

Gender and Insecurity

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In a transforming world, as 'the old order changeth yielding place to new', continuities of the old, and uneven emergence of new ideas and practices, make for a complex unequal and hierarchical society. Innumerable incidents of violence against women in public as well as private spaces, structural issues of gender based discrimination, marginalisation of women, and their invisibilisation in the workforce, are evidence of the continued playing out of power and patriarchy in society. Newer aspects of role of institutions and collectives may emerge through particular incidents. The discourse takes on a new dimension with social media.

With 81.8 percent of women's employment in India being in the informal economy (ILO, 2021), and the contiguity of this section of the economy with poverty (NCEUS, 2007), it becomes useful to examine gender - through an intersectional lens - and insecurity in the context of labour. At this juncture, the sheer number of terms related to informal labour, for instance (informal, non-formal, contractualisation, casualisation, nonstandard, flexibilisation, precarity), is evidence of many dimensions of absence of the standard employment relationship, and the pace at which changes are taking place in the world of work. The ILO and Standing (2011) asserted that the idea of security transcends that associated with work or paid employment; Standing proposed a categorisation of labour within the changing global order, and a security continuum with the Precariat at the bottom. Based on this, one finds that security and therefore insecurity can stem from multiple factors, with context and population-specific implications.

A gendered view of everyday lives, and work points to conditions of bias and disadvantage that women face in particular work contexts. Yet the informality that is now almost all-pervasive is seen in the nature of workplaces that are gender-blind, and in work and living spaces that are actually unsafe for women and adolescent girls. While insecurity may permeate one's life and existence, within a framework of social justice, welfare, and governance, it can be examined in concrete terms. In what are more private and bounded spaces - the household and the community, as well as the more public, market and state - insecurities, material as well as non-material are sought to be addressed in some measure by state policies and programmes. Some of these are gender neutral, while others may be gender-specific, or gender redistributive. To illustrate

- The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), specific Labour Codes, The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (2013), special provisions for women in MGNREGA, and the National Policy for Domestic Workers (2019), are among the policies where gender specific needs may be addressed.

In social, economic and political contexts such as that of India, the central concerns with most policies are Outreach, which is a responsibility of the state, and Access for the people concerned. Information does not necessarily reach those for whom it is intended; it is wrongly assumed that these populations have the resources and social capital required to access rights and entitlements. For scholars and activists, making contribution to policy advocacy is a significant area of practice; for practitioners in

particular, it is engagement with actual implementation of policies, and contributing to what is referred to as last-mile-connectivity. This practice space is the focus of this policy brief. It will examine ground level mobilising and community building with women in particular policy contexts, such as domestic workers, self-employed women, women migrants in the city and so on. As collective work places, and residential neighbourhoods get restructured, this is even more daunting an ask. This brief could comprise the following three components: first, an outline of a landscape of gender and insecurity; second, through select case studies, drawing out of facilitators and barriers for outreach and access, and key aspects of gendered practice needed for policy provisions to reach the women; and third, takeaways and implications for policy makers.
