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# UNIT 1 INTERNATIONAL DEBATES

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Historically, women in both Eastern and Western societies were viewed as the weaker sex and this view placed women in the category of a lesser being. Even today women in most of the world are less well-nourished than men, less healthy, more vulnerable to physical violence and sexual abuse and less paid. They are much less likely than men to be literate, and still less likely to have pre-professional or technical education. Should they attempt to enter the workplace and political life they face greater obstacles from family members, discrimination in hiring, and sexual harassment. In many nations women are not full equals under the law. Often burdened with the full responsibility for housework and child care, they lack opportunities for entertainment and imagination. In all these ways, unequal social and political circumstances give women unequal human capabilities. However, marked changes are discernible in the status of women as can be gleaned from their increasing participation in almost all existing occupations.

Let us cast a look at reading the objectives of this Unit.

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## 1.2 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- Analyse why women are considered weaker sex and have a less privileged position in the society as compared to men;
- Examine reasons for women facing discrimination at workplace and make get lesser returns for the same work;

- Situate women *vis a vis* their work participation during pre-industrial, industrial and modern periods;
- Examine the manner in which cultural analyse perception of women's work varies; and
- Critique women's work and their concomitant position as argued by different organisations, groups and scholars.

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### 1.3 ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF WOMEN: LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS

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The situation vis-a-vis women's paid work is changing with the initiative of international and national bodies and the resultant change in the overall perception of women. Today we have a high percentage of women as professionals industrialists, entrepreneurs, ministers and judges. We also have the increasing rate of female university graduates in the world. The economic well-being of women is often used as an indicator of the overall advancement of a society.

The integration of women into the labour force has meant less dependence on men. The integration of women has also widened the intellectual pool in social, political and economic debate. Not to mention that the appointment of women in administrative posts has shattered myths that the domain of politics and leadership in public sphere is purely for men. But, are these recent events indicative of an underlying improvement in the economic status of women? Are women really improving their status in life, relative to men? More specifically, are they becoming more educated, taking up more jobs and earning better wages?

#### The Economics of Gender

If we are to work successfully with the problem of women and economic development, of preparing women to take their place in the employment market, there are a number of patterns to which we must attend namely pay equity, the 'glass ceiling,' work and family balance, domestic work and 'real work', the feminization of poverty and women in a learning society.

Also the meaning of employment and unemployment has to be understood in the context of gender and economic activity. Women's work has to be defined anew with a gendered perspective. What is considered as house work or family work is to be seen in new light of global initiatives to set the record straight for women's work at home and outside. What was considered in the past as non- economic activity is been seen in a different light today and the future prospects are going to further redefine women's economic roles.

## Economic Status of Women

The economic well-being of women is often used as an indicator of the overall advancement of a society. The better women fare relative to men, the argument goes, the better the overall society is at creating equal opportunities and benefits for its entire people. In more recent times, we've seen a surge in the formation of women's groups and more women are taking up key government positions. Women are increasingly influencing politics and development. Are women really improving their situation in life, relative to men? More specifically, are women becoming more educated, taking up more jobs and earning better wages?

It is imperative to start with a discussion of general historical activities and earning power of women, their progression to professions and the modern movements to equality of wages based on the idea of 'same pay for same work' and eliminating gender as an economic consideration. Policies, programs, ways and means to achieve various degrees of success in different societies will be discussed within the context of globalization. Global benchmarks set by those countries in Africa, Europe, the New World, and Asia who have achieved or close to achieving gender equality in the market place will be highlighted as goal posts for those countries that have not yet done so.

## Various Views on Women's Work

There are conflicting notions of 'real work', 'domestic work' and the family as most working women are still first committed to their families. Women's domestic work is of course also socially productive as it contributes to the reproduction and maintenance of labour. Another important concept that has been coined more recently is the ILO agenda of 'decent work'.

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## 1.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY LIFE – THE 'BALANCING ACT'

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There is a great need to understand the overlapping relationship that exists between work and family life particularly amongst the unskilled women. This is a typical feature of an industrial society.

The debate about whether industrialization led to an improvement or deterioration in women's lives is linked to the question of women's economic opportunities. Work outside the home has gained importance in the industrial societies. As a result the notion of self-respect has got attached to it. This helps to explain why women are prepared to go through what **Kate Crehan** calls the 'balancing act' in order to assure themselves of a self-identity.

However, these notions of work and commitment to work outside home vary from country to country. **Sylvia Walby** throws light on the changes in gendered

employment and its interconnections to wider systems of political economy and society. Her study on Gender Globalization and Work Transformation (GLOW) is particularly useful in understanding changes in the regulation of non-standard forms of working, the nature of the knowledge economy, and the theorisation of varieties of capitalism and gender regime.

### **Pay Equity**

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in the developing world, women grow up to 80 per cent of all food produced, but rarely hold the title to the land they cultivate. Worldwide, they constitute one third of the wage-labour force. Much of their work, however, is unpaid, among a wide range of other activities. Women also dominate the informal sector of the economy but this work is not usually reflected in economic statistics. If global calculations of the gross domestic product included household work, the amount would increase by 25 per cent and would be generally greater than that of men. It is also clear that women work much longer hours than men. In developing countries, women's work hours exceed men's by 30 per cent but within each occupation, male fulltime employees receive higher incomes than female fulltime employees. Why is it so difficult to overcome this wage gap? One of the reasons is patriarchal society's thinking of women and the work they do is less importance. In addition, up to 90 per cent of part-time workers are women. This has short-term benefits that it increases the number of jobs that can be handled along with household responsibilities, whereas, has long-term disadvantages, however, including reduced job security, retaining opportunities and workplace benefits such as pensions and health insurance.

Male unemployment and underemployment have put even more pressure on women to take on the role of bread-winner. Men are increasingly unable to support their families alone. In Canada, France, Sweden, the United States, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, the percentage of prime working-age men without jobs has increased. Working mothers, who reconcile work out-side the home while retaining primary responsibilities for child care and other duties, shoulder a heavy burden, particularly as their families grow. Various factors contribute to this phenomenon, including increasing levels of migration and high levels of marital dissolution, as well as the growing number of children born to single mothers. Excessive drug and alcohol used by males, multiple unions and polygamous households add to the economic hardship faced by women, since men may not have sufficient resources to support multiple families. Evidence from the Philippines shows that with each additional young child, a mother's workload increases by an average of 8.4 hours per week.

Because women are more likely to spend their earnings on their families' basic needs, their income tends to have more positive effects on family

well-being. A study in South India found that while women kept barely any income for their exclusive personal use, men kept up to 26 per cent. Despite their key economic roles, women occupy a very small minority of decision-making positions in the economic arena. In most countries, they make up just 10 to 30 per cent of managers in the private sector, and occupy less than 5 per cent of the very highest positions. They are also under represented in the trade union movement.

### **Glass Ceiling**

Existing economic structures are dominated by men and pose major obstacles to women's advancement that prevent women from rising professionally regardless of their education and experience, is still impermeable today. These structures include networks and achievement criteria based on perceptions and stereotypical expectations of men compared to women. Glass ceiling is an apt label for the phenomenon faced by women who aspire to the positions of leadership. The proportion of women who have made it into high leadership positions is stunningly small. It has also been found that the women who had reached this level faced a second glass ceiling especially in the Multi-National Corporations (MNCs). These women made the same pay and received the same bonuses as their male counterparts. However, they managed fewer people, were given fewer stock options, and obtained fewer overseas assignments than men did. Being in the same position does not necessarily imply having the same level of status in the organisation. Clearly, they had got the message that they had moved up as far as they could in their company whereas men were more likely to see new opportunities ahead.

### **Work and Family Balance**

Studies show that, in most of the world, women spend more hours per week working than men do. However, for women, a larger proportion of time spent working is devoted to unpaid work i.e. housework, childcare, cooking, laundry, housecleaning, ironing ,gardening, and carrying water and wood and other domestic activities that are not counted when economists try to quantify work. In most countries, women spend about twice the amount of time doing unpaid work as men do. For instance in Japan this rate is nine times that of men. Even women who are employed full time do most of the domestic work in their households. In family life women overwhelmingly carry the workload although in some countries the gap has narrowed significantly.

Women's total work time per week is 53 hours in Bangladesh, 69 in India and 77 in Nepal as compared to men's work time in these countries of 46, 56, and 57 hours respectively. There is one remarkable similarity among these countries. The role played by fathers in child care- they do it for, on average, less than one hour per day. Chinese fathers spent the most time



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## 1.5 THE FEMINISATION OF POVERTY

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The world's population tripled in the period 1950-2010 to reach almost 7 billion. There are approximately 57 million more men than women in the world. According to some estimates, approximately 70% of the world's poor are women and the majority of the 1.5 billion people living on 1 dollar a day or less are women. In addition, the gap between women and men caught in the cycle of poverty has continued to widen in the past decades. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as **'the feminization of poverty'**.

As an idea, the term 'feminization of poverty' dates back to the 1970s. It was popularized at the start of the 1990s, mostly in research by United Nation agencies. The concept has various meanings, some of which are not entirely consistent with its implicit notion of change. Recent studies in the field claim that the feminization of poverty is a change in poverty levels that is biased against women or female-headed households. More specifically, it is an increase in the difference in poverty levels between women and men, or between households headed by females on the one hand, and those headed by males or couples on the other. The term can also be used to mean an increase in poverty due to gender inequalities, though it is preferable to call this the feminization of the causes of poverty.

Women living in poverty are often denied access to critical resources such as credit, land and inheritance. Their labour goes unrewarded and unrecognized, their health care and nutritional needs are not given priority and they lack sufficient access to education and support services. This gendered distribution of poverty shows that there are more poor households that are headed by women than by men and there are more women than men in the poorest households. In developed countries, studies reported by the United Nations (between 1995 and 2010) suggest that there are three factors that are very relevant to the elimination of feminization of poverty:

- strong family ties,
- employment opportunities for women, and
- a strong system of social welfare.

An examination of the 'feminization of poverty' around the world is done in terms of the three contributing factors that have been emphasized in the Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2004).

- First is the growth of female-headed households,
- Second, intra-household inequalities and bias against women and girls, and
- Third, neoliberal economic policies.

*It is argued that the growing visibility of women's poverty is rooted in demographic trends, cultural patterns and political economy. Social inequality aggravates the vulnerability of women and girls and this problem may vary by social class and region. While the disadvantaged position of women is incontestable, poverty is seen as a denial of human rights. It has been pointed out that the poorer women suffer doubly, first on account of gender inequality and second because of poverty. Therefore attempts to eliminate or alleviate poverty require attention to gender inequality and women's human rights.*

You will read in greater detail about feminisation of poverty in Block 6. Now, let us examine women's position with regards to the field of education especially higher and professional education.

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## 1.6 WOMEN IN A LEARNING SOCIETY

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Years ago, women who insisted on access to higher education, were considered unreasonable in many countries. American educator **Edward Clarke** argued in the second half of the 19th century that women's brains were relatively undeveloped and unsuited to the intellectual rigors of higher education and that if women used too much of their energy to think, it might rob energy from their vital reproductive organs and render them infertile. In many countries, women make up no more than 20% to 30% of undergraduate students, and in still others their participation is extremely low. A report released by the **American Association of University Professors (AAUP)**, shows that in the academic year 2003-04 male faculty members at doctoral institutions outnumbered women by two to one. In comparison, faculty positions at community colleges, considered lower in rank, were more likely to be held by women. During the 2005-06 academic year only 26 percent of women held substantial positions at institutions of higher learning whereas the rest were employed at institutions of lower levels of learning like the masters, undergraduate or associate institutions.

The disparities in the number of female faculty members across various institutions may also be due to the subject of study involved. For instance, men were more likely to go in for degrees in science and engineering and majority of research universities are more likely to hire within those fields. Thus, the greatest problem may be that female students and faculty are still heavily concentrated, within the universities, in disciplines that are traditionally feminine. And, while there are some signs that the gender gap is narrowing somewhat in some of the sciences and mathematics, it appears that it may be widening in technology and computer science education.



Here the question of rank may also be taken up as it is another indicator of where women stand in the scheme of things. Women are more likely to hold lower ranks like instructor, lecturer and assistant professor and are less likely to move up through the ranks than male faculty members. The **Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession** reveals that in 2004, 26 percent of full professors were women as compared to 74 percent of men full professors. According to the **2009 Almanac of the Chronicle of Higher Education** this figure remained unchanged in 2007. The pipeline argument has been used to explain the discrepancies and rank and tenure.

According to this theory, women are in the pipeline and will eventually advance at a rate equivalent to their male counterparts. Despite the parity in the academic achievements of women they have not been promoted up the academic ranks at the same rate as men and attrition is higher for women at the lower levels of the academic ladder. In addition it takes longer for women to reach the status of full professor. Then there are indicators that point to pay disparities between male and female professors, even when credentials of both are the same. According to the AAUP the gaps in the pay between men and women of all ranks range from 2.9 percent to 12.1 percent.

Another related benchmark is the data related to salaries of women vis a vis men. The AAUP annual report of 1975-76 brings out the salary data by gender, on full time faculty salaries. According to this report the overall average salary for women faculty members was 81 percent of that men. In the 2009-10 report the proportion was 81 percent thereby showing that after more than thirty years of women's increasing participation as faculty members in American colleges and universities, women's salary disadvantage had not eased one bit proving that gender inequity is alive and well in higher education.

### **Decent Work**

The idea of 'decent work for all' has been put forward by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as a strategy to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The concept of decent work, with its four pillars of Employment and Enterprise Development, Rights at Work, Social Protection and Dialogue, constitutes an important point of reference which aims to make societies more just, sustainable and equitable, while focusing on the empowerment of society's marginalized groups in particular. The ILO has planned this against a challenging background of a global financial and economic crisis that has already left millions of workers, men and women alike, unemployed.

Decent Work is a prerequisite for just globalization and a fair distribution of wealth, which benefit everyone in the long run. Workers in developing

countries need the solidarity and support of those who have been working and living in more secure circumstances in the industrialized countries. **Maria Floro and Mieke Meurs (2009)** argue that it is women in particular who need social rights and protection as they have remained, despite their growing role as income earners, among the most vulnerable. Their access to the labour markets in general and to decent jobs in particular is still limited by the prevalence of multiple discriminations in education, family, politics, culture and religion in many places. They have much to gain from decent employment, social rights, social protection and social dialogue as they continue to raise children and care for the elderly and the infirm. Awareness of worker's rights and gender equality at work has increased across all regions over the last decades in general. Yet, much remains to be done.

The rapid expansion in trade, capital flows and economic restructuring have led to significant changes in work. Jobs have shifted from advanced market economies to developing countries and from the formal to the informal sectors. These changes led to new opportunities for employment, especially for women, but they also created gaps and imbalances, as well as continued marginalization of female workers in many parts of the world.

Women's access to decent work is particularly affected by the burden of combining reproductive and productive work. This adds stress not accounted for in traditional conceptions of work, which focus on paid work and do not examine related changes in reproductive labour. Influential social theories have reinforced the problem of women's double burden. **Sociobiology** emphasized the 'natural' differences between men and women. Mainstream economic thought focused on individual rationality, competition, and market activities, at the expense of unpaid work, nonmarket production, social norms, and relations between economic agents. More recently, feminist economists have developed new and more comprehensive theories, defining economics as the study of the 'provisioning of human life.' Different countries' trajectories and specific cultural practices and institutions result in significant differentiation in access to decent work. Differences emerge not only between men and women, but also by education, household structure, race, class and access to social protection and welfare support systems.

The availability of decent work in the workplace, and trends in its availability, vary significantly across countries and regions. Globally, female labour force participation rates remained steady from 1996-2006, at about 53% compared to male rates of 80%. The gender gap in global labour market showed some decrease in the earlier part of the last decade but increased again after the global financial crisis of 2007 -08. This crisis increased the unemployment rate of women and destroyed 13 million jobs for women. While the gender gap in employment-to-population ratio remained high at 24.5 percent, both

men's and women's participation rates fell equally in the first decade of the twenty first century.

However, sectoral segregation measure shows that the choice of employment across sectors is much more limited for women. Women are still segregated into certain types of employment. In 2012, the share of women in vulnerable employment; meaning unpaid family worker and own-account worker who lack decent working conditions, adequate social security and lack a 'voice' through trade unions; was 50 percent and that of men was 48 percent. However, there were much larger gaps in North Africa (24 percent) and Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa (15 percent). The sectoral segregation increased over time with women moving out of agriculture in developing economies and out of industry and into services in developed economies.

Thus, 85 percent of them crowded into services like education and health. At the same time women's jobs are more likely to be part-time or temporary. In many countries, women are likely to work in the informal sector, and the share of female workers in this sector appears to be increasing. From 1980 to the end of the 1990s, the gender wage gap closed significantly in Latin America and in 20 countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and many post-socialist countries, where women earned about 80% of what men do. But this convergence almost stalled between 2000 and 2010 in most of the countries. Wage gaps are often greater in the informal than formal sectors, which may undermine the narrowing of the gap as employment shifts to the informal sector so the absolute gains for women are limited.

Here, you take a break and take up the following exercise to assess your learning.

***Check Your Progress:***

- 1) *What is meant by decent work?*
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) *What are the reasons for feminisation of poverty?*

3) *What are the factors relevant to elimination of feminisation of poverty?*

In the following section you will read about need and importance of social protection for women.

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## 1.7 WOMEN'S WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

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Work has become more insecure as jobs have shifted from formal, legally-regulated and large-firms to smaller and informal firms and home work. These jobs are often more accessible to women, but lie outside the protection of labour laws and lack rights to social benefits. Part-time workers in the formal sector also face significant insecurity.

Social protection, including the spending on public health and education, and access to pensions and healthcare insurance, can particularly benefit women. From the mid-1980s to 2004, many countries have experienced a fall in spending on these protections. In a few exceptional cases, the state has begun to extend social protection to informal or self-employed workers. An important alternative in some developing countries has been the effort by workers themselves - with support from NGOs - to develop alternative forms of social protection.

Increasingly 'flexible' labour markets have reduced workers' rights to organize in many countries and reduced their bargaining power. Unions have often responded by organizing new sectors, including the service sector and the informal sector. Female union membership has increased significantly in many countries, but this does not always increase women workers' bargaining power. In some countries NGOs have begun to organize women in the informal and home work sectors.

Women's ability to get decent work in the market economy is closely linked to the gender roles and division of work in the household. Women do

substantially more unpaid work than men. When hours in paid and unpaid work are totaled, women have longer work weeks than men and less time for leisure or sleep. This affects the rate at which paid work is rewarded. Demands of reproductive and care work can also affect a worker's choice of employment and work location.

The lack of social support systems for unpaid family responsibilities exacerbates these problems and hits poor and vulnerable families the hardest, forcing them to choose between employment and care, or to combine these activities. Workers, particularly women, may end up both 'time-poor' and 'money-poor,' which contributes to stress and undermines their well-being. Some countries have significantly reduced tensions between paid and unpaid labour through extended paid parental leave, incentives for more equal sharing of this leave, limits on the expected work week, and expanded public and subsidized child care. However, much remains to be done to assure gender equality and the benefits of the Decent Work Agenda for all workers.

In order to successfully promote economic and social policies that enhance the availability of decent work, a number of issues are crucial for example developing a gendered statistical system and frameworks for the evaluation of gender-disaggregated data on decent work on the one hand, and promoting the participation of labour unions and women's organisations in the development and implementation of social policies and social protection systems on the other.

You will read more about this discussion on social protection for working women in Block 5 and Block 6.

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## 1.8 LET US SUM UP

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Indeed, it is clear that the stress of balancing job and family can be reduced, and the rewards increased, by the availability of high-quality day care and certain kinds of flexibility in the workplace itself which is often in rather short supply. The 'glass ceiling,' an invisible but impassable barrier against women in the workplace must be removed through a forward-looking economic policy. Women's roles in the economy are critical to family survival and to economic development. Existing policies that place constraints on women must be changed. Women must have equal access to credit, property and markets, and should not require the consent of a male family member in order to secure this access. Policy changes must also be made, which place greater value on women's roles within the family which ensure that men take equal responsibility for their children and household tasks.

Clearly, to reduce the threat of poverty for women is to position them so that they can earn a decent income. That means providing social and cultural support for women who are trying to manage between jobs and family responsibilities. And it means educating and providing technical training to women in ways that allow them to enter the employment market with reasonable income and advancement. The need is to find ways to help young women envision themselves as engineers, computer scientists, political leaders, business executives, biotechnologists, university presidents and also as electricians, precision metalworkers and other skilled, high-paying jobs in the trades sector. We must recognize that this is essential, not only for women but for society as a whole.

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