

Socio-Economic Marginalization and Gender Inequality: A Sociological Study of Begging, Rural Women, and Domestic Workers

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The article addresses the issues of people involved in begging, rural women, and female domestic workers. The study was conducted using a qualitative and descriptive research design. The author-utilized secondary data, reports, and published works of other researchers and literature. The articles and literature were searched in national and international databases. The social exclusion theory, feminist theory, intersectionality, and informal sector were utilized to analyze the problem. The author focuses on explaining the mechanisms and structures that lead to social exclusion, poverty, and gender inequalities. The research provides empirical evidence that social exclusion is multidimensional and cannot be solved by addressing only one specific aspect, for example, the lack of income. It is concluded that limited access to education, gendered division of labor, informal care work, caste, class, and social hierarchy, and insufficient social protection are some of the issues that increases social exclusion of vulnerable groups. Rural women are often subjected to unpaid domestic duties in addition to engaging in labor-intensive informal activities. Female domestic workers are economically active but remain marginalized and without legal support. Individuals resorting to begging are further exposed to derision, homelessness, disabled status, unemployment, and limited social inclusion. The study recommends social protection programs, rights-based social security, decent jobs, gender-sensitive rural development, unpaid care, quality public services, and retraining schemes for the affected communities.

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1. Introduction

Socio-economic inequality continues to shape opportunities available to individuals in contemporary society. Economic development and modernization can generate employment, education, mobility, and technological opportunities; however, their benefits are not distributed equally. Certain populations continue to remain at the margins of social and economic systems because of poverty, gender, occupation, caste, class, geographical location, migration, disability, educational disadvantage, and restricted access to institutional resources.

Socio-economic marginalization refers to the process through which individuals or communities experience limited participation in the economic, political, cultural, and social spheres of society. It is therefore broader than monetary poverty. Individuals may experience marginalization because of unemployment, insecure occupations, poor housing, restricted educational opportunities, lack of social security, occupational stigma, and limited participation in decision-making. These disadvantages are frequently interconnected and can reproduce poverty across generations.

Gender is one of the most common forms of marginalization. Women are frequently subject to unequal conditions at home and in the workplace. Caregiving, family, marriage, mobility, and jobs are areas in which women are socialized to take on certain roles. Additionally, women's labor is often invisible since many of their tasks are unpaid or done in an informal manner.

Recent Indian time-use study findings show the disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities carried by women compared to their male counterparts. The Time Use Survey 2024 reveals that females devote significantly more hours to performing unpaid domestic services and care activities compared to men. This information highlights the inequality and time imbalance in the number of hours women have to devote to unpaid work, thus limiting their chances for education, employment, leisure, and economic development opportunities.

Rural women are an important population group

in bridging the relationship between gender and socio-economic factors. These women play a leading role in agricultural production, animal husbandry, subsistence farming, family business, childcare, domestic service, and community engagement. However, some of these activities are not compensated, are undervalued, or carry less social status. The lack of ownership of property, access to quality education, employment opportunities, and family support can adversely affect these populations' financial stability.

Women who work as domestic workers are exposed to a different set of marginalizing experiences. This type of employment is a source of livelihood for many, particularly those coming from low-income groups, migrant populations, rural communities, and socially disadvantaged populations. At the same time, the work is performed in private households and is often informal, which makes it difficult to monitor and govern, resulting in a lack of written contracts, social security, fixed working hours, employment benefits, and dispute resolution mechanisms.

Persons engaged in begging represent another vulnerable category. Although this practice is often viewed as an individual behavior or problem, it may have sociological causes related to homelessness, disability, unemployment, migration, old age, family disorganization, inadequate education, insufficient livelihood opportunities, and inadequate social protection. A sociological approach requires an analysis of the conditions as a result of which persons are forced to resort to begging as a means of survival.

Although rural women, domestic workers, and beggars are different categories, they have a number of common characteristics. Extreme poverty, job insecurity, lack of resources, low bargaining power, social discrimination, gender-based inequality, and a lack of institutional support can lead to social exclusion. For this reason, this research presents these three groups together to explore the phenomenon of marginalization and gender inequality.

2. Statement of the Problem

Socio-economic marginalization cannot be explained by deprivation of income alone, since there are more reasons why people can be considered to be without resources. Individuals can lack education, job opportunities, health services, affordable housing, safe working conditions, social recognition, and access to welfare programmes. Such deficiencies can accumulate, and they are especially common among women because economic inequality and discrimination can aggravate the situation.

Rural women may perform substantial amounts of productive and reproductive labor without receiving comparable income, property ownership, institutional recognition, or decision-making authority. Housemaids may engage in paid employment while experiencing informal employment relations, low wages, limited bargaining power, insecurity, and inadequate social protection. Likewise, people who are engaged in begging can be subjected to severe forms of exclusion as a result of unemployment, homelessness, disability, migration, family disruption or lack of social support.

The question that the study under consideration aims to address is, accordingly, how economic structures and gender relations interact to generate marginalization. By examining rural women, domestic workers, and those engaged in begging from a similar perspective, the study tries to find their common characteristics and differences.

3. Objectives of the Study

The present study reports on the issue of economic marginalization of what we may term at risk groups and also looks at gender inequality via the issue of access to employment, income, resources, recognition, and decision making. We look at the socio economic condition of rural women in detail which includes their issues of which unequal access to resources is a large part, also we report on their unpaid work, lack of education and limited job opportunities. Also we look at the issues of women domestic workers which include lack of social security, hazardous work environment and low bargaining power.

Another crucial objective is to view begging in the context of poverty, homelessness, disability,

unemployment, migration, and social exclusion, and not as a singular behavioral issue. The paper also explores how gender, class, caste, rural residence, migration, and casualization intersect and overlap with one another. Lastly, the research is intended to identify the social and policy measures that would contribute towards securing economic security, dignity, employment, social protection, and inclusion for vulnerable groups.

4. Research Questions

The research is guided by questions seeking to establish the structural conditions under which socio-economic marginalization takes place, as well as the way in which gender shapes the experience of economic and social exclusion. The ways in which limited access to employment opportunities, low income, lack of education, unequal access to resources, informal labour, and restricted social protection contribute towards the vulnerability of disadvantaged groups are discussed.

The research also explores the influence of gender inequality on the position of rural women in terms of work, income, responsibility, property, mobility, and decision-making. In relation to domestic workers, the study focuses on the effects of informal employment, occupational invisibility, migration, and lack of employment protections on their working and living conditions. Begging is considered in terms of poverty, homelessness, disability, unemployment, and family situations that may lead to a person's dependency on alms. The question of how such problems interact and what institutional responses could promote sustainable social and economic inclusion is also of concern.

5. Research Methodology

The present study utilizes a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical design. It is purely based on secondary data, and the study does not generate primary survey results or direct interviews. The study focuses on exploring the common sociological phenomena that explain gender inequality, informal employment, poverty, and social exclusion processes in various marginalized populations. Therefore, the chosen design is best suited to the objectives of this study.

The secondary data used in the study were drawn from government statistical publications, policy reports, academic studies, reports of international organizations, and literature concerning gender, labour, rural development, poverty, domestic work, social exclusion, and rehabilitation of persons engaged in begging. Particular attention was given to evidence that could illustrate contemporary patterns of unpaid work, labour-force participation, informality, social protection, and gender inequality in the Indian context.

The collected literature was analyzed thematically. The themes explored in the literature include economic insecurity, unpaid and underpaid labor, occupational informality, gendered division of work, rural disadvantage, migration, social stigma, employment insecurity, access to welfare, and social recognition. The themes were further interpreted using social exclusion theory, feminist theory, intersectionality, and sociological perspectives on informal labor.

The study is focused mainly on India, and various sociological concepts and international literature were used to interpret the results. Since the article

is based on secondary data, it does not aim to evaluate the influence on each individual. It would be wrong to generalize findings for all rural women, domestic workers, and beggars in the world. The experiences of these people depend significantly on the countries where they live and other factors such as caste, class, age, education, migration status, family structure, and access to public services.

5.1 Empirical Evidence from Official Secondary Data

To strengthen the descriptive analysis, selected quantitative indicators were extracted from recent official Indian statistical and administrative sources. These figures do not represent primary data collected by the present study; rather, they provide empirical context for the patterns of gender inequality, informal labour, and social exclusion discussed in the article. The indicators were selected because they correspond directly to the study populations and themes, particularly unpaid work, labour-force participation, domestic and household work, and rehabilitation of persons engaged in begging.

Table 1. Selected empirical indicators of socio-economic marginalization in India

Indicator	Empirical observation	Source
Unpaid domestic work	Among persons aged 6 years and above, 81.5% of females participated in unpaid domestic services compared with 27.1% of males. Female participants spent an average of 289 minutes per day on these activities, compared with 88 minutes for males.	Time Use Survey 2024 (MoSPI, 2025)
Female labour-force participation	For persons aged 15 years and above in 2023-24, female LFPR was 47.6% in rural areas, 28.0% in urban areas, and 41.7% for India overall. The corresponding all-India male LFPR was 78.8%.	PLFS 2023-24 (MoSPI, 2025)
Domestic and household workers	As of 3 March 2025, e-Shram recorded 30.687 crore unorganised-worker registrations, of which 53.68% were female. Domestic and Household Workers accounted for 2.890 crore registrations, approximately 9.4% of all e-Shram registrations.	e-Shram administrative data (PIB, 2025)
Persons engaged in begging	As of 31 December 2025, the SMILE sub-scheme had identified 26,708 persons engaged in begging and reported 7,873	SMILE administrative data (Ministry of Social

	persons rehabilitated. The programme was being implemented in 181 cities across 34 States/UTs.	Justice and Empowerment, 2026)
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Note. e-Shram figures are self-declared administrative registrations and should not be interpreted as a census of all domestic workers. SMILE figures refer to persons identified through programme implementation and should not be interpreted as a national prevalence estimate of begging.

Time use data which we present quantitatively shows the picture of the gendered division of labor which this study reports. We found that female involvement in unpaid domestic work is three times that of men also the average time put in by females is more than three times what men put in. This pattern indicates that which is women's economic position is a matter which goes beyond paid work as a large part of what they do daily is outside of the conventional wage based relation. The issue is also very much a rural women's issue for which home based work, care giving, agricultural activity and informal employment often take place at the same time.

The labour force data present a more in depth picture which is beyond that of simple labor market exclusion. In 2023-24 we saw that rural female labor force participation had reached 47.6% which did in fact outperform the urban female rate which was at 28.0% but still is a long way from the rural male rate of 80.2%. This put forth that labor force participation does not in itself do away with gender based inequalities. What type of work is done, access to assets, wage levels, social protection, decision making in the home and the issue of the large scale unpaid domestic work continue to be what we look at in terms of what labor does or does not do in the issue of economic empowerment.

Administrative data also show the extent of informal and vulnerable work. In March 2025 Domestic and Household Workers had about 2.89 crore e-Shram registrations which is a indication that home based labor makes up a large part of the registered unorganized workforce. Also at the same time women made up 53.68% of all e-Shram registrations. What the available occupation wise

data does not give us is a separate gender break up for domestic and household workers which is what this study does not report on from these numbers alone. That said this distinction is important as we see the scale of informality but also we must put forth what is it that admin data is actually telling us.

The SMILE data present a practical look at begging and rehabilitation. We see that out of 26,708 identified persons and 7,873 which were helped by the end of 2025 that begging is a social issue which public institutions are tackling through measureable , and which is not only seen as an individual behavioral problem. Also these numbers support the articles' arguments which say that for a response to be effective it has to include shelter, health care, skills, employment, identity documentation and social security. As the program is city based, we use these numbers here to report on what we have been able to achieve in terms of outreach to the most vulnerable rather than to present a total picture of the begging population in India.

6. Theoretical Framework

6.1 Social Exclusion Theory

Social exclusion theory offers a useful perspective on marginalization as a multi-faceted concept. Individuals may be economically excluded due to unemployment, unstable employment, or low income, whereas institutional exclusion may be caused by lack of access to education, health care, housing, banking, documentation, welfare schemes, and social security. Social exclusion may also be characterized by stigma, discrimination, underrepresentation in politics, and depoliticization of society at large.

From this perspective, the situation of rural women, domestic workers, and beggars cannot be completely explained by individual factors. Besides, the issue should be evaluated through the frameworks of labor markets, a household's norms, social institutions, welfare, and inequality of resources distribution

6.2 Feminist Theory

Feminist sociological perspectives prioritize the fact that gender relations play a critical role in determining the organization and value of both paid and unpaid labour. Women are more likely than men to be responsible for a substantial amount of unpaid work, including domestic and care duties, child care, food preparation and cleaning, as well as caring for other family members. While women's unpaid domestic work is essential for the proper functioning of households, as well as national and global economies, it is often not accounted for in estimates of national economic production.

The uneven distribution of unpaid work between genders has considerable consequences for women's employment. Time spent on housework may result in decreased levels of education, paid work, skill acquisition, and involvement in public life. This is especially relevant for rural women and domestic workers who may perform great volumes of unpaid work within the household, in addition to working in agriculture, in the informal sector, or in paid domestic service.

6.3 Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an intellectual and methodological approach that empowers individuals to understand the complexity of social phenomena. For instance, gender cannot be understood in isolation from class, caste, age, education, disability, rural or urban residence, migration status, occupation, and family background. A poor rural woman is disadvantaged due to gender but is also deprived because of poverty, lack of access to education, insufficient job opportunities, and limited access to assets.

Similarly, a woman working as a domestic worker can experience gender inequality on the grounds of class and migration and can be vulnerable to various gender-based power imbalances. A woman reliant on begging can be homeless, disabled, widowed, aged, or without family support. Intersectionality, therefore, can help explain how individuals of the same gender can experience significantly different levels and types of marginalization.

6.4 Informal Labour Perspective

Informal labour comprises economic activities whose employment relations are often outside conventional systems of contracts, regulation, social security, and employment benefits. Many marginalized workers rely on informal activities because formal-sector employment requires education, skills, documentation, mobility, and access to networks which may not be available to them.

Casual jobs such as domestic work, casual agricultural labor, street livelihoods, and other marginal jobs provide examples of work that is productive but insecure. Consequently, employment is not a guarantee against marginalization if wages are low, working conditions are poor, and social security is lacking.

7. Socio-Economic Marginalization and Begging

Begging is usually a clear sign of social and economic decline. Not only are persons who resort to begging constantly exposed to public contempt, but the fact that they have to resort to such means of livelihood may have multiple causes, which are not necessarily obvious at first glance. These may range from loss of employment, disability, old age, or homelessness to broken families, immigration, psychological and physical diseases, lack of education, and limited access to the job market.

From a sociological perspective, it is incorrect to interpret begging as mere unwillingness to work. Individuals may have encountered obstacles which prevent them from seeking or remaining in employment. It may be impossible for disabled people, elderly people without children to look after them, homeless people, migrants without papers, or those without the necessary skills or education to find jobs.

Social stigma can exacerbate marginalization. People who are begging can be labeled as lazy or as individuals who do not contribute to society, which leads to reduced social interaction and can result in their exclusion from other areas of life such as employment, housing, education, and social services, thereby creating a cycle in which marginalization leads to poverty and poverty leads to further marginalization.

Policies addressing begging increasingly recognize the importance of rehabilitation, education, healthcare, counselling, skill development, shelter, and livelihood support. In India, programmes such as Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise reflect the shift towards rehabilitation-oriented approaches. However, the effectiveness of such measures will depend upon the provision of continued access to housing, identity documents, health services, training, employment opportunities, and social security.

8. Rural Women and Gender Inequality

Rural women bear the main responsibility for ensuring the survival of households and contributing to the local economy through their participation in agricultural production, animal husbandry, processing raw materials, obtaining food, fuel, and water, performing domestic and care tasks, contributing to the development of enterprises, and working for wages. However, this group's economic contribution might be underestimated since many rural women perform their work for free or in the context of informal employment.

One of the causes of inequality is unequal access to productive resources. Access to agricultural land, property, technology, credit, training, and markets can give individuals a certain degree of economic independence according to their level of ownership and control. Women working in agriculture without the same ownership and control over productive resources do not necessarily gain greater social power even if they contribute economically.

Education also contributes towards enhancing women's socio-economic prospects. Lack of education has an adverse effect on women's capacity to access highly skilled and quality employment. Moreover, family responsibilities, lack of security, early marriage, insufficient transport, and geographical isolation are some of the social factors which hinder girls' and women's access to and/or completion of education.

Unpaid care work is also a significant challenge. If women do not have enough time to dedicate to their careers, this can affect their professional

growth and development. Many women spend long hours cooking, cleaning, gathering water, caring for children and elderly family members, and managing the home. This may lead to time poverty as they invest a lot of their time caring for others while having limited control over their own time and money.

Women who participate in the workforce may continue to face a double burden since the distribution of roles at home is not necessarily adjusted when they become economically active. Therefore, women's participation in employment does not necessarily lead to their empowerment or challenge existing gender inequalities in the household. Other factors that need to be addressed include participation in decision-making, social norms, access to ownership, mobility, and visibility of their work.

9. Domestic Workers and Informal Employment

Domestic work includes a range of tasks such as cleaning, cooking, washing, caring for children, caring for the elderly, and other jobs performed for wages. Domestic work is an important source of employment for women who have limited freedom to take up jobs elsewhere. Additionally, domestic work allows members of other families to work and engage in economic activity by delegating care and domestic tasks to domestic workers.

Despite its contribution to economic development, domestic work is often socially undervalued. One reason for this state of affairs is that it replicates unpaid work typically performed by women. When transformed into paid work, it continues to be associated with low skills and a natural aptitude among women and is not viewed as work requiring appropriate compensation and employment relationships.

The private household as a workplace leads to new challenges. Domestic workplaces are distributed and often inaccessible to labour inspection mechanisms. Furthermore, there can be verbal rather than written agreements and uncertainties about wages, working hours, leave, workload, and termination of employment.

Migrant domestic workers can become more vulnerable because of possible isolation from their

social networks. Lack of knowledge of local social institutions, reliance on an employer, limited knowledge of the language, housing problems, and lack of information about one's rights can undermine the bargaining capacity of migrant domestic workers.

The situation of domestic workers is one of the sociological paradoxes that reveal the state of our society. Their work is essential for the functioning of many households and allows family members to be gainfully employed, yet domestic workers themselves often occupy a low rung of the economic ladder. Acknowledging this situation and emphasizing the importance of their work for society is the key to improving the state of affairs.

10. Gendered Nature of Poverty and Marginalization

Poverty differs according to gender since women and men do not have equal control over resources, property, employment, mobility, and decision-making. If a household is not considered to be poor, a woman may still experience personal economic dependence if she does not have access to financial resources.

Women are overrepresented in several categories of informal and unpaid work. Their concentration in occupations associated with low pay and limited social security increases the risks for women facing illness, unemployment, pregnancy, aging, or family problems. The lack of social protection for women working in the informal economy is even greater if social protection is primarily promoted through social insurance, as is the case in many countries, which rests on a wage reference.

Consequently, gendered poverty is connected not only with the level of the family budget but also with the distribution of resources within the family framework and the availability of independent economic opportunities. Gender equality policies therefore need to take into account such components as employment quality, access to assets, unpaid work, education, social protection, and intra-household decision-making.

11. Interconnection Between Begging, Rural Women, and Domestic Work

The three social locations considered in this study are different but can be related through the

process of structural disadvantage. This can be observed in rural poverty that leads to migration in search of employment. Women from families living in poverty might be inclined to become employed as home helps since the profession does not require high qualifications and skills. At the same time, lack of competencies and education can prevent them from obtaining a stable job.

Where employment opportunities are unavailable or where disability, old age, homelessness, or family breakdown prevent individuals from sustaining employment, extreme livelihood insecurity may contribute to dependence on begging. These pathways demonstrate how marginalization can operate as a continuum rather than as a series of unrelated social conditions.

Gender can be a factor in these transitions. Women who are encountering widowhood, abandonment, abuse, inadequate social service networks, and lack of property ownership may have fewer resources to deal with an economic shock. Similarly, women working in the home may find themselves working in two homes, producing multiple burdens and layers of oppression.

The connection between these groups, however, is not that they have the same experiences, but that they share mechanisms such as poverty, informality, low assets, gender inequalities, social protection, and limited access to dignified livelihood opportunities.

12. Discussion

The article clearly indicates that socio-economic marginalization is produced by economic, social, institutional, and cultural factors. Income poverty is an important contributor, but by itself it is an inadequate explanation. Marginalized people can still be economically active but may work in the informal sector, work for low pay with little job security or protection, face stigma, or be deliberately denied social services.

For rural women, the unequal distribution of productive and reproductive labour is particularly significant. Women's contribution to agriculture and survival, in addition to their involvement in other spheres of social life, may exist alongside a lack of control over their income, property, and decisions in general. Domestic workers, in the same way, show that employment does not equal

occupational security and social recognition.

The cases of begging illustrate the risks threatening individuals who have lost their jobs, family and social support, housing, and other factors associated with normal human life. That is why begging should be considered a broader social problem rather than just a public safety or order issue.

These findings are consistent with the theoretical perspectives used in the study. Social exclusion theory shows how individuals who are economically and institutionally disadvantaged can be simultaneously excluded. Feminist theory explains the gendered organization and undervaluation of labour. Intersectionality explains how gender intersects with class, caste, migration, age, disability, and other social categories. The informal labour perspective explains why participation in employment does not automatically produce social security.

13. Policy Implications

The issue of marginalization among vulnerable populations needs to be addressed through multiple interventions. Social protection programs should be provided for individuals who work in the informal employment sector. Identity documents, medicines, provision of housing, insurance schemes, pensions, food, and livelihood programs can help address the problem of severe deprivation.

For rural women, initiatives related to development should focus on improving access to education, training, information and technology, financial services, agricultural technologies and markets, tenure rights, and income opportunities, while also taking into account women's unpaid care work. Similarly, provision of childcare, water, health, transport, and other services can help to free up time for women and provide them with more opportunities to engage in wage employment.

Domestic workers need to be recognized as workers whose labor has economic value. Written agreements, clarity on wages and hours of work, leave, dispute resolution mechanisms, social security registration, and protection against exploitation are some of the aspects that could be considered to improve the employment conditions

of domestic workers. Awareness among both employees and employers is also a significant factor.

Responses to begging should be primarily rehabilitative and should focus on social reintegration. Shelter is only an intervening measure that can provide a short-term solution. Successful rehabilitation should involve providing medical, psychological, educational, and vocational support, as well as access to identity documents, social security, housing, and employment.

Community-level changes are also important: legal and economic reforms may not have the desired effect if social stigma and gender discrimination persist. Awareness programmes, women's collectives, worker organizations, self-help groups, local institutions, and civil-society organizations can help to change attitudes and improve access to rights and public services.

14. Conclusion

Socioeconomic marginalization and gender inequality are issues which play into each other and which do not have a simple poverty based explanation. From the issue of rural women, domestic workers, and beggars we see that there is a complex interaction of economic lack, informal labor participation, lack of social safety nets, gender based roles, stigma and also the issue of which institutions do not provide for them.

Rural women are key players in the home and in the economy yet are also very much underpaid for what they do. Maids perform very important functions for the home but at the same time operate from a very weak economic position. Those that beg are the most visible results of social exclusion which is in large part due to poverty, homelessness, disability, unemployment, immigration, and also a lack of family and institution support.

The report notes that which populations must be the focus of development assistance. Also at the same time we see that a more advanced sociological and policy structure should look at these populations as rights bearers which include them in terms of labor, agency, and dignity. We must see reduction in marginalization through increased access to education, employment, and social protections which include health, housing,

assets, skills, and public services. Also we must put forward the issue of changing discriminatory gender norms and occupational biases.

In that which is social inclusion we see that it won't be enough to put at table the vulnerable groups in present economic structures. Also we must see to it that we look at what in these structures is

discriminatory which in turn produces and reproduces insecurities and vulnerabilities. We see that gender responsive social protection, recognition of the informal and unpaid work, sustainable livelihoods, and a rights based approach to rehabilitation will put us in a better place for social inclusion and equity in our society.

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