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Q5(a)

Explain the emerging challenges in establishing gender equality in the informal sector

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Stratification and Mobility: Concepts

Stratification and Mobility: Concepts - equality, inequality, hierarchy, exclusion, poverty and deprivation; Theories of social stratification - Structural functionalist, Marxist, Weberian; Dimensions - Class, status groups, gender, ethnicity and race; Social mobility - open and closed systems, types, sources and causes.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the challenges to gender equality in the informal sector
- Keep the discussion within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Informal work lacks contract and security; for women it rides on unpaid care.

Oakley and **Walby** map household and labour-market patriarchy.

Census and **NFHS** miss much female work.

Lockdown exposed domestic and migrant women without a home office.

- **Challenges:** recognition, portable security, care, and safety.

Introduction

The informal sector is work without secure contract, social security, or a recognised career. For women it is often the default labour market. Gender equality here is blocked by unpaid care, weak law, and a status order that codes their work as help.

Body

What the sector does to women

- Ann **Oakley** made housework visible as labour. Informal paid work sits on that unpaid base, so the double day is the first challenge.
- Sylvia **Walby**'s patriarchal structures of household, paid work, and state meet in piece-rate, domestic service, home-based manufacturing, and gig tasks.
- No written wage, no maternity cover, and no union hall make "equal pay for equal work" a slogan without a file.

Indian files

- **Census** and **NFHS** undercount female work when it is seasonal, home-based, or unpaid family labour.
- **SEWA** showed that organising can raise voice. It does not by itself transfer land or stop violence.
- **COVID-19 lockdown hit domestic workers and women migrants first:** no WFH laptop, no urban citizenship.

Challenges named

- Recognition of work in statistics and law.
- Social security portable across houses and cities.
- Childcare and safety, without which "choice" of informal hours is constraint.

Flow diagram

Informal sector -> Unpaid care

Informal sector -> No contract security

Informal sector -> Undercount Census NFHS

Unpaid care -> Blocked gender equality

No contract security -> Blocked gender equality

Undercount Census NFHS -> Blocked gender equality

Conclusion

Gender equality in the informal sector is challenged by unpaid care, statistical invisibility, and missing contracts. **Oakley** and **Walby** name the structure. **Census**, **NFHS**, **SEWA**, and lockdown make the Indian case. Equality needs recognition and security, not only growth of informal jobs.

Facts & figures

Oakley

Treated housework as work; informal equality cannot ignore the unpaid day.

Walby

Patriarchy as linked structures, including paid work and the state, not only custom.

SEWA

Self Employed Women's Association: organising informal women workers for voice and some security.

NFHS

Shows gaps in women's employment, decisions, and health that informal labour intensifies.