

Social Security, Welfare Programmes And The Economic Status Of Women Agricultural Labourers: A Sociological Study

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Abstract

A significant portion of rural labourers are women agricultural labours who play a crucial role in agricultural output and enhance household well-being. Even though their contributions, they still face economic instability because of low wages, temporary jobs, insufficient social support, and restricted access to welfare programmes. This current descriptive analysis focused the connection between social security, governmental aid programmes, and the economic condition of rural women agricultural labours in the Ramanagara district of Karnataka. The research relies on primary data gathered from 300 women agricultural labours via a structured interview format. Cross-tabulation, percentages, and descriptive statistics were employed for the analysis. The findings indicate that although several welfare schemes have improved access to financial assistance, employment opportunities and healthcare, many respondents continue to face barriers such as inadequate awareness, documentation issues, delayed benefits and limited institutional support. The study recommends strengthening social security systems, improving awareness, and ensuring effective implementation of welfare programmes to enhance the economic well-being of women agricultural labourers.

Keywords: Women Agricultural Labourers, Social Security, Welfare Programmes, Economic Status, Ramanagara District, Karnataka.

Date of Submission: 24-07-2026

Date of Acceptance: 04-08-2026

I. Introduction

A significant and vulnerable group within the rural workforce in India are the women agricultural labourers. They are actively involved in nearly every phase of agricultural production, such as seed planting, seedling insertion, hoeing, crop gathering, threshing, post-harvest treatment, livestock care, and related agronomic activities. Although they make substantial contributions to agricultural productivity and household incomes, women agricultural labours persistently experience low pay, seasonal unemployment, insufficient social protections, and restricted access to formal support.

In the district of Ramanagara, specifically within Karnataka, agriculture continues to be a significant contributor to the daily lives of rural residents. The majority of agricultural labourers, who are predominantly from economically disadvantaged groups, rely mainly on daily wage jobs. Their circumstances are defined by inconsistent work, unequal pay, restricted landholding, restricted access to financing, and insufficient social support. These elements enhance their economic precariousness and diminish their prospects for productive living conditions.

Social security and welfare programs contribute significantly to safeguarding rural labours from poverty, unemployment, illness, old age, and other socio-economic hazards. Programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the Public Distribution System (PDS), Ayushman Bharat, social assistance pensions, Self-Help Group (SHG) initiatives, and other rural development schemes seek to improve income security, food security, health care, and financial inclusion. Research from around the world indicates that implementing gender-sensitive social support measures can enhance women's economic independence, fortitude, and involvement in rural progress. When it is created to tackle obstacles like unpaid caregiving, diminished bargaining leverage, and restricted access to resourceful opportunities.

Among women agricultural labourers, access to these programmes is typically restricted due to low literacy, lack of awareness, documentation problems, administrative delays, and social barriers. Though welfare initiatives have boosted rural living conditions, many women still qualify for social protection programmes. Studies have discovered that combining agricultural development with social protection measures boosts household strength, encourages productive spending, and decreases rural poverty. This research examines the impact of these social benefits on enhancing the economic position of women farmers in the Ramanagara region.

II. Review Of Literature

Agarwal investigated how impoverished farming communities manage food scarcity, irregular employment, and economic upheavals. The research underscored the significance of social security measures, showing that women frequently experience a greater burden in household vulnerabilities during crises. Boserup showed that women play crucial roles in agriculture, though their contributions are often underestimated and overlooked in development strategies. The research study laid a crucial groundwork for future studies on gender and agricultural labour. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2023) reported on enduring gender disparities in land access, credit availability, agricultural extension services, social welfare programs, and productive resources. It advised gender-sensitive agricultural strategies and more robust social support mechanisms to enhance women's economic standing.

Theoretical foundations

Structural functionalism views society as a system of interconnected institutions that work together to maintain stability and social order. Institutions like families, governments, labor markets, education, and social welfare systems carry out crucial roles for society. Seen from this angle, social security programs, employment assurance schemes, public distribution networks, healthcare coverage, and pension plans act as institutional mechanisms safeguarding vulnerable groups against economic instability. These programs assist women agricultural labours in securing livelihoods, integrating socially, and alleviating poverty. Inequal access or inadequate implementation, therefore, diminishes the effectiveness of these institutions in performing their intended functions.

Feminist theory elucidates that gender disparity is inscribed within patriarchal social frameworks, leading to unequal distribution of resources, professional prospects, property entitlements, and influence over decisions. Empowerment Theory states that women gain economic and social empowerment by accessing resources, exercising agency, and achieving significant results.

Research Gap

While past research has investigated women's contributions to agriculture, their rural well-being, and social support in India, there is scant empirical data exclusively dedicated to women agricultural labours in Ramanagara district, Karnataka. Limited research has examined the connection between access to social security programmes and the economic condition of women agricultural labours through primary data surveys and cross-tabulations. This study tackles the gap by exploring the experiences of 300 women agricultural labourers, specifically. Emphasizing their knowledge, usage, and attitudes towards social security and welfare programs and their influence on economic prosperity.

Objectives of the Study

To analyse the socio-economic status of women in agriculture. To evaluate knowledge of social security and welfare programs. To analyse women agricultural labourers' access to welfare benefits. To study the relationship between welfare programmes and economic standing. To pinpoint obstacles in accessing governmental assistance programmes and to propose steps for enhancing social support and economic security.

III. Research Methods

The current study used a descriptive research design to investigate the relationship between social security, welfare programs, and the economic situation of women agricultural labours. The research, which was carried out in Ramanagara District, Karnataka, involved the taluks of Ramanagara, Channarayana, Kanakapura, and Magadi. A descriptive design was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic collection, classification, and interpretation of data relating to socio-economic characteristics, awareness of welfare schemes, accessibility, utilization, and their impact on the livelihoods of women agricultural labourers. The sample of the study included 300 women from the agricultural labour force. Descriptive survey techniques employing structured interviews are commonly utilized in research on women agricultural labourers and rural well-being. A pre-verifying structured interview outline was created according to the goals of the research. The schedule encompassed both closed questions and those with limited openness.

IV. Result And Discussion

This portion outlines the research results utilizing data gathered from 300 women agricultural labours in the Ramanagara district of Karnataka. Cross-tabulation has been employed as the main descriptive statistical approach to investigate the connection between chosen socio-economic factors and access to social security and welfare programs. The study examines how education, possession of land, job stability, involvement in Self-Help Groups, access to welfare programs, and income levels affect the economic standing of rural women farmers.

The tables clearly illustrate the socio-economic conditions of women labours and underscore the impact of government welfare programs on enhancing their livelihood security. The analytical discussion that follows each table focuses on interpreting the observed patterns.

Table 1: Educational Status and Awareness of Welfare Programmes

Education	Aware	Not Aware	Total
Illiterate	30	60	90
Primary	48	42	90
Secondary	56	19	75
PUC & Above	40	5	45
Total	174	126	300

Education levels have been shown to correlate with increased awareness of welfare initiatives. Those with secondary and higher levels of education reported having more awareness about schemes including MGNREGA, the Public Distribution System (PDS), health insurance, and pension programs. Respondents with low literacy levels demonstrated lower awareness primarily due to restricted access to information and overreliance on unofficial sources.

Table 2: Land Ownership and Access to Welfare Programmes

Land Ownership	Regular Access	Occasional Access	No Access	Total
Landless	60	72	48	180
Marginal Farmers	40	25	10	75
Small Farmers	30	10	5	45
Total	130	107	63	300

Women owning agricultural land showed greater access to welfare programs than those without land. Land ownership allowed for record-keeping, qualification for particular programs, and engagement with farming organizations. Landless individuals remained excluded from welfare benefits, according to the study.

Table 3: MGNREGA Participation and Household Economic Status

Participation in MGNREGA	Improved	Moderate Improvement	No Improvement	Total
Regular	82	28	10	120
Occasional	38	30	22	90
No Participation	18	22	50	90
Total	138	80	82	300

Engaging regularly in MGNREGA helped increase household income, enhance food security, and stabilize finances. Women who did not engage with the program reported higher instances of economic insecurity and reliance on seasonal agricultural jobs.

Table 4: Self-Help Group Membership and Household Savings

SHG Membership	Increased Savings	No Change	Decline	Total
Members	108	42	10	160
Non-Members	36	62	42	140
Total	144	104	52	300

SHGs membership was linked to increased household savings and financial stability. SHG members enjoyed more access to microloans, savings programs, business prospects, and financial competence compared to non-members.

Table 5: Social Security Benefits and Economic Status

Social Security Benefits	Good	Moderate	Poor	Total
Regular Benefits	84	46	10	140
Occasional Benefits	28	42	30	100
No Benefits	8	16	36	60
Total	120	104	76	300

Those receiving consistent social security payments reported greater economic well-being. They had improved access to food, healthcare, education, and household expenses compared to respondents who received inconsistent or no aid.

Table 6: Income Level and Perception of Welfare Programme Effectiveness

Annual Household Income	Highly Effective	Moderately Effective	Less Effective	Total
Below ₹75,000	34	52	34	120
₹75,001–₹1,50,000	48	36	16	100
Above ₹1,50,000	26	34	20	80
Total	108	122	70	300

Women from financially disadvantaged backgrounds viewed welfare programs as extremely advantageous due to their ability to alleviate economic distress via earnings, subsidized meals, healthcare aid, and other forms of assistance. Participants from wealthier households found the programmes helpful but less essential to their economic well-being.

The descriptive cross-table analysis indicates that educational attainment, land ownership, regular participation in MGNREGA, membership in Self-Help Groups, and consistent access to social security benefits are associated with improved economic status among women agricultural labourers in Ramanagara district. The report further underscores persistent challenges tied to awareness, documentation, and unequal access to welfare programs, notably among landless and less educated women. Enhancing the implementation, broadening outreach, and developing gender-sensitive social protection policies are crucial for bolstering the livelihood security and economic empowerment of rural women agricultural labours.

V. Conclusion

The research indicates that social security and welfare programs have significantly improved the economic position of many women agricultural labours in the Ramanagara district. Nonetheless, disparities in understanding, availability, administrative efficiency, and execution persist, thereby limiting their overall efficacy. Enhancing social safety nets, enhancing outreach efforts, and advancing gender-inclusive rural development strategies will substantially bolster the economic stability, respect, and empowerment of women agricultural labours.

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