

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR- 58789

Title: Beyond Employment: A Multidimensional Analysis of Gender Inequality and Women's Empowerment in India.

Recommendation:

Accept as it is

Accept after minor revision.....

Accept after major revision

Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality			✓	
Techn. Quality				✓
Clarity			✓	
Significance	✓			

Reviewer's ID: JPR- 212

Detailed Reviewer's Report

General Assessment

This paper addresses a critically important topic—the multidimensional nature of gender inequality and women's empowerment in India—and demonstrates awareness of key theoretical frameworks, particularly Kabeer's (1999) resources-agency-achievements model. The paper correctly identifies that employment alone is insufficient for women's empowerment and that multiple dimensions (education, decision-making, safety, digital access) must be considered. The attention to policy history, attitudes toward the girl child, gender-based violence, and economic participation shows a broad understanding of the subject.

However, the paper suffers from significant methodological and structural weaknesses that prevent it from making a substantial contribution. The most critical issue is the absence of any original empirical analysis—the paper promises a "multidimensional analysis" but delivers only a descriptive literature review with secondary data presented without analysis. The objectives and research questions are stated but not systematically addressed. The paper reads as a general overview or conceptual paper rather than the empirical study implied by the title and abstract. Additionally, there are serious issues with citation quality, referencing consistency, factual accuracy, and writing clarity that require substantial revision.

Strengths

- Important and Timely Topic:** Gender inequality and women's empowerment in India is a subject of significant academic, policy, and practical importance. The paper engages with current national indicators (NITI Aayog SDG scores, PLFS data) and policy developments.
- Multidimensional Perspective:** The paper correctly emphasizes that women's empowerment cannot be reduced to a single indicator like employment or literacy. The recognition that employment quality, income control, decision-making, and safety are all essential is a strength.
- Theoretical Grounding:** The use of Kabeer's (1999) resources-agency-achievements framework provides a sound theoretical foundation for understanding empowerment as a process rather than a binary state.
- Policy History Coverage:** The detailed discussion of Five-Year Plans and their evolution in addressing women's issues provides useful historical context.
- Attention to the Girl Child and Violence:** The paper highlights critical issues (sex-selective abortion, female feticide, trafficking, domestic violence) that are essential to any discussion of women's empowerment in India.

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6. **Broad Literature Engagement:** The paper draws on a range of sources including Duflo (2012), Jayachandran (2015), Anderson and Eswaran (2009), and Field, Jayachandran and Pande (2010), demonstrating awareness of key theoretical and empirical contributions.

Areas Requiring Revision

Major Issues

1. No Original Empirical Analysis (Critical)

The paper's title, abstract, and introduction promise a "multidimensional analysis" of gender inequality and women's empowerment. The abstract describes "A study of the evolution of development and the empowerment of women in India." The objectives state the study will "examine the nature, dimensions and determinants of gender disparity and the empowerment of women." The methodology section states: "This study will use descriptive and analytic methods of research in order to examine the essence of gender inequality and women empowerment."

However, the paper contains no original analysis. There is no primary data collection, no systematic analysis of secondary data, no statistical testing, no regression models, no multivariate analysis—nothing that constitutes "analysis" in a research sense. The paper presents:

- A descriptive review of policy history (Five-Year Plans)
- A brief table on sex ratios (with incomplete data)
- A figure on crimes against women (without analysis)
- A general discussion of issues

Required Action: The authors must either:

- **Option A (Preferred):** Conduct and present original empirical analysis using secondary data (NFHS, PLFS, NCRB, Census) with appropriate statistical methods (descriptive statistics, regression, or other quantitative techniques). This would align with the stated objectives.
- **Option B:** Revise the title, abstract, objectives, and methodology to clearly state this is a **conceptual/theoretical review paper** or a **policy analysis paper**, not an empirical study. The claims of "analysis" must be removed.

Without addressing this fundamental issue, the paper cannot be considered a research article suitable for publication.

2. Objectives and Research Questions Are Not Addressed

The paper states three objectives and three research questions:

Objectives:

1. To assess the linkage between public expenditure and women empowerment.
2. To examine the relationship between women's attitude towards girl child and equality constraints.

Research Questions:

1. What are the major dimensions of gender inequality experienced by women?
2. What is the level of women's economic, social and decision-making empowerment?
3. How does employment and income generation influence women's empowerment?

Problem: The paper does not systematically address any of these. There is no analysis of the linkage between public expenditure and empowerment (Objective 1). There is no analysis of attitudes toward the girl child (Objective 2) beyond a descriptive paragraph. The research questions are not answered with evidence—they are described qualitatively but not analyzed.

Required Action: The paper must be restructured to explicitly address each objective and research question with supporting evidence and analysis. Alternatively, the objectives and research questions should be revised to reflect the paper's actual scope.

3. Methodological Section is Inadequate

The methodology section (lines 199-209) states:

"This study will use descriptive and analytic methods of research in order to examine the essence of gender inequality and women empowerment... Relevant secondary data are obtained from authentic sources such as the Census of India, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), National Family Health Survey (NFHS), National Statistical Office (NSO), NITI Aayog, Ministry of Women and Child Development and other official Government of India publications."

Problems:

- The methodology is described in the **future tense** ("will use"), suggesting the study is planned but not yet conducted.

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- There is no description of **how** the data will be analyzed (e.g., what statistical techniques, what software).
- There is no sample description, analytical framework, or variable specification.
- The methodology does not justify why specific data sources are appropriate.
- There is no mention of how the "multidimensional" analysis will be operationalized.

Required Action: Provide a detailed methodology section including:

- Data sources and time periods
- Variables and their operationalization
- Analytical techniques (e.g., descriptive statistics, regression, factor analysis, etc.)
- Software used for analysis
- Justification for chosen methods

4. Data Presentation is Incomplete and Unanalyzed

Table 1 (Sex Ratio): The table is incomplete and problematic:

- The data are presented without clear column headings
- The years appear to be a jumble: "1901 972 1911 964 1921 955 1931 950 1941 945 1951 946 1961 941 1971 930 1981 933 1991 945 2001 927 2011 914"
- The source is listed as "Census, Government of India" but the specific Census report is not cited
- The data are not analyzed (no trend analysis, no interpretation beyond a brief description)

Figure 2 (Crime Against Women): The figure is not included in the manuscript. It is referenced (line 287) but not present. The figure is described as showing a rise in crimes from 2010-2019, but the data are not analyzed.

Required Action:

- Present Table 1 in a properly formatted table with clear rows and columns
- Analyze the sex ratio trend with appropriate statistics (percentage change over time, regional variation if available)
- Include Figure 2 or describe the data in a table if the figure cannot be included
- Analyze crime data with appropriate descriptive statistics

5. The Paper is Not a Coherent Research Article

The paper reads as a collection of disconnected sections rather than a unified research article. The paper moves from:

- Abstract and Introduction
- Literature Review (with some original sources)
- Research Gap
- Methodology (future tense)
- Analysis (policy history, discussion of girl child, violence, economic participation)
- Conclusion

Problems:

- The "Analysis" section does not analyze data—it describes policy history and issues
- The "Literature Review" section is very brief (lines 139-192) and should be more substantial
- The "Research Gap" section is a continuation of the literature review rather than a separate section
- The paper has no "Findings" or "Results" section
- The "Conclusion" is a brief summary without synthesizing findings

Required Action: Restructure the paper to follow the standard research article format:

1. Introduction (with clear research questions)
2. Literature Review (comprehensive)
3. Theoretical Framework
4. Methodology (detailed, past tense for completed research)
5. Results/Findings (organized by research question)
6. Discussion
7. Conclusion (with implications and limitations)

6. Inaccurate Statement About Employment Rates

Line 56 states: "The percentage of employed women in India increased from 22.9% in 2018 to 35.3% in 2025."

Problem: The paper is being written/sourced in 2026. The 2025 figure may be a projection or from a specific survey, but the source is not cited. This is a significant factual claim without attribution. Additionally, the methodology section claims the study will use "secondary data" but does not cite the specific source of this employment figure.

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Required Action: Provide the exact source of employment data and ensure the figure is accurate and current.

7. Serious Reference and Citation Problems

A. Inconsistent Author Names:

- Reference list shows "Anderson, S., & Eswaran, M." but the text refers to "Anderson and Eswaran (2009)"
- "Pande, R." appears multiple times with different years (2001, 2008, 2014, 2016) and the references have inconsistent titles

B. Incomplete References:

- Reference "Ahuja, R. (1987). Crime against women. South Asia Books." - This is a book but no publisher location is provided.
- Reference "Desai, M. (1999). Does India need new politics? ICRIER." - Incomplete.
- Reference "Dolan, M. (1993). Global economic transformational ndless developed countries. In R. Slater et al. (Eds.), Global transformation and the Third World. Lynne Rienner Publishers." - Typo in title.
- Reference "Flavia, A. (1988). Violence in the family: Vibebeating. In Women in Indian society: A reader (pp.151-166)." - Editor(s) not specified.
- Reference "Jigging, J. (1986). Gender-related impacts and the work of the International Agricultural Center. Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)." - Is this the correct author name?

C. Uncited References: Several references in the bibliography are not cited in the text:

- Agrawal et al. (1996)
- Desai (1999)
- Dolan (1993)
- Flavia (1988)
- Gibson (1994)
- Jigging (1986)
- Johnson & Johnson (2001)
- Kabeer (1994)

D. Outdated References:

- Pande (2001, 2008, 2014, 2016) - Some sources are 15-20 years old; more recent sources should be prioritized
- Ahuja (1987) - Outdated
- Flavia (1988) - Outdated

Required Action:

- Standardize all references to a consistent format (e.g., APA 7th edition)
- Verify all author names and titles
- Include only references that are cited in the text
- Update outdated sources where possible
- Provide complete bibliographic information for all sources

8. Over-Reliance on a Single Author (Pande)

The paper cites "Pande" (presumably Rekha Pande) 7 times across the references (2001, 2008, 2014, 2016) and multiple times in the text. While Pande has contributed to this field, the paper would benefit from broader engagement with other scholars. Additional contemporary scholars on gender in India include:

- Naila Kabeer (already cited but could be engaged more)
- Esther Duflo (already cited)
- Seema Jayachandran (already cited)
- Martha Chen (on informal economy and gender)
- Jeemol Unni (on labour markets)
- Bina Agarwal (on land rights and gender)

Required Action: Broaden the literature engagement to include more scholars and recent publications (post-2020).

9. Insufficient Engagement with Contemporary Debates

The paper does not engage with several important contemporary debates in Indian gender studies:

- The impact of COVID-19 on women's employment and economic empowerment
- The gender digital divide and its implications
- The role of self-help groups (SHGs) in women's empowerment
- The impact of the Women's Reservation Bill (2023) on political participation

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- The economic implications of unpaid care work and its measurement
- Intersectionality (caste, class, religion, region) in women's empowerment

Required Action: Expand the literature review to engage with these contemporary debates.

10. No Discussion of Intersectionality

The paper discusses gender inequality in broad terms but does not address how **caste, class, religion, and region** interact with gender to shape women's experiences. Women from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and minority communities face distinct and compounded forms of discrimination. Without an intersectional analysis, the paper misses a critical dimension of gender inequality in India.

Required Action: Incorporate intersectional analysis, at least in the discussion section, to acknowledge that women's experiences of empowerment vary significantly by social location.

11. Grammatical Errors and Awkward Phrasing

The paper contains numerous grammatical issues that affect readability:

- Line 12: "women were involved in the design" - the antecedent is unclear
- Line 15: "Their work has also transformed our perspective on development" - "their" is unclear
- Line 23: "social norms, division of labour, control over resources, unpaid care work, discrimination and violence" - run-on list
- Line 38: "restructuring the very system that maintains the cycle of gender inequality" - good phrasing but should be supported with analysis
- Line 47: "domestic disparities in household work" - redundant
- Line 75-78: "the woman may be earning money, but may not have much control over the utilization of this money" - awkward
- Line 105: "The study is significant because it examines gender inequality and women's empowerment as interconnected and multidimensional issues" - repetitive
- Lines 141-143: "It makes for a better analysis of structure since inequality based on gender in developing countries is due to not just underdevelopment, but also culture of the society" - awkward and unclear
- Lines 216-217: "As a result of anticipated growth, expenditures on women and children have consistently increased over the last sixty years" - which growth? This is unclear.
- Line 267: "Despite the girl child's efforts, most of them go unnoticed" - unclear referent

Required Action: Thorough copy-editing is needed throughout the manuscript.

Minor Issues

12. Inconsistent Use of Terminology

The paper uses "women" and "female" interchangeably. It also uses "women empowerment" and "women's empowerment" inconsistently. Standardize to "women's empowerment" throughout.

13. Figures and Tables Not Referenced Consistently

- Table 1 is referenced but the data are presented in a single line, not as a proper table
- Figure 2 is referenced but not included
- The table and figure numbering jumps (the paper has Table 1 and Figure 2 but no Figure 1)

14. Missing Current Data

The paper cites:

- NITI Aayog SDG score up to 2023-24
- NCRB data up to 2019
- PLFS and NFHS data but without specific years or analysis
- Sex ratio data up to 2011

Required Action: Include the most recent available data (NFHS-5, 2019-21; PLFS 2022-23; NCRB 2022, if available) and conduct appropriate analysis.

15. The "Hypothesized Relationship" Model is Not Operationalized

Lines 128-131 present:

"Education + Employment + Income + Resources + Decision-making + Social Participation + Safety + Digital Access → Greater Agency and Empowerment → Reduction in Gender Inequality."

This is a useful conceptual model but it is not operationalized or tested in the paper. The paper should explain how this model informs the analysis and whether the data support it.

16. Inadequate Discussion of Policy Implications

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The paper mentions several policies (Five-Year Plans, the National Commission for Women, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Panchayati Raj) but does not critically evaluate their effectiveness. The paper could benefit from:

- A discussion of policy implementation gaps
- Evaluation of flagship programs (Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Mahila E-Haat, etc.)
- A comparison of states with better vs. worse gender outcomes

17. Missing Limitations Section

The paper does not acknowledge its limitations (theoretical, methodological, or empirical). This is essential for any research article.

Specific Suggestions

1. **Clarify the Paper's Contribution:** The abstract states the paper "provides" a study, but it is unclear what is new. What does this paper add beyond existing reviews? The authors should clearly articulate their unique contribution.
2. **Engage with the "Empowerment as Process" Framework:** Kabeer (1999) is cited but not fully integrated into the analysis. The paper could use this framework to organize the findings (Resources, Agency, Achievements) and show how these dimensions are operationalized in the Indian context.
3. **Add Regional and State-Level Analysis:** India is highly diverse. The paper should acknowledge that women's empowerment varies significantly by state (e.g., Kerala vs. Bihar) and analyze these differences.
4. **Incorporate the Role of Culture:** Jayachandran (2015) emphasizes cultural norms in gender inequality. The paper could expand this discussion and analyze how cultural factors interact with economic development.
5. **Strengthen the Conclusion:** The conclusion is brief and does not synthesize findings or offer concrete policy recommendations. It should:
 - Summarize key findings
 - Address each research question
 - Propose specific policy recommendations
 - Suggest directions for future research
 - Acknowledge limitations
6. **Add a Discussion of Men and Masculinity:** Gender equality is not only a women's issue—it requires changes in male attitudes, behaviours, and social norms. The paper could briefly touch on this.
7. **Include More Recent Statistics:** Update all statistics to the most recent available data. For example:
 - Sex ratio data (Census 2011 is the latest; provisional 2024 data may be available)
 - Crime data (NCRB 2022 or 2023)
 - Employment data (PLFS 2022-23 or 2023-24)
 - Education data (Unified District Information System for Education, UDISE+)
8. **Professionalize the References:** The references currently have a mix of citation styles (APA-like but inconsistent). The journal likely has a preferred style (e.g., APA 7th). The authors should follow this consistently.

Questions for the Authors

1. **What is the original contribution of this paper?** The paper covers well-trodden ground on gender inequality and women's empowerment in India. What does this paper offer that is new?
2. **What specific data were analyzed?** The methodology states secondary data will be used, but no data analysis is presented. Can the authors provide a detailed analysis plan and results?
3. **Who is the intended audience?** The paper seems targeted at policy audiences but uses academic terminology. Clarifying the audience would help with revision.
4. **Why are the 2025 employment figures cited without a source?** What is the source of the 35.3% employment rate for women in 2025?
5. **Why are the references so heavily focused on the work of Rekha Pande?** While Pande is a relevant scholar, a more balanced literature review would strengthen the paper.
6. **How does this paper engage with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality)?** The paper mentions SDG 5 briefly (line 120) but does not analyze India's performance against SDG indicators systematically.

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7. **Was this paper originally written as an essay or book chapter?** The structure and writing style suggest it may have been adapted from a different format. If so, the authors should revise it substantially to meet the standards of a research article.

Ethical Considerations

Incomplete Citation: Several sources in the reference list are not cited in the text. The authors should verify all citations and ensure they are integrated appropriately.

Dated Statistics: Some statistics are very old (e.g., sex ratio data ending in 2011). The authors should use the most recent available data and be transparent about data limitations.

Conclusion

This paper addresses a critically important topic and demonstrates familiarity with key theoretical frameworks and policy history. However, in its current form, it does not meet the standards of a research article due to the complete absence of original empirical analysis, the failure to address stated objectives and research questions, inadequate methodology, incomplete data presentation, and serious citation problems.

The paper is currently best characterized as a **descriptive review or policy overview** rather than a research article. The authors have two options:

1. **Major Revision:** Conduct and present original empirical analysis using secondary data, restructure the paper to follow standard research article format, address all objectives and research questions systematically, and correct citation issues. This is the preferred option.
2. **Reframing:** Substantially revise the title, abstract, introduction, and methodology to clearly position the paper as a **conceptual or policy review paper**. Remove claims of "analysis" and reframe the contribution as a synthesis of existing knowledge. Even with this approach, the paper would still require significant revisions to improve structure, engagement with contemporary debates, and citation quality.

Given the paper's potential relevance, the recommended course is to pursue Option 1: conduct and present original empirical analysis to transform the paper into a research article with genuine contributions. If the authors choose Option 2, the paper should be submitted as a review or conceptual paper, not as an original research article.

Recommendation: Accept after major revision (with substantial work required to meet publication standards)

Reviewer's Confidence: Low-Medium (the paper's strengths are conceptual, but the lack of empirical analysis is a fundamental limitation)

Reviewer's Expertise: Gender and Development Studies, Labour Economics, Quantitative Methods, South Asian Studies