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Urban Informality and Gender: A Feminist Inquiry into the Informal Labour Dynamics of Women in a Delhi Resettlement Colony

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ABSTRACT

In the vibrant tapestry of urban existence, the threads of informality and gender are interwoven, creating a narrative that remains largely unexplored. This academic endeavour embarks upon a captivating journey through the kaleidoscope of Delhi's resettlement colony, where the stories of informal women workers emerge as a 'habitus' of a verdant landscape. Adopting a feminist lens, this study delves into the intricate nuances of urban informality, offering insights into the lives and labours of these resilient women. The paper highlights how gender intersects with informality, shaping women's experiences of vulnerabilities, and agency. The emphasis is on the need for gender-sensitive policies and interventions that address inequalities and empower women. The paper is based on the findings of a sociological study of women living in Sanjay Colony in Delhi and work as informal-casual workers. A feminist approach to urban informality provides a nuanced understanding of informal practices and their implications for urban life, highlighting the struggles, resilience, and transformative potential of women living and working in cities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban informality, also known as informal urbanism or the informal economy refers to the various informal practices and activities that exist in cities. It is a complex nd multifaceted phenomenon intricately intertwined with the fabric of contemporary urbanisation (Castells & Portes, 1989). It encompasses informal economic activities, housing arrangements, and societal norms that operate outside the formal regulatory frameworks (Castells, 2001). These informal activities can include informal housing, street vending, informal transportation, and informal employment. Urban spaces, particularly in developing contexts, harbour intricate informal labour markets, offering livelihoods that are fraught with uncertainties and inequities. Within this complex landscape, women engaged in informal labour emerge as a distinct demographic group facing unique challenges and opportunities mirroring the broader complexities of gender roles and urbanisation (Chen et al., 2005). This research paper adopts a feminist lens to unravel the symbiotic relationship between urban informality and gender dynamics within the contours of a resettlement colony in Delhi. Besides using a feminist approach, the paper also applies Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' to document women's subjective experience of urban informality. This provides valuable insights into the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of informal settlements in cities. Bourdieu's theory of habitus suggests that individuals behaviours, preferences, and practices are shaped by their social and cultural context.

2. URBAN INFORMALITY AS A WAY OF LIFE

Urban informality is not merely a survival strategy but a distinct way of life shaped by social, economic, and political forces (Birch, 2019). Urban informality has been broadly discussed as referring to uncertain land tenure, to insufficient infrastructural provision and to transgressions of zoning regulations, or more generally, referring to a "way of life" of the urban poor (AlSayyad, 2004). Since the 1970s, informal labour has not only survived on a worldwide scale but has also grown and taken on new forms in the context of globalisation, neo-liberalism, cross-border migration, and rural-urban mobility, all of which are highly gendered phenomena (Bach, 2003; Carr & Chen, 2004; Chant & McIlwaine, 2015; Chen et al., 2014). The growth of informal workers across the globe is not merely a survival strategy but a distinct way of life shaped by social, economic, and political forces (Williams & Schneider, 2016). Informality as a way of life impact women far more than their counterpart because despite increase of women in labour force participation much of the increase is in lower quality, irregular and informal employment" (Heintz, 2006). Women constitute a large proportion of informal workers, and their work is often undervalued, underpaid, and unrecognised.

3. GENDER AS A DETERMINING LOCUS

Fundamental to our investigation is the recognition that gender is not a peripheral feature but an essential determinant within the domain of urban informality (Chen et al., 2005; Moser, 1993). As women navigate the labyrinthine pathways of informal labour, societal gender norms, and expectations impose constraints and opportunities that warrant critical examination. The structural inequalities embedded in these labour markets create and perpetuate gender disparities (Hart, 1973). Gender has become a key dimension of urban informality as women's participation in informal employment and caregiving roles within informal settlements reflects the experiences of informality (Allen, 2003). Women continue to be concentrated in "invisible" areas of informal employment, such as domestic work, piece-rate homework, and support for small family businesses, which offer precarious employment status, low, irregular, or no pay, little or no access to social security or protection, and limited ability to organise to ensure the enforcement of international labour standards and human rights (Akella, 2014; Reinecke et al., 2019). The paper highlights how gender intersects with informality, shaping women's experiences, vulnerabilities, and agency. The focus of the study is on women who are engaged in informal work. Informal workers typically lack job security, benefits, and legal protections that formal workers enjoy. In many cases, they may be involved in activities like street vending, domestic work, or small-scale entrepreneurship. The paper is based on the findings of a sociological study of informal women workers living in one of the resettlement colonies in Delhi and work either part time or full time as casual workers. Resettlement colonies often refer to areas where people have been relocated due to urban development projects or other reasons. These areas may face unique challenges related to infrastructure, access to basic services, and economic opportunities.

The focus of the ethnographic research is to examine the lives, challenges, and experiences of this marginalised and often overlooked segment of the population. The findings of the study reveal that women informal workers face multiple challenges due to their gender, including low wages, long working hours, limited access to education and training, and harassment and discrimination from employers. The women workers also face considerable social stigma and are often seen as "not real workers" by mainstream society, which exacerbates their marginalisation and exploitation. There are several reasons why there is a need for feminist research on urban informality. Here are a few:

i. *Understanding urban poverty*: Informal settlements and informal economies are often found in impoverished areas of cities. Sociological research can help to understand the causes and consequences of urban poverty, including the factors that contribute to the persistence of informality and the challenges faced by those living in informal settlements.

ii. *Informal economies and employment*: Informal economies provide a significant source of employment, especially for marginalised or vulnerable populations. Sociological research can explore the nature of informal employment, including the types of activities involved, the conditions of work, and the social networks and relations that support informal economic practices.

iii. *Informal housing and urban planning*: Informal settlements often arise due to inadequate affordable housing options. Research can examine the social, economic, and political dynamics that lead to the formation and growth of informal settlements, as well as their impact on urban planning and development. This knowledge can inform policy and interventions aimed at improving housing conditions for marginalised urban dwellers.

iv. *Social networks and community dynamics*: Informal settlements are often characterised by strong social networks and community ties. Sociological research can investigate the social dynamics within informal settlements, including issues of social cohesion, conflict, and the ways in which residents navigate their living conditions and access resources.

v. *Informal governance and politics:* Informal settlements often have their own governance structures and systems of informal regulation. Sociological research can examine the ways in which informal governance operates, including the role of local leaders, power dynamics, and the relationship between formal and informal systems of governance.

vi. *Gender and informality:* Informal economies and settlements often have gendered dimensions. Sociological research can explore the gendered aspects of informality, including the gender division of labour, women's roles in informal economies, and the gendered impacts of informal housing and living conditions.

Overall, a feminist approach to the study of urban informality can provide valuable insights into the complex social, economic, and political dynamics that shape informal settlements and economies. This knowledge can inform policy and interventions aimed at addressing urban poverty, improving housing conditions, and promoting social inclusion in cities. It underscores the pressing need for gender-sensitive policies to address the vulnerabilities faced by these women and promote their socio-economic empowerment.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

A sociological study of urban informal women workers in Delhi gave valuable insights into the lives, challenges, and experiences of this marginalised and often overlooked segment of the population. Applying this concept to the study of urban informality involves examining how the habitus of residents in informal settlements influences their actions, choices, and the overall structure of these settlements.

i. *Work and occupational patterns*: The study would explore the types of informal work that women engage in, such as street vending, domestic work, waste picking, or home-based activities. It would examine the reasons behind their choice of work, the skills involved, and the challenges they face in finding and sustaining work.

ii. *Gender roles and norms:* Investigating how traditional gender roles and societal norms influence the types of work available to women in the informal sector and their opportunities for mobility and growth within these occupations.

iii. *Income and economic insecurity:* Analysing the income disparities between men and women in informal work and how economic insecurity impacts their well-being and that of their families. The study would also explore their coping mechanisms to deal with financial constraints.

iv. *Social networks and support systems:* Understanding the role of social networks and support systems in the lives of urban informal women workers. This includes examining how women access information, resources, and support from their social circles.

v. *Work conditions and safety:* Investigating the working conditions of women in the informal sector, including issues related to workplace safety, health hazards, and exposure to harassment and violence.

vi. *Agency and empowerment:* Exploring the level of agency and empowerment among urban informal women workers, including their involvement in decision-making processes and collective action.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Urban informality is prevalent in many cities of the global South, but it is also present to a certain extent in cities of the global North. As cities continue to grow and face new challenges, understanding and addressing urban informality will remain a crucial area of study and policy concern. Mike Davis (2006) his book, 'Planet of Slums', explores the social and political aspects of urban informality, focusing on the experiences of informal settlements in various cities around the world. The book examines the causes and consequences of informality, highlighting the struggles and resilience of residents. The author emphasises how cities, instead of serving as hubs for development and wealth, become into dumping grounds for a surplus of people engaged in low-wage, unregulated, and unskilled informal trade and service. He suggests that "the future of human solidarity depends on the militant refusal of the new urban poor to accept their terminal marginality within global capitalism" (Davis, 2006).

The literature on urban informality also recognises its role in urban transformation and development. Informal settlements, for instance, are often significant contributors to the urban fabric and may play a crucial role in accommodating urban growth. Informal economies, likewise, can contribute to local economic development and innovation. Scholars have explored how formal and informal systems can coexist and interact positively, such as through the promotion of inclusive urban policies and the recognition of the rights and needs of informal residents and workers. 'Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, A New Urban World' by Neuwirth (2005) provides an in-depth look at informal settlements, also known as squatter settlements, in different urban contexts. Neuwirth delves into the daily lives of residents, their economic activities, and their efforts to improve their living conditions.

Another work that highlights the complex relation between informality and urban settlement is the work of Mitlin and Satterthwaite (2013), '*Urban poverty in the Global South: Scale and Nature*'. Mitlin and Satterthwaite, in their book, present a collection of essays that examine the politics and governance of informal settlements. It explores the challenges faced by residents and offers insights into inclusive policies and practices. The imbalance between growths of urban informality in urban areas has led further altering the symbiotic relation with the environment. It explores how and why governments and international organisations all across the world typically underestimate the scope and depth of urban poverty. The paradox of prosperous economies is that it shows little evidence of lowering poverty.

Another significant theme that emerges from the literature is the complex relationship between urban informality and formal urban systems. Informal practices often arise in response to a lack of formal infrastructure and services provided by the state. For instance,

informal housing can emerge in response to a shortage of affordable formal housing options. The book, 'Informal Urban Street Markets: International Perspectives' edited by Seale and Clifton (2015), provides a comprehensive analysis of urban street markets, which are a common form of informal economic activity. It explores the dynamics of these markets in different global contexts and their implications for urban development. While urban informality often fills a gap in formal systems, it also posechallenges to urban governance and planning. Informal settlements, for instance, often lack basic infrastructure such as water and sanitation, raising concerns about public health and safety. Informal practices, such as unauthorised street vending, can also create conflicts with formal businesses or produce challenges for urban mobility. Scholars have explored strategies for addressing these challenges, including the regularisation of informal settlements and the integration of informal economies into formal systems. Another important consideration in the literature is the social and cultural dimensions of urban informality. Informal settlements are often characterised by strong social networks and community ties. Scholars have highlighted the resilience and creativity of informal residents in addressing their own needs and shaping their built environment. At the same time, informal practices can also perpetuate social inequalities, as those engaged in informal activities often face precarious working conditions and limited access to social protection.

Gender is one of the key dimensions of urban informality that scholars have explored. Women are disproportionately affected by urban informality, as they are more likely to be engaged in informal employment and caregiving roles within informal settlements. Research has highlighted the various challenges and opportunities that women face in navigating informal urban contexts and has called for gender-sensitive approaches to addressing urban informality. In "Gendered Urban Informality: Street Vending and Home-Based Work as Drivers of Gender Inequality" by Chant and McIlwaine (2009), Chant and McIlwaine examine the gendered dimensions of urban informality, focusing on street vending and home-based work. They argue that these informal economic activities often perpetuate gender inequalities, as women face significant barriers in accessing resources, legal protections, and fair remuneration. The article calls for a feminist analysis of urban informality and the development of gender-sensitive policies to address the specific challenges faced by women. King (2016) in the article, 'Access to opportunity: A case study of street food vendors in Ghana's urban informal economy explores the experiences of women in informal street food vending in Accra, Ghana'. He explores how gender shapes the opportunities and constraints faced by women engaged in informal economic activities. Tsikata highlights the importance of recognising the agency and resilience of women in navigating the challenges of urban informality, while also calling for policies that address gender disparities and promote inclusive economic opportunities. Feminist Perspectives on Informal Settlement Upgrading: Lessons from South Africa by Mitlin (2009) examines the gendered dimensions of informal settlement upgrading in South Africa, addressing issues such as land tenure, housing, and access to services. The article emphasises the need to move beyond a gender-blind approach to upgrading and highlights the importance of including women's voices and experiences in decision-making processes. It calls for feminist approaches to informal settlement upgrading that address the specific needs and rights of women.

The literature on urban informality highlights the multifaceted and complex nature of informal practices in cities. It recognises their role as responses to socioeconomic challenges and engages with their impact on urban governance, social dynamics, and urban development. The scholars shed light on various challenges posed by urban informality, including inequality, governance, spatial dynamics, conceptual framing, and socioeconomic change. They contribute to a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding urban informality and offer insights into potential strategies and approaches to address the problems

it present in urban contexts. These scholarly articles by feminists provide valuable insights into the gendered dimensions of urban informality. They highlight how gender intersects with informality, shaping women's experiences, vulnerabilities, and agency. The articles emphasise the need for gender-sensitive policies and interventions that address inequalities and empower women in informal urban contexts.

6. FIELD, FIELDWORK AND METHODS

Thousand and lakhs of migrant reside in resettlement colonies in Delhi, which is engulfed poverty and precarity. The socio-economic conditions of all these colonies are more or less similar and a number of scholarly works are already available. The paper is based on an extensive field work carried out in Sanjay Colony- one of the resettlement colonies in Delhi NCR. Some of the pertinent questions that need to be answered are: Why another study of a resettlement colony? Why do fieldwork particularly in Sanjay Colony? The answer to these questions lies in the reasons that propelled the selection of the universe of study - first is that Sanjay colony is an illustration for understanding urban informality, second the area is symbolic of a pattern referred 'ethnification' of urban space and third as vantage point for comparing the diverse experience of urban informality.

I. An illustrative case of urban informality: Sanjay Colony stands out as an ideal site for studying urban informality exhibiting the following characteristics:

i.   *Temporary settlements*: Sanjay Colony is characterised by the presence of makeshift housing structures made of materials such as tin, cardboard, and plastic sheets. These houses are often cramped, lack basic amenities, and are built without legal permission. The settlement lacks proper sanitation facilities, clean water supply, and adequate infrastructure.

ii. *Informal economic activities*: The residents of Sanjay Colony are engaged in a wide range of informal economic activities. Many work as daily wage labourers in construction, domestic work, and street vending. Others are involved in informal manufacturing activities, such as small-scale garment production or recycling waste materials. Lack of formal employment opportunities pushes residents into the informal sector.

iii. *Exclusion and marginalisation*: Informal settlements like Sanjay Colony face exclusion and marginalisation due to their informal status. The residents often lack access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and formal financial services. They also face eviction threats as their settlements are considered encroachments on public or private land.

II. Symbolic of 'ethnification' of urban life: The choice of a residence in an urban area is largely dependent on kinship networks as it is the kin relations who provide psychological and financial security to the new entrant. A common tendency that has been observed by scholars of urban studies is the 'ethnification' urban neighbourhood (Friedman, 2005; Massey, 1994). This implies that migrants when they settle in a particular region in return invite their friends and relatives from their native place. Once the friends and relatives arrive in cities they also get employed in the same factories as the employment of informal workers are through primordial ties (Prasad, 2018). As a result, a colony in one part of the state is dominated by population from a particular region leading to 'ethnification' of the areas.

My acquaintance with the area was part of another project but in the first few visits, I observed that this neighbourhood exhibited a strong sense of belonging, community, and togetherness notwithstanding its negative perceptions to the outsiders as dirty and dangerous

(Prasad, 2023). And this sense of community was found despite the absence of any supermarket or malls, which are a point of creating collective consciousness among those living in the centre of urban city (Srivastava, 2014). This feeling of collectivism emerges from the fact that the residents are migrants from North Indian states mainly from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Residents rely on kinship and neighbourhood ties for mutual aid, security, and livelihood opportunities. Collective action and community-based organisations play an essential role in advocating for residents' rights and improving living conditions. An interesting observation was the ways in despite their economic hardship, residents enjoy the festivals together.

III. A kaleidoscope of diverse urban life: Sanjay colony is located in South Delhi, Okhla Industrial Area which has a number of export factories in its vicinity that provides employment to the residents. At the same time the area is surrounded by number of sprawls on one side and housing complex of the owners of the export factories and other affluent residents. The field therefore provides a kaleidoscope of the experience of urban life. Three subjective experience of urban life can be observed- the rich population with high rate of consumption through malls and market, the poor population living in scrawl and surviving by getting basic necessities and the third category is that of people whose working and living conditions are such that they fall between the two groups- having a decent job in neighbourhood factories and fulfilling the average needs of food, shelter and clothing. The respondents for the study fall into the third category and were therefore able to share their understanding of the other two extremes.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Urban informality in Delhi has been a significant issue, with a large number of informal settlements and informal economies existing within the city. The topic of research is multifaceted and seeks to capture multiple aspects of urban life therefore the reliance on the usage of multiple methods like survey, case study and participant observation. The use of multiple methods was necessary keeping in mind the nature of research and it enabled to explore the intricate relations between gender and informality. However, the research is purely qualitative adopting an ethnographic approach to capture the subjective experience of informality. The different research methods used for data collections are:

7.1. Case study

A case study can shed light on specific aspects of urban informality in Delhi. Let's consider a case study focusing on the informal settlement of Sanjay Colony. The slum came into being nearly 30 years ago when migrants (mainly from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) began settling on empty tracts of land. This illegal colony is now considered a "notified slum," giving it access to electricity and a formal water delivery system. The majority of the population consisted of daily wage employees including construction workers, rickshaw pullers, domestic helpers, and rag pickers or recyclers. Sanjay Colony has been selected a case study as it epitomises the intersection of urban informality and gender within the realm of informal labour markets.

7.2. Household survey

The fieldwork for data collection, including household survey using a simple random selection procedure, was done for a span of two years. From among the sample households, only the families whose members were willing to collaborate and share the required data were randomly chosen. A questionnaire was created to investigate the socioeconomic position of women working in an informal setting in order to pursue this data. In addition to household survey, to make the study sociologically comprehensive, qualitative methods such as in-depth

interviews, focus group discussions, participant observations, and case studies were used to gather rich and nuanced data. While doing fieldwork, the researcher was mindful of ethical considerations, ensuring the safety, privacy, and informed consent of the participants.

7.3. In-depth interviews

An in-depth interview is a qualitative research technique that offers an open dialogue with the subject of the study and provides insight into their attitudes, actions, and emotional connections to the problem at hand. In-depth interviews are a crucial instrument for gathering crucial data when using the grounded theory methodology, according to Strauss and Corbin. The primary method for gathering qualitative information regarding the socio-cultural aspects of the informal society in the current study is in-depth interviews. To learn more about the residents of the informal settlements, cultural history, mentalities, and aspirations, in-depth interviews with them were conducted. The interview questions were based on experiences of their everyday life, access to services and facilities, and their perceptions of urban aspirations.

7.4. Participant observation

The study relied heavily on documenting the experience of urban informality through participant observation, for this, every day a commendable time was spent in the field. Initially, time was spent on the fieldwork site speaking with residents in public spaces like the tea stall, market, temple, community centre, and NGO offices. In order to describe the physical and social landscape, the observation process also included wandering around, becoming acquainted with the neighbourhood, stopping by the corner store and other services, and offering help in their everyday activities After a few months, the difference between outsider and insider was blurred and the researcher was accepted as a member of the community. This allowed the researcher to take interviews of women who became friendly and willing to spend time. Thus, several days and weeks were spent roaming around in the colony's market and by-lanes observing and listening to the gossips among women and men.

7.5. Stages of fieldwork

The fieldwork for collecting data spread over a period of two and a half years in which the following stages of research was followed:

i.   Pilot survey of several resettlement colonies which included walking through the by lanes of slums located in different parts of Delhi Bawana, Mongolpuri, Naraina, Wazirpur and Dakshinpuri. It took almost a month to explore and understand the socio-economic conditions of these colonies.

ii. After a visit to these slums, Sanjay Colony located in South Delhi in Okhla Industrial Area was selected for the study. The reason for selecting this particular slum for doing fieldwork has been discussed in detail in previous section.

iii. Getting familiarised with the respondent- mainly women, as the focus of the study was to document the subjective experience of women, but men were not totally neglected. Men respondents were also part of the interviews and observations.

iv. Doing In-depth interview and informal interactions with women while they were working or sitting idle after work. Many a time it was difficult to continue the conversation as the women has to be back to work.

8. PROFILE OF THE AREA SELECTED FOR FIELDWORK

Sanjay Colony is a resettlement colony located in South Delhi -Okhla phase II. The colony came into existence almost three decades back with the increased influx of migrants from states of Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. The colony is located close to some of the big export factories. At the time of fieldwork, the total population of the areas was around 35000 and 6000. The area is congested with small lanes occupied by people selling goods like clothing, footwear and eatable items. The residents face problems of poor sanitation, inadequate water and electricity which are found in most areas of Delhi-NCR inhabited by migrants (Prasad, 2023).

8.1. Profile of Respondents

The majority of respondents for the study were women including both single and married women. In this study no attempt was made to further segregate women into categories like married, unmarried, age group and so on. The reason was to avoid categorisation as male or female per se. The profiles of the respondents were heterogeneous, across age, marital status and occupation. It included those in their retirement years, students, and those of working age who did not have a job but were carers or engaged in volunteer activities in the community instead. As stated already, these women had migrated with their husbands or fathers and were mainly from the state of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

9. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS- A HABITUS OF INEQUALITY & ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY

Informal women workers are a significant and often overlooked group of individuals engaged in various informal economic activities within urban settings. They play a crucial role in the urban economy, contributing to the labour force, household income, and local economies. However, they face numerous challenges and vulnerabilities due to their habitus. Residents' habitus can contribute significantly to the persistence of informal structures, social hierarchies, and economic systems in a society. Habitus refers to the ingrained habits, dispositions, and cultural norms that individuals develop through socialisation and experience. These habits and dispositions can shape how individuals interact with their social and economic environments, reinforcing existing structures and systems (Bourdieu, 1977).

9.1. A habitus of inequality and economic vulnerability

Bourdieu's concept of habitus has been applied to explore the ways in which the social and cultural circumstances of urban informality further perpetuates patriarchal ideas which determine women's position in society and leads to persistence of inequality.

i. *Socialisation into gender roles*: Women are socialised from a young age into traditional gender roles that assign them responsibilities for household chores, caregiving, and maintaining family harmony. These roles become deeply ingrained in their habitus. Around 78% women respondent reported that as child they spent their time taking care of their younger siblings and hence could not go to school. When they grew up, due to lack of education they managed to get the job of cleaner in the factories located in their neighbourhood. As girls grow up, they observe their mothers and female relatives taking on domestic responsibilities, while boys often witness their fathers engaging in income-generating work. This reinforces the idea that domestic work is a "women's job." 94% married women responded that they experience verbal and physical abuse at home on days when they had extra work in the factories and could not reach home on time and prepare dinner for their husband. They were advised by their husbands to leave the job if

they did not have time for domestic work. As a result, they internalise the belief that their primary role is to be homemakers and caregivers and give up their professional work.

ii. *Economic vulnerability*: the lack of formal education and technical skills leads to vicious circle of economic vulnerabilities, such as lack of access to credit, assets, or job opportunities, can push women into the informal, part -time and home-based works. The habitus of financial dependence on male family members can perpetuate gender-based economic disparities.

iii. *Normalisation of low wages and exploitation*: As domestic work is not considered as professional work due to no or low compensation, it is undervalued and considered "women's work," resulting in low wages and lack of employment benefits. Almost all women respondents accepted these conditions as normal and felt that questioning the normative would label them as 'bad women' and they would have to sacrifice their marriage and family. A small percentage (24%) woman who continue to work outside their home accept low wages and exploitative working conditions because their habitus has conditioned them to prioritise family welfare over their own economic well-being.

iv. *Lack of collective bargaining*: The number of women working is low coupled with fragmentation and flexibility in job, there is complete absence of any collective body to fight for the improvement in working condition and descent wage. There was a lack of awareness among women respondent on trade unions. Also, most respondents (89%) were of opinion that their husbands would not allow them to join union as it would hamper their domestic work.

v. *Resistance to change*: The deep-rooted ideas in traditional gender roles and patriarchy have created a resistance to change, making it challenging to challenge and transform the status quo. The primacy of marriage and family over professional growth is the key reason for no participation of women in any movement for resistance and change. Even when advocacy groups and policymakers attempt to improve conditions, the habitus of gender-based roles and expectations has hindered the progress. It may take time and concerted efforts to shift societal attitudes and dismantle patriarchal norms in this sector.

9.2. Influence of habitus on informal women workers

These findings allow for developing a discourse on urban informality and gender in the broader context of feminist theory. It is evident that the conditions of informality further strengthen the patriarchal relations in society that eludes women to marginality. Urban informality complicates gender relations in several ways, some of them are:

i. *Lack of safe spaces due to absence of affordable housing*: High housing costs and limited access to formal housing options push women towards informal settlements where they can find cheaper accommodation but insecure space. The living conditions in these settlements are usually cramped, with inadequate infrastructure, making residents vulnerable to health hazards and environmental. This is often exacerbated by an increase of their vulnerability to gender-based violence.

ii. *Limited formal job opportunities:* Informal *employment* can be driven by a lack of formal job opportunities, limited access to education and skills training, and rigid labor regulations that make it difficult for women to enter the formal labour market.

iii. *Social exclusion and inequality:* Social Exclusion: Informal settlements and economies are often stigmatised and marginalised, leading to the exclusion of residents from mainstream society. Lack of access to education, healthcare, financial services, and formal networks hampers social mobility and keeps residents trapped in cycles of poverty and marginalisation.

iv. *Informal economies as survival strategies*: For many women, especially in low-income communities, engaging in informal economic activities is a survival strategy to meet basic needs and generate income in the absence of formal job opportunities.

Addressing gender roles and patriarchy in the informal sector, particularly in Sanjay Colony, requires a multifaceted approach. This includes legal reforms, social awareness campaigns, and education and training opportunities for women, and efforts to challenge ingrained gender stereotypes. Breaking the cycle of habitus that perpetuates these inequalities is essential to achieving gender equity in both the informal and formal sectors of the economy.

10. CONCLUSION

The study sheds light on the structural inequalities that underlie the informal economy and the importance of addressing these inequalities to promote women's empowerment. The study highlights the need for policies that provide legal recognition and protection for informal workers, including gender-responsive social protection schemes and measures to combat gender-based violence. By addressing the unique challenges faced by urban informal women workers, policymakers and communities can foster a more equitable and supportive environment for this critical segment of the urban workforce. The findings challenge the status quo and calls for more inclusive and transformative urban policies. It serves as an empowering resource for scholars, policymakers, and activists' alike, inspiring action toward creating more equitable and just urban spaces for all. Thus, this study contributes to a growing body of literature on urban informality and gender, emphasising the importance of a feminist perspective in understanding the experiences and challenges faced by informal women workers.

Recognising the contributions and challenges faced by urban informal women workers is crucial for achieving more inclusive and sustainable urban development. Policymakers and stakeholders need to take several steps to support this vulnerable group:

i. *Gender-responsive policies*: Develop and implement gender-responsive policies that address the specific needs of urban informal women workers, such as social protection programs, skill development initiatives, and access to finance.

ii. *Recognition and formalisation*: Recognise the importance of informal work and create pathways for the formalisation of certain informal activities, providing workers with improved working conditions and legal protections.

iii. *Access to services*: Ensure that urban informal women workers have access to essential services, including healthcare, education, and childcare facilities.

iv. *Empowerment and representation*: Promote the active participation and representation of urban informal women workers in decision-making processes to advocate for their rights and interests.

v. *Capacity building*: Provide training and capacity-building programmes to enhance the skills and knowledge of urban informal women workers, enabling them to transition to more sustainable livelihoods. The study underscores the need for policies that promote women's economic empowerment and address gender inequalities in the informal economy. The study also highlights the potential of collective action and organisation among informal workers as a means of advocating for their rights and improving their working conditions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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