in-work poverty among women employed in the agricultural sector in rural India. One key to comprehending the feminized nature of poverty is “women in work”. Women are consistently more likely to be poor than men, and this is where the gender dimension of in-work poverty lies (EIGE 2016). Women’s engagement in the workforce is significantly influenced by social norms. An investigation of poverty from a gender perspective needs to look at how socioeconomic ties interact with aspects of the welfare state, labour market, and family (Bennett and Daly, 2014). Poverty’s gendered aspect has been more acute and intense since the COVID-19 economic crisis. In actuality about one in four persons is at risk of poverty or social marginalisation; women make up the majority of the population in this regard. Women are disproportionately more likely than males to experience in-work poverty because they devote most of their waking hours to caring for others and taking care of the home, which leaves little time for earning a living.

Employment is ineffective as a strategy to combat poverty. The primary concern is that work alone is insufficient to prevent poverty. Kim (1998) contended that increasing one’s labour effort or working longer hours is not a means of eradicating poverty; rather, it will only make the working poor more numerous. People’s perspectives need to shift from the conventional belief that “if one works hard, one should not be poor” to the startling reality that “simply having a job does not end poverty” because of the phenomena of the working poor. Having a job is no longer the main route out of poverty. Because of precarious employment and unstable market trends, poor status is intimately linked to in-work poverty, which is a result of economic globalization. Review of earlier studies has shown that developing nations have a low awareness of in-work poverty. Lack of social awareness is creating problem to think and implement policies for in-work poverty.

Historically, the agriculture industry has absorbed leftover labour force members, primary through self-employment. In a densely populated agricultural economy such as India, where land is becoming increasingly scarce, it should be apparent that the focus of growth in this sector should be on improving land and livestock productivity through improved technologies along with actively and crop diversification, thereby reducing under-employment and improving the quality of employment in this sector. To address the issue of in-work poverty, social resources and access to essential social security, such as health services, medical assistance, and unemployment insurance policies should be implemented. The market reconstruction tendencies that focused on the informal sector demanded social security and family-oriented policies to support work-related policies. As a result, family policy is becoming a bigger priority.

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