



Gender Wage Gap among Casual Workers in India: A PLFS-Based Descriptive Analysis (2020–2024)

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to examine gender wage gap and income inequality of casual workers in informal sector of India. The study is based on secondary data. The data is studied with the help of simple percentage, tables and bar graph. An analysis of data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) reveals that male casual workers engaged in non-public works consistently earned higher wages than females throughout the four-year period that is from 2020-21 to 2023-24, underscoring the persistence of gender wage inequality in India's informal sector. The estimated gender wage gap is approximately 35 percent, indicating persistent inequality despite nominal wage growth.

Keywords: Wage Differential, Casual Workers, Informal Sector, inequality

Introduction:

Informal workers consist of those working in the unorganized sectors or households, excluding regular workers with social security benefits provided by the employers and the workers in the formal sector without any employment and social security benefits provided by the employers (National Commission for Enterprises in the Un-Organised Sector, 2007). This paper attempts to analyze gender wage gap and income inequality of casual workers in informal sector of India. A careful examination is conducted on analyzing the persistent gender gap in wage earning per day from casual labour work other than public works in current weekly status for India on quarterly basis from 2020-21 to 2023-24. The objective of the paper is to examine the extent and persistence of gender-based wage differentials among casual workers in India's informal sector using PLFS data from 2020-21 to 2023-24.

Methodology and Data Source:

In this study, we incorporate descriptive statistics as integral components of our data presentation and analysis methods. The paper is based on secondary data obtained from some reputed sources, such as, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) published by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation (MoSPI).

The analysis uses quarterly data on average daily wage earnings from casual labour work other than public works, based on the Current Weekly Status (CWS) approach. The data covers a four-year period from 2020–21 to 2023–24, combining rural and urban sectors at the all-India level.

Table 1: Average Wage Earning (Rs.0.00) per day from Casual Labour work other than public work in CWS for India

	Rural + Urban		
	Male	Female	Person
July-Sept, 2020	340	218	314
Oct-Dec, 2020	341	221	311
Jan-Mar, 2021	352	229	322
April-June, 2021	357	233	327
July-Sept, 2021	392	266	364
Oct-Dec, 2021	401	267	373
Jan-Mar, 2022	406	264	376
April-June, 2022	408	272	383
July-Sept, 2022	443	265	415
Oct-Dec, 2022	428	276	394
Jan-Mar, 2023	429	286	398
April-June, 2023	432	291	403
July-Sept, 2023	439	293	404
Oct-Dec, 2023	451	293	416
Jan-Mar, 2024	451	293	419
April-June, 2024	459	306	433

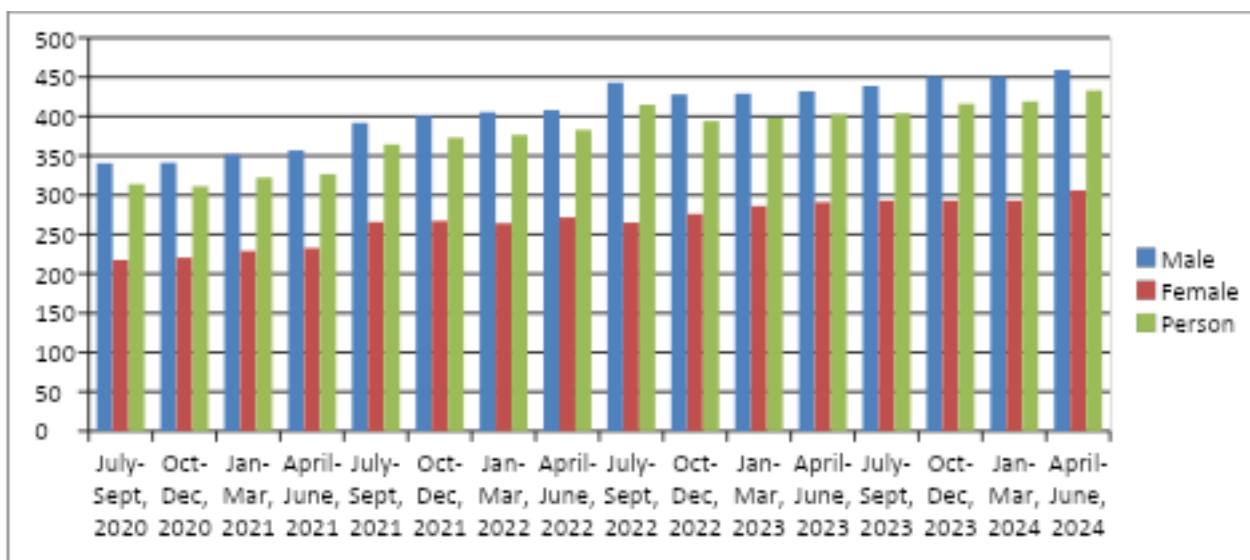
Source: PLFS (2020-21 TO 2023-24), MoSPI, Government of India

Based on the Table 1, the findings indicate that in 2020–21, the average daily wage of male casual workers engaged in non-public works was ₹347.50, whereas female workers earned only ₹224.94. In 2021–22, wages increased for both groups, rising to ₹400.76 for males and ₹267.18 for females. Despite this increase, a substantial gender wage gap persisted. Moreover, during this inflationary period, daily wages remained inadequate to meet basic living requirements, with female workers being disproportionately disadvantaged.

In 2022–23, the average daily wage further increased to ₹433 for male casual workers and ₹279.5 for female workers. A marginal rise was again observed in 2023–24, with wages reaching ₹450 for males and ₹296.2 for females. However, these increments did not translate into a narrowing of the gender wage gap, which continued unabated.

At the national level, male casual labourers engaged in non-public works consistently earned higher wages than their female counterparts throughout the four-year period, highlighting the persistence and structural nature of gender-based wage inequality in India's informal sector. It is found that in 2022–23, the average daily wage for male casual workers (other than public works) was ₹433, while female workers earned only ₹279.5. From 2022–23 to 2023–24, a slight increase is observed for both male and female casual workers. The average daily wage increased from ₹433 to ₹450 for males and from ₹279.5 to ₹296.2 for females. However, the gender wage gap continues to persist. At the national level as well, male casual worker engaged in non-public works consistently earned higher wages than females throughout the four-year period.

Figure 1: Average Wage Earning (Rs.0.00) per day from Casual Labour work other than public work in CWS for India



Source: PLFS (2020-21 TO 2023-24), MoSPI, Government of India

Figure 1 illustrates the trend in average daily wage earnings of casual workers engaged in informal sector activities other than public works in India, based on current weekly status (CWS) data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey for the period 2020–21 to 2023–24. The figure presents a comparative view of wage movements for male and female workers, combining both rural and urban areas.

The graph clearly demonstrates that throughout the entire study period, male casual workers consistently earned higher average daily wages than female casual workers. While wages for both genders show a gradual upward trend over time, the gap between male and female earnings remains persistent across all quarters. This indicates that overall wage growth in the informal sector has not been accompanied by a corresponding reduction in gender-based wage inequality.

During the initial phase of the period under study (2020–21), the wage differential is already pronounced, with male workers earning substantially more than female workers. Although both male and female wages increased in the subsequent years, particularly after 2021–22, the rate of increase for female workers remained insufficient to close the existing gap. In several quarters, the absolute difference in wages either remained stable or widened, suggesting limited convergence between male and female earnings.

The figure further reveals that short-term fluctuations in wages—possibly reflecting seasonal employment patterns or macroeconomic conditions—affected both male and female workers in a similar manner. However, these fluctuations did not alter the overall structure of wage inequality. Female workers consistently remained clustered at the lower end of the wage scale, highlighting their continued vulnerability within the informal labour market.

Overall, Figure 1 underscores the structural and persistent nature of the gender wage gap among casual workers in India's informal sector. Despite periodic increases in nominal wages for both genders, female casual workers continue to face systematic wage disadvantages, emphasizing the need for targeted policy

interventions aimed at promoting wage equity and improving employment conditions in the informal economy.

Descriptive statistics analysis supplemented by Wage Gap Percentage method as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Wage Gap Percentage} &= [(\text{Average Male Pay} - \text{Average Female Pay}) / \text{Average Male Pay}] \times 100 \\ &= [(408.06 - 267.06) / 408.06] \times 100 \\ &= (141 / 408.06) \times 100 \\ &= 34.56\end{aligned}$$

Therefore, the Gender Gap Percentage is approximately 35 percent for the period 2020-21 to 2023-24.

Conclusion and Suggestions:

The present study examined the gender wage differential among casual workers engaged in informal sector activities other than public works in India, using quarterly data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for the period 2020–21 to 2023–24. The analysis, based on simple descriptive tools such as tables and graphical representation, reveals the persistence of a significant gender wage gap throughout the study period.

The findings clearly indicate that male casual workers consistently earned higher average daily wages than their female counterparts across all quarters and years considered. Although there was a gradual increase in nominal wages for both male and female casual workers over time, these increases did not result in a meaningful reduction in the gender wage gap. Female workers continued to remain at a disadvantage, reflecting the structural and systemic nature of wage inequality in India's informal labour market.

The persistence of gender-based wage disparities, even during periods of overall wage growth, highlights the limited effectiveness of market forces alone in addressing inequality in the informal sector. Factors such as occupational segregation, societal norms, unequal access to better-paying work, lower bargaining power, and the absence of social security and labour protections are likely contributors to the continued wage disadvantage faced by female casual workers.

The study underscores the need for targeted policy interventions aimed at reducing gender wage inequality in the informal sector. Strengthening labour market regulations, promoting skill development and employment opportunities for women, ensuring equal remuneration for equal work, and expanding social protection measures for informal workers are essential steps toward achieving wage equity.

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