

## GENDER BASED WAGE DISCRIMINATION IN AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS OF MADURAI DISTRICT

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### ABSTRACT

This study was carried out during 2024-2025 to examine gender based wage discrimination and employment patterns among women agricultural workers in Madurai District, Tamil Nadu, focusing on Vadipatti and Melur blocks. Despite constituting a significant portion of the rural workforce, women in agriculture face persistent inequalities, including low wages, insecure employment, and occupational segregation. Data from 100 women workers households revealed that most belong to scheduled castes, live in nuclear families averaging five members, and have low literacy levels. Employment is largely seasonal and divided by gender, with men performing physically intensive tasks and women engaged in transplanting, weeding, harvesting, and threshing. The socio-economic status and persistent wage inequalities experienced by women agricultural workers in Madurai District. Our findings from 100 households indicated an average family size of five, with a notable shift towards nuclear family structures (78%). The majority of these women (58%) belonged to Scheduled Castes, signifying significant economic vulnerability. Despite most being married (91%), their living conditions were often dire, with over half residing in huts. Demographically, a substantial portion (37%) were young women aged between 31 and 35, highlighting a group in their prime child-bearing years driven to agriculture work by economic necessity. Literacy rates were alarmingly low, with many having minimal or no formal education. While 74% were categorized as permanent laborers, income from non-agricultural sources frequently outstrips agricultural earnings, primarily due to better opportunities and wages in sectors like construction. Crucially, the study reveals a stark gender wage gap women earned significantly less than men for comparable agricultural tasks, with disparities ranging from 36% to 67% in key operations. This persistent inequality, despite the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 is often linked to biased employer assumptions and a gendered division of labor. Regression analysis further confirmed that while factors like family size and husband's income positively influenced total family income, women's age, education, and days worked in agriculture paradoxically have a negative impact.

**(Key words:** Agricultural workers, gender based wage discrimination, employment patterns, economic opportunities, social security, and educational access)

### INTRODUCTION

The introduction highlights the vulnerable position of rural women labourers in India, who constitute a significant portion of the total workforce yet face cumulative inequalities due to discriminatory socio-economic practices. Over 90% of working women are concentrated in the unorganized sector, particularly agriculture, where they are often subjected to low wages and lack of security. Historically, women from lower strata were prevalent in agriculture, and while land reforms aimed to free labourers, the employment patterns and status of women haven't significantly improved. The advent of globalization, WTO norms, and the preference of multinational corporations for cheap female labour has led to the "feminization of labour," often pushing women into precarious "putting-out" systems

without benefits. The shift of employment from the organized to unorganized sector, driven by subcontracting, further disadvantages women, many of whom belong to socially and economically marginalized groups. Despite agriculture's declining share in national income, it still supports a large population, yet non-agricultural sectors haven't absorbed the surplus labour, making agricultural employment crucial. The text points out that women are increasingly in self-employment but often in less risky ventures due to household responsibilities, leading to discrimination in both wage and self-employment opportunities (Rajalaxmi and Indra, 2024). Specifically, a legal sex-based wage differential exists in Tamil Nadu, where women are paid less than men even for similar work. Despite various government strategies and the Green Revolution aiming to improve agricultural income and employment, their impact on real income and

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employment status of agricultural workers, especially women, has been limited. This context underscores the necessity of the study to understand gender discrimination in wages and employment within the agricultural labour force.

This study aimed to analyze the extent of discrimination in women's employment and wage rates within the agricultural sector of Madurai District. A key characteristic of agricultural labour is the segregation of tasks by gender, where some jobs are exclusively performed by men, others by women, and only a few by both. This division often leads to significant wage disparities between male and female workers, undermining women's bargaining power and relegating them to a marginalized, intermittent, or reserve labour status. The primary focus is on labour market discrimination, where workers are treated less favorably based on characteristics like sex, caste, or status, even if these do not affect their actual capability (Katre *et al.*, 2022). The most significant forms of such discrimination manifest in wages, days of employment, and occupational characteristics, with wage and employment discrimination often stemming from occupational bias. Recognizing the distinct roles and challenges faced by women in agriculture, the study acknowledges that female workers typically engage in less physically demanding tasks, receive lower wages, and have limited time due to household responsibilities. Although women's income constitutes a significant portion of their family's total earnings, particularly as they supplement male incomes, manage labour scarcity during peak seasons, and find non-farm work during off-seasons, they often have limited say in how this income is spent Kinitoli and Odyno (2025). Therefore, this research also sought to identify the factors contributing to wage and sex discrimination in the agricultural labour market, paying particular attention to the dual burden faced by female labourers at home and in the workplace. Ultimately, gender discrimination in the agricultural labour market is a critical area of scrutiny for this study.

The reviewed literature highlights several key aspects of agricultural wages and women's employment. Raj (2007) examined spatial-temporal variations in agricultural and industrial wages, noting that while the Green Revolution positively impacted agricultural wages, significant real wage increases were not observed for agricultural workers, unlike industrial workers. Dhillon (2019) observed a declining contribution of rural women to agriculture in Punjab, attributing it to their inability to adapt to technological advancements. Sudakar (2020) emphasized the differential impact of agricultural modernization and the Green Revolution on rural populations by class and gender, concluding that the wealthy and men have benefited more than the less well-off and women, respectively. Globally, Dash (2021) also noted historical policy-driven mobilization of women into farm work in China post-1949, with a high percentage remaining farmers even in the early 2000s. In India, recent studies indicate that women are major food producers, with a higher percentage of economically active

women (78%) engaged in agriculture compared to men (63%). A significant proportion of female workers (43.56%) are employed as agricultural labourers. This context underscores the critical yet often unacknowledged role of women in agriculture and sets the stage for examining wage discrimination.

However, a critical research gap remains despite the studies on the gender wage gap in Indian agriculture exist (Kundu and Das, 2019), there's a paucity of recent, in-depth empirical studies specifically quantifying and analyzing the extent and determinants of wage discrimination against women agricultural workers at the micro-level in Madurai District. Previous Madurai-specific studies may be older or focus on broader socio-economic conditions rather than a rigorous econometric analysis of wage discrimination. Many existing studies highlight the existence of a wage gap and discuss general contributing factors (occupational segregation, social norms, lack of access to resources), but detailed, region-specific analyses that systematically disentangle the "explained" vs. "unexplained" portions of the wage gap using decomposition techniques are less common. The specific socio-economic and cultural nuances of Madurai District, including its unique cropping patterns, labour market dynamics, and social structures, might influence the nature and extent of discrimination in ways not fully captured by broader national or state-level studies. Furthermore, while the feminization of agriculture is acknowledged, the literature sometimes lacks granular details on how local shifts in agricultural practices, technology adoption, or the implementation of specific government schemes specifically impact gender wage discrimination at the district level. The study's focus on identifying the "factors responsible" for discrimination and paying "special attention to the problem of female labour at home and at the working place" can fill this specificity gap.

The primary objective of this study was to provide a comprehensive understanding of agricultural labourers by examining the socio-economic characteristics of women agricultural labour households in the selected Vadipatti and Melur blocks of Madurai District. The study aimed to analyze the nature and extent of employment among women agricultural labourers in these areas, assess the level of discrimination they face in terms of employment and wage rates, and determine the percentage contribution of women to their family's total income.

### Definition

Wage discrimination against women agricultural workers in Madurai District refers to the unfair practice of paying women lower wages than men for performing the same or equivalent agricultural work. This inequality stems from entrenched gender stereotypes, cultural norms, and systemic social and economic inequalities that diminish the value of women's labour in agriculture. Despite playing a crucial role in the agricultural workforce, women often face wage gaps, limited access to skilled job roles, and poor working conditions. These issues are further intensified by

informal labour arrangements and weak enforcement of labour regulations.

#### Assumptions

Ø Male and female agricultural workers in the Madurai district were assumed to be paid unequally, even though they carried out similar tasks and possessed equivalent skills and experience.

Ø The agricultural workers were expected to provide honest and accurate information about their wages, working conditions, and hours of employment.

Ø In cases where wage discrimination was observed, it was assumed that employer practices were the primary cause, rather than external factors such as education or physical capability.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Madurai District in Tamil Nadu was selected for this study for several compelling reasons. Firstly, it is predominantly an agricultural district, with approximately 76% of its population relying on farming, directly or indirectly, for their livelihood. Critically, women agricultural labourers constitute nearly 30% of the total population, providing ample scope for an intensive analysis of labour issues, particularly those affecting women in agriculture. Finally, the district benefits from numerous government-sponsored schemes aimed at the farm sector, and the availability of irrigation facilities significantly influences employment opportunities and wage rates for farm workers. These variations between irrigated and dry areas led to the strategic selection of Vadipatti and Melur Blocks. Discussions with officials from the Department of Agriculture, Government of Tamil Nadu, confirmed that these blocks are representative of their respective regions, justifying their inclusion. For data collection two villages, each with a population exceeding 3,000 were chosen from each block. From each selected village, 10 women agricultural labour households were chosen using a simple random sampling method. This resulted in a total sample of 100 women labour households, obtained through a multi-stage stratified random sampling technique. Primary data were collected through personal interviews using a specially designed and comprehensive questionnaire that gathered the necessary information from the respondents.

Beyond primary data, region-specific secondary data were gathered from government records, including agricultural census publications. This encompassed information on area, climate, rainfall, land use, land ownership, holding size, irrigation, fertilizer application, high-

yielding varieties, agricultural product prices, crop productivity, labour force composition, wage patterns, and agricultural development schemes. Data for the study was collected primarily between September 2024 and February 2025. Data from sample households were processed and analyzed to meet the study's objectives. Initially, operation-wise daily employment for men and women was estimated, and open unemployment was assessed by comparing actual days worked with the 100 days full employment standard. Daily wage rates for male and female workers were calculated and compared against government-prescribed minimum wages. Women's contribution to family income and challenges in job seeking and wage negotiation were also examined to understand labour market characteristics. Statistical tools such as averages, percentages, ratios, tests of significance, correlation coefficient matrices, and multiple linear regression models were employed. Averages helped determine the percentage contribution of women to total family income, using variables like family size, annual income, savings, borrowings, expenditure, and employment days. Percentage analysis and correlation matrices were used for analyzing women's age, number of activities, and wage discrimination, exploring relationships between employment days, family size, spousal income, and women's wages across both blocks.

In order to find out wage discrimination, the following formula is applied;

$$\text{Wage Discrimination (WD)} = \frac{\text{Male Wage (MW)} - \text{Female Wage (FW)}}{\text{Female Wage (FW)}}$$

To identify the factors, which are affecting Family Income and Women Wage Rate the following Multiple linear regression models were employed:

- $Y = a + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_3 + b_4x_4 + b_5x_5 + b_6x_6 + b_7x_7 + b_8x_8 + u_i$
- $Y = a + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_3 + b_4x_4 + b_5x_5 + b_6x_6 + b_7x_7 + b_8x_8 + b_9x_9 + b_{10}x_{10} + u_i$

Y : The dependent variable

a : The intercept (the value of Y when all independent variable are 0)

$x_1, x_2, x_3$  : The independent variable (also called explanatory or predictor variables)

$b_1, b_2, b_3$  : The regression coefficients for respective independent variables. Each one represents the expected change in Y for a one-unit change in the corresponding  $x_i$  holding other variables constant.

$u_i$  : The error term (also called the disturbance or residual). It accounts for all other factors that affect Y but are not included in the model.

<b>Y=Total Income Family</b>	<b>Y=Women's Total Wage</b>
$X_1$ = Age of women	$X_1$ = Age of women
$X_2$ = Education status	$X_2$ = Education status
$X_3$ = Size of the family	$X_3$ = Size of the family
$X_4$ = Husband's income	$X_4$ = Husband's income
$X_5$ = Wage from agricultural activities	$X_5$ = Wage from agricultural activities
$X_6$ = Wage from non-agricultural activities	$X_6$ = Wage from non-agricultural activities
$X_7$ = Number of days employed in agricultural activities	$X_7$ = Number of days employed in agricultural activities
$X_8$ = Number of days employed in non-agricultural activities	$X_8$ = Number of days employed in non-agricultural activities
	$X_9$ = Total income of the family
	$X_{10}$ = Marital status

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Household characteristics of women in agricultural employment

Table 1 provides the socio - economic characteristics of women agricultural labour households such as size of the family, type of family, caste, religion, marital status, age composition, educational status, nature of occupation, income, savings, indebtedness, assets, liabilities, consumption pattern etc., have also been analysed in the present study.

It shows the distribution of women agricultural labour households according to family size. The average family size of the household in the study area, was maximum 8 and above (nine per cent only). The overall average size of the family was also found to be around five members. However, around 70 per cent of the sample households were having less than 5 members. Another important point that needs to be noted here is that only 9 households 9 per cent out of the 100 sample households, had families of size of 8 and above, indicating that the tendency to have a large family is declining. There was only 22 per cent of the women labour households live in joint family and 78 per cent preferred to live in nuclear type of family. This also shows that the joint family system had vanished, according to changes in life style situation over the years. Was observed that majority of the women agricultural labourers 58 per cent belonged to scheduled caste and the remaining 42 per cent belonged to backward community, which includes Muthuraja, Reddiyars, Vellalars and Chettiar who also engaged as agricultural labourers. They were equally economically backward in the sample blocks of Vadipatti and Melur. Among the sample of 100 women agricultural labourers in Vadipatti and Melur blocks, all of them were Hindus 100 per cent and none of them were Christians and Muslims. Except nine and all the women agricultural labourers were married and living with their husband and children in both the study blocks. The analysis of the types of houses owned by the women agricultural labour households revealed that, of the sample of 100 women agricultural labourers, as high as 54 were found to live in huts (54 per cent) and from remaining 46 per cent, 26 per cent had own tiled houses and 20 per cent owned concrete houses. It is evident from the data that in both the study

blocks of Vadipatti and Melur, the women agricultural labourers were found highest in the age group of 31 to 35 years 37 per cent and second highest 22 per cent found in the age group of 35 to 40 year. This age distribution of women agricultural labourers clearly indicates that women in greater number (37) were young and in the child bearing child rearing age group. The fact that they were occupied in full time, part time employment in the agricultural sector in spite of young children at home and monetary need which drives these women to work. It was found that the female literacy was very low and it was relatively very low among rural women. This was mostly applicable to women agricultural labourers also. Education seemed to be the least consideration in the women agricultural labourers. Nearly 27 per cent of the agricultural labourers had no schooling, 22 per cent had only primary education, while 48 per cent had level of educational attainment up to secondary level. And a very few 3 per cent had education to the maximum of higher secondary level in Vadipatti block. It also found that, in Melur block, none of the women labour in agriculture had the level of educational attainment above secondary education.

It was found that majority 26 per cent of the women agricultural labourers were casual labourers and only 74 per cent were considered as permanent labourers because most of the landlords preferred to employ casual labourers during a particular agricultural operation rather than keeping permanent labourers.

The income from non - agricultural activities was higher than income from agricultural activities in Dindigul, this was because (i) Employment opportunity in construction work was more, (ii) Number of days employed in non-agricultural sector, (iii) Wage rate was high day<sup>-1</sup>, (iv) Hours of work were restricted and (v) Availability of transport facilities made the women labourers to earn more money from non-agricultural activities than from agricultural activities.

Wahyana (1994) reported similar observations from their research findings. It showed that this insightful study shed light on the often-overlooked socio-economic realities of women agricultural laborers. The alarmingly low literacy rates highlighted a significant barrier to upward mobility and access to better opportunities. While many were considered "permanent laborers," the preference for casual

labor by landlords suggested an underlying precariousness in their employment. The observation that non-agricultural activities offered better income in Vadipatti, due to higher wages and better working conditions, strongly suggested a need for diversified livelihood opportunities and skill development for these women, enabling them to transition into more remunerative sectors and improve their overall socio-economic well-being.

#### **Capita<sup>1</sup> wage of women farm labour**

The average household income of women labourers in both the blocks were found to be Rs.36,730/- and in case of average income of both the blocks, it was worked out to be Rs.7,812.5/- (Table 2). It is understood from the table that the average income in Melur block was higher i.e. Rs.7,929/- than Vadipatti block Rs.7,696/-. The reason was the total annual income and as well as the average household income of Melur block was more (Rs.38,060/-) than Vadipatti (Rs.35,400/-). It could be, noted that the household expenditure (yearly) for both the study blocks ranged from Rs. 28,500/- to 29,650/-.

Women played a vital role in the agriculture sector, and working women were also very important in their families because their income was helpful for family expenses and also contributed to economic development (Palani, 2019).

#### **Comparative analysis of male and female wage rates in agricultural activities**

The wage rates of men and women labourers in both the study block are given in Table 3. The data revealed that in Vadipatti block, the wage rate of men labourers was found to be higher when compared to women labourers and the same could be seen in case of Melur block also. The analysis of data indicates that agricultural wages for men and women labourers were to be higher in Vadipatti than in Melur. The difference wages between these two areas might be due to the underdevelopment of the dry region namely Melur, lack of irrigation facility, less cultivation, and less demand for both men and women labourers. Hence, the employment opportunities of them were affected considerably. The analysis with regard to wage rates of men and women labourers showed that those exist sex-wise wage differentials in agricultural sector. It is dealt separation between men and women labourers in each operation. The ploughing operation was excluded because in all the sample blocks, it was invariably performed only by male labourers. Men were doing ploughing and also doing other particular agricultural operations while the female were doing transplanting, weeding, harvesting, winnowing and threshing. This segregation is accompanied by discrimination in wage payments. Though the equal remuneration Act was enacted in 1976, the female agricultural labourers were still paid less than their male colleagues for equal work. They accepted different wages only because they are women. They do not hesitate to work at lower wages under harsh conditions. They slog alongside their men in the field the whole day and they look after the house and children too, with no help forthcoming from the male

members of the family. Most of these labourers occupy the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder. They work for wages because of the economic necessity to supplement the family income. The so called development programmes launched by the government have failed to ameliorate their position. By extracting cheaply the labour of the poor class, by running parallel economic and by subjecting women even to sexual exploitation. The exploitative forces thrive, and life becomes increasingly difficult for those who live on their wages alone. The basic nature of the existing relations in the society cannot be changed.

It is true that agricultural operations were substitutable among men and women, all the operations are often divided into a male specific job are more skilled than the female specific jobs. Even if the same operations are undertaken by both the male and female agricultural, higher wages are paid to male labourers on the assumption that productive capacity of male labourers is greater than of the females, and therefore it becomes difficult to find out how far wage differential is due to differences in productivity and how far it is due to their sexual discrimination. It should therefore be understood that the extremely subtle form of discrimination against agricultural jobs among male and female labourers and consequently the differences between men's and women's occupations which became an important source of wage disparity between the sexes. It is assumed that workers wage rates and occupational positions in agricultural field are likely to be determined more on the basis of productivity or efficiency, even though it means indirectly that men are assumed to be more productive and efficiency, even though it means indirectly that man are assumed to be more productive and efficient than women because of their superior muscular power. Agricultural jobs certainly need different skills. For example ploughing needs some special skill and greater physical strength while transplanting requires a quite different kind of skill and hence regimentation occurs in agricultural fields and that restricts the agricultural labourers employment in particular occupations and fixes different rates of wage for different occupations. Even though men and women do all types of agricultural jobs, and some are specifically done by men (ploughing, manuring and spraying), and some others are done exclusively by women on the assumption that specific skill required to carry out certain agricultural job is found much more in men than in women and vice versa.

Palanikumar and Sathishkumar (2006) stated that the women's empowerment, asserting that entrepreneurship was a key to national progress. It argued that bilateral development, involving both men and women entrepreneurs, was essential to avoid unilateral growth. Echoing Swami Vivekananda, the research concluded that entrepreneurship offered women a vital path to self-reliance and empowerment, especially given the difficulty of securing profitable jobs.

#### **Wage inequality rate**

It is understood from Table 4 that in case of harvesting, the wage discrimination was 42 per cent in the

Vadipatti block than 36 per cent in Melur block. In case of threshing it was found to be 50 per cent and 67 per cent respectively. And in the case of sowing it was found to be 25 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. This shows that, discrimination takes much more subtle forms than paying unequal wages for equal work. Female labour was primarily engaged in specific farm activities such as transplanting, weeding, winnowing, harvesting, sowing, and threshing, whereas male labour was generally involved in tasks like ploughing, manuring, and spreading fertilizer.

The wage differential in agricultural constitutes a serious problem in India due to several factors. The most important factor was that the faun employer are extremely keen on pointing out that labour as a factor of production used in agriculture is not a standard unit and that it has different components cash of which is qualitatively different from the other and hence it was certainly heterogeneous in character and therefore deserves different wage rates. The coefficient of educational status of women was found significant at 10 per cent level.

The agricultural sector historically employed the most women, who were involved in various activities from farming to post-harvest tasks. Despite their significant contributions, these women faced poverty and unequal wages. Their limited mobility often forced them into local jobs, leaving them with a heavy burden of household chores, childcare, and earning an income (Yoganandham, 2021).

#### **Annual income**

The annual average income family from agricultural activities in Vadipatti block was found to be Rs.20,450/- and in Melur block, it was Rs.16,660/- (Table 5). The annual average income family from non-agricultural activities was Rs.14,950/- and Rs.21,400/- respectively in both the blocks. And the total annual average income family was found to be Rs. 35,400/- in cash in Vadipatti and Rs.38,060/- in case of Melur blocks. The income from non-agricultural activities was higher than income from agricultural activities in Dindigul, this might be due to employment opportunity in construction work is more, number of days employed in non-agricultural sector, wage rate is high (day), hours of work are restricted and availability of transport facilities made the women labourers to earn more money from non-agricultural activities than from agricultural activities.

#### **Expenditure patterns of women agricultural labourers: Household and individual perspectives**

The women agricultural labourers were spending more money Rs.15,900/- on non-food expenditure than on food expenditure Rs.12,600/- (Table 6).

#### **Allocation of rural women in agricultural and allied activities workforce**

It is evident from the Table 7 that the number of days employed in agricultural activities by women labourers in Vadipatti was worked out to be 210 days in a year, and in case of Melur it was 185 days in a year. Regarding the women agricultural labourers employed in non agricultural activities in both the blocks, it was observed to be 35 and 73 days in

a year respectively. Taking the two categories together, the total number of days employed in a year was 245 days and 258 days in both the blocks respectively.

#### **Determinants of income and wages: a block-wise regression analysis**

The results show from Table 8 that the total income of the households, had negative relationship with age of women ( $X_1$ ), education status ( $X_2$ ), wage from agricultural activities ( $X_5$ ), number of days employed in agricultural activities ( $X_7$ ) and positive relationship with the size of the family ( $X_3$ ), husband's income ( $X_4$ ), wage from non-agricultural activities ( $X_6$ ), number of days employed in non-agricultural activities ( $X_8$ ). It is notable that except age of women all other variables had insignificant results. The  $R^2$  value was very poor, that was 0.298, it indicates a poor model fit.

The combined results of the multiple linear regression model indicate that family size, number of days employed in non-agricultural activities, and husband's income were major determinants of total family income. An increase of one member in the family size corresponds to an increase of Rs. 159 in total family income, while an additional day worked in non-agricultural activities increased in Rs.42 in total family income. Similarly, higher husband's income contributed to an increase in the overall family income.

The age of women, their education status, and the number of days worked in agricultural activities were negatively affected the total family income. Specifically, a one-year increase in a woman's age leads to decrease of Rs.95 in total family income, and similarly, a one-year increase in education status led to a decrease of Rs.144 in total family income.

From the Multiple Regression Analysis, it is identified that the size of the family is an important determinant of total family income. One unit increase in size of the family leads to increase in Rs.340 total family income of the year. In husband's income, number of day's employed in non-agricultural activities were also lead an increase in total income of the family in Vadipatti block.

Table 9 presents multiple linear regression models for the Melur block. The results indicate that, age of women ( $X_1$ ), educational status ( $X_2$ ), wage from agricultural activities ( $X_5$ ), number of days employed in agricultural activities( $X_7$ ) gave negative impact on total income of the family.

In this block also, educated women got the same wage even sometimes got lower wage than uneducated women's labour. This might be due to lack of field experience in agricultural activities.

Husband's income ( $X_4$ ), wage from non-agricultural activities ( $X_6$ ), number of days employed in non-agricultural activities ( $X_8$ ) showed a positive impact on total family income. It indicates that husband's income played a dominant role that means men's are breadwinner of the families in the study area. Like this, the variables, wage from non-agricultural activities had a positive impact on total income of the family. However, all the coefficients were

insignificant and  $R^2$  value was very low that was 0.107 for Melur block.

From the multiple regression analysis, it may be concluded that the size of the family, husband's income, number of days employed in non-agricultural activities are the major determinants of total family income in Melur block. A one-unit increase in family size resulted in an annual increase of Rs. 450 in total family income. Similarly, each additional day worked in non-agricultural activities leads to a Rs. 20 increase in the family's annual income in the Melur block.

#### Employment

Agricultural sector plays a key role in providing employment to the landless labourers in rural areas. Getting employment from the agricultural sector depends upon the agricultural development of the region (irrigation availability, soil condition, climate, credit facilities etc.) Usually commercial crops dominated regions gives higher days of employment to the rural people than the region of food crops.

Women are generally found in the unorganized sector, due to the flexibility of work in this sector and easy into it. Women labourers became concentrated in occupation that usually require less skill and that have low wages than male dominated occupation. The present study examined the nature and extent of women's employment in both agricultural and non-agricultural activities, focusing on the number of days they were employed annually in these sectors, including comparisons between the seasonal and off-season periods.

Based on the study findings, the authors proposed the following recommendations to enhance and support women empowerment.

- Enforcing the Equal Remuneration Act is crucial for tackling gender-based wage discrimination. Though it requires a large administrative setup and higher costs, it is vital to eliminate gender injustice.
- Wage rates can be increased by shifting surplus labour from agriculture to other sectors, creating labour scarcity in agriculture and thus driving wages up.
- Government should encourage rural entrepreneurship by offering subsidies, tax holidays, and promoting small-scale industries in rural areas to absorb surplus labour.
- Employment programs like the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) should be effectively utilized. Providing training for rural women labourers in areas like Vadipatti is crucial.
- Encourage women to join Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and engage in cottage industries, which provide financial support, build unity, and help women assert rights during off-seasons.

To conclude, this study provides valuable insights into the surveyed individuals, their livelihoods, and the marketing challenges they encounter. To enhance the economic well-being of this diverse group, policymakers and organizations should take these findings into account and design targeted interventions that address their specific needs.

**Table 1. Household roster of the women agricultural labour**

Indicators	Cluster / Grouping	Number of households		Frequency	% distribution
		$M_M$	$M_K$		
Categories of family	Joint family	10	12	22	22
	Nuclear family	40	38	78	78
Caste	Scheduled class	31	27	58	58
	Backward class	19	23	42	42
Types of house	Hut	23	31	54	54
	Tiles	16	10	26	26
	Concrete	11	9	20	20
Age groups (in years)	20-25	4	5	9	9
	26-30	9	5	14	14
	31-35	21	16	37	37
	36-40	8	14	22	22
	41-45	5	4	9	9
	46-50	2	4	6	6
	51-55	1	2	3	3
Educational Status	Illiterate	12	15	27	27
	Primary	9	13	22	22
	Secondary	26	22	48	48
	High secondary	3	-	3	3
Nature of Occupation	Permanent	14	12	26	26
	Temporary	-	-	-	-
	Casual	36	38	74	74

Source: Primary data

**Table 2. Annual average income and capita<sup>-1</sup> income of the women agricultural labour house-holds**

Sl. No.	Sample blocks	Average household income	Average capita <sup>-1</sup> income in Rs. year <sup>-1</sup>
1.	Vadipatti	35400	7696
2.	Melur	38060	7929
	Total	36730	7812.5

Source: Primary data

**Table 3. Wage difference between men and women labourers in each agricultural operation in study block**

Sl. No.	Variables	Sample block			
		Vadipatti		Melur	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
1.	Ploughing	200	-	200	-
2.	Sowing	150	120	130	100
3.	Transplanting	-	100	150	100
4.	Weeding	-	80	-	75
5.	Harvesting	170	120	150	110
6.	Pesticides	150	-	150	-
7.	Winnowing	-	120	-	120
8.	Threshing	150	100	150	90

Source: Primary data

**Table 4. Percentage of wage discrimination**

Sl. No.	Types of work	Wage discrimination (FW)		Percentage (FW)	
		M <sub>M</sub>	M <sub>K</sub>	M <sub>M</sub>	M <sub>K</sub>
1	Sowing	0.25	0.30	25	30
2	Harvesting	0.42	0.36	42	36
3	Threshing	0.50	0.67	50	67

Source: Primary data

**Table 5. Economic indicators of household in women agricultural labour**

Indicators	Cluster / Grouping	Amount (in Rs)		Percentage	
		M <sub>M</sub>	M <sub>K</sub>	M <sub>M</sub>	M <sub>K</sub>
Annual Income family (in Rs.)	Income from agriculture	20450	16660	58	44
	Income from non- agriculture	14950	21400	42	56
Annual expenditure family (in Rs.)	Food expenditure	12600	13600	44	46
	Non- food expenditure	15900	16050	56	54
Sources of savings (in Rs.)	Cash in hand	3500	4000	64	57
	Chit fund	2000	3000	36	43

Source: Primary data

**Table 6. Annual average expenditure and capita<sup>-1</sup> expenditure of the women agricultural labourers**

Sl. No.	Sample blocks	Average household expenditure	Average capita <sup>-1</sup> income in Rs. year <sup>-1</sup>
1.	Vadipatti	28500	6196
2.	Melur	29650	6177
	Average	29075	6186.5

Source: Primary data

**Table 7. Employment distribution of women agricultural labourers in agricultural and non-agricultural activities**

Sl. No. Variable	No. of days employed		Percentage of employed days in a year	
	$M_M$	$M_K$	$M_M$	$M_K$
1. Number of days employed in Agricultural activities	210	185	86	72
2. Number of days non- employed in Agricultural activities	35	73	14	28
Total number of days employed	245	258	100	100

Source: Primary data

**Table 8. Results of multiple regression analysis in both the study block**

Variables	$a$	$b$	$SE_b$	Sig	$R^2$
Total Income of the family	33383.650				0.298
Age of women		-95.081	91.725	.000	
Education status		-144.593	101.002	.156	
Size of the family		159.958	337.806	.637	
Husband's income		.025	.105	.814	
Wage from agricultural activities		-.035	.102	.732	
Wage from non-agricultural activities		.166	.119	.176	
Number of days employed in agricultural activities		-12.563	13.189	.343	
Number of days employed in non-agricultural activities		42.206	25.229	.098	

**Table 9. Results of multiple regression model in vadipatti block**

Variables	$a$	$b$	$SE_b$	Sig	$R^2$
Total Income of the family	31910.187				0.107
Age of women		-145.895	108.503	.186	
Education status		-45.113	123.558	.717	
Size of the family		453.257	421.301	.288	
Husband's income		.058	.140	.679	
Wage from agricultural activities		-.015	.250	.952	
Wage from non-agricultural activities		.198	.163	.230	
Number of days employed in agricultural activities		-28.998	35.924	.424	
Number of days employed in non-agricultural activities		20.158	54.785	.715	

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