Statutory Benefits, Perceived Gender Equity, Social Support, and Well-Being: Evidence from Women in India's Manufacturing Sector

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Abstract

Statutory benefits, perceived gender equity, and social support shape the subjective well-being of women employed in India's manufacturing sector. A cross-sectional survey design with (N-250) women workers from the manufacturing sector in Dharwad, Karnataka, India. Using structural equation modeling (SEM), tested direct and indirect pathways linking statutory benefits, perceptions of gender equity, and social support to subjective well-being.

The results revealed that both statutory benefits ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < .01$) and perceived gender equity ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .001$) had significant direct effects on well-being. Social support emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.57$, $p < .001$) and partially mediated the relationship between perceived gender equity and well-being, highlighting its critical buffering role. Interestingly, statutory benefits did not significantly predict social support ($\beta = 0.03$, $p = .344$), suggesting that while formal policies may directly enhance well-being, they may not automatically foster supportive interpersonal environments.

These findings underscore that enhancing workplace well-being for women necessitates more than merely complying with policies. Organizations must cultivate cultures that reinforce fairness and support. The study contributes to the broader discourse on workplace equity by highlighting how formal benefits and perceived interpersonal dynamics together influence psychological outcomes for women in industrial employment.

Keywords: gender equity, statutory benefits, social support, subjective well-being, manufacturing sector, India, women workers, organizational justice

Context and Relevance

Empirical research increasingly indicates that there is a link between the well-being of employees and organizational performance, such as productivity, staff turnover, and innovation (Roberston and Cooper 2010, Bakker and DeRouti 2017). However, most existing evidence has considered knowledge work or service work and excludes women in labor-intensive sectors, particularly in developing nations such as India.

India has a peculiar paradox of having a robust legal framework of labour laws, but the administration of these laws is very different for various categories of work (Deshpande, 2020; Bhattacharjee, 2019). Permanent workers have legal entitlements to benefits such as paid maternity leave, daycare facilities within the workplace, and health insurance, whereas contract workers are deprived of the same

despite doing the same category of work (ILO,2016). This discrimination damages the workplace morale as well as contributes to chronic stress, decreased participation, and poor well-being (Vijayalakshmi and Sriram, 2019).

Theoretical background

This research is grounded in three core concepts. First, the Perceived Organizational Support theory explains that when organizations offer fair policies and treatment, employees interpret these actions as signs that the organization values and supports them. This perception, in turn, positively influences their emotional well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1997). Second, Social Support Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985) proposes that emotional and instrumental support from one's social network reduces stress and promotes psychological resilience. This is especially important for women juggling workplace and family roles (Taylor, Singh & Kaur, 2011; House, 1981). Third, the Gender Role and Equity Theory (Heilman, 2012; Ridgeway, 2009) posits that women's workplace experiences are influenced by both explicit and implicit norms of inequality that shape their opportunities and perceptions.

Many studies have established that legal protections such as paid leave and maternity benefits can increase women's workplace satisfaction, reduce absenteeism, and improve retention (Chatterjee & Mishra, 2019; Sengupta & Das, 2018; Gupta et al., 2020). However, these benefits alone may not be effective if women do not perceive their workplace as fair or do not receive adequate support when exercising these rights (Singh & Kaur, 2016; Radke et al., 2016). In light of this, the current research considers not only the direct impact of statutory benefits and perceived equity but also the role of social support in translating workplace conditions into improved well-being outcomes.

Existing Gaps and Research Needs

Most research on the work-related well-being of Indian women has relied heavily on macro-level evidence, such as the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), or focused narrowly on individual benefits like access to crèches or the use of maternity leave. Few studies have integrated both structural and psychological factors into a unified framework or compared contract and permanent employees within formal industrial settings (Rani & Unni, 2009; Srivastava & Nair, 2020).

Moreover, comparatively little is known about how perceived gender equity influences the emotional and social health of women in the workplace. Although the Government of India and organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) regularly publish data showing persistent gender disparities in wages, promotions, and leadership positions, many women may internalize these differences as normal or justified aspects of their professional lives (Jost & Kay, 2005; Subašić et al., 2018). It is therefore essential to explore how women perceive equity in their workplaces and how these perceptions shape their overall well-being.

Addressing these gaps, the present study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the impact of statutory benefits, perceived gender equity, and social support on the subjective well-being of women in industrial employment.

Research Overview

This study aimed to examine the role of workplace interventions, specifically statutory benefits, perceived gender equity, and social support, in shaping subjective well-being. Rooted in organizational

behavior and occupational health psychology, the study conceptualized how structured benefits and socio-cultural factors interact to impact women's workplace experiences and well-being outcomes.

Statutory provisions such as maternity benefits, health insurance, and paid leave, when accessible and well-communicated, are likely to contribute to women's subjective well-being (OECD, 2021). This assumption aligns with organizational and policy research suggesting that such benefits play a critical role in enhancing employee welfare. The perception of equitable treatment across gender lines is expected to serve as a crucial psychological resource, promoting trust and motivation among women employees (Heilman, 2012). (Eagly and Carli, 2007) Further argued that equitable practices can empower women to navigate organizational structures more effectively and achieve greater workplace satisfaction. Perceived organizational support plays a mediating role between policy structures and employee satisfaction (Eisenberger, 2002).

We argue that when women are aware of and can access statutory benefits such as maternity leave, paid holidays, or health-related entitlements, they are more likely to experience higher levels of well-being. These provisions signal organizational care and support. Based on this reasoning, we hypothesized that statutory benefits would directly and positively influence subjective well-being (Hypothesis 1). We also theorized that perceiving fair and equal treatment at work strengthens psychological security and job satisfaction. Therefore, we predict that perceived gender equity would also have a direct positive effect on subjective well-being (Hypothesis 2).

Beyond these structural and perceptual influences, we expected social support to play a critical role in helping women manage work demands. Based on the buffering effect proposed by (Cohen and Wills 1985), we hypothesized that greater perceived social support would be positively associated with subjective well-being (Hypothesis 3). We did not treat social support as an isolated factor; instead, we conceptualized it as a pathway through which experiences with workplace policies and perceptions influence emotional outcomes. Based on this view, we hypothesized that statutory benefits would positively predict social support (Hypothesis 4) and that perceived gender equity would similarly predict social support (Hypothesis 5).

Social support could mediate the relationships between statutory benefits, gender equity, and well-being. Specifically, we hypothesized that social support would mediate the effects of both statutory benefits and perceived gender equity on subjective well-being (Hypothesis 6). This approach allowed us to examine not only direct effects but also the indirect mechanisms through which workplace structures and perceptions impact women's psychological outcomes.

Our structural equation modeling (SEM) results largely supported the proposed framework. Both statutory benefits and perceived gender equity showed significant direct effects on subjective well-being. Social support emerged as the most influential predictor and significantly mediated the relationship between perceived gender equity and well-being. However, the pathway from statutory benefits to social support was not statistically significant, suggesting that policy alone may be insufficient to cultivate interpersonal or organizational support. These findings underscore the importance of aligning equitable workplace policies with strong support systems to promote well-being among women in industrial employment contexts sustainably.

Study

This study investigated the impact of statutory benefits (SB), perceived gender equity (PEG), and social support (SS) on women's subjective well-being (SWB) in the manufacturing sector. Using structural

equation modeling (SEM), we tested six hypotheses, including both direct and mediated pathways. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) validated the measurement model. The findings showed that perceived gender equity and social support significantly predicted well-being, while statutory benefits had a weaker effect. Social support also partially mediated the relationship between gender equity and well-being.

Method

Participants and Procedure

We conducted this study between January and March 2025, targeting women employed in manufacturing industries located in the Dharwad districts of Karnataka, India. Using purposive sampling, we selected 250 participants currently working in formal industrial settings. This sampling method was appropriate for identifying respondents with relevant workplace experience in statutory benefits, gender equity, and social support (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

All participants were approached physically at their workplaces. We explained the purpose of the study in person and obtained informed consent through a signed consent letter before administering the questionnaire. We assured participants that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. Participation was entirely voluntary, and we did not offer any form of compensation.

Participants completed a structured questionnaire provided either in English or Kannada, depending on language preference. All surveys were completed in person, ensuring clarity and completeness. No responses were excluded, and the full sample of 250 valid cases was retained for analysis.

We determined that our sample size was sufficient based on (Kline's 2016) recommendation that structural equation modelling (SEM) requires at least 200 participants when involving latent constructs. With 250 responses, the study achieved appropriate statistical power.

Participants were primarily between 25 and 45 years old, had 3 to 15 years of work experience, and earned annual incomes ranging between ₹1.5 to ₹4.5 lakhs. These demographics align with recent trends in India's industrial female labour force (Mehrotra & Sinha, 2017; ILO, 2018). Descriptive statistics for the four main study variables are: Statutory Benefits (M = 21.52, SD = 5.74), Perceived Gender Equity (M = 20.35, SD = 4.19), Social Support (M = 14.92, SD = 6.42), and Subjective Well-Being (M = 15.77, SD = 3.88).

Measures

The questionnaire, which required 10 minutes to be completed, was provided in both English and Kannada and included measures of statutory benefits, perceived gender equity, social support, and subjective well-being. Participants were also asked to provide basic demographic information at the end of the survey.

Statutory Benefits Statutory benefits were measured by asking participants to rate the extent to which they agreed (1= *strongly disagree,* 5 = *strongly agree)* with six items (SB1-SB6) about women's benefits like maternity leave, health coverage, and job-protected absence. Examples of items include: *"I am aware that I am entitled to paid maternity leave in my organization,"* and *"My organization offers paid leave benefits for women,"* and *"My organization provides creche facilities".* Statutory benefits are those that employers must provide by law to protect workers' security and well-being. All six items formed a single-factor scale. A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) supported the unidimensional of the construct, with excellent model fit indices: CFI = 1.000, TLI = 1.002, RMSEA = 0.000, and SRMR =

0.036, which are well within the recommended thresholds (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The standardized factor loadings ranged from 0.956 to 1.011, and the 95% confidence intervals fell between (0.877, 1.088), confirming the stability of the measurement model. The construct also showed strong internal consistency of this scale was also high (Cronbach's α ≈ 0.86), suggesting reliable responses across participants.

Perceived Gender Equity (PEG) To measure perceived gender equity, participants read: *"Men and women are treated equally in promotion opportunities"* and *"I feel valued at work irrespective of my gender"* (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). This scale was adapted conceptually from equity-focused workplace assessments (Heilman,2012). All six items have strong standardized factor loadings between 0.987 and 1.063. The measure showed excellent reliability (α ≈ 0.96). We used mean scores, whereby higher scores indicated stronger perceived gender equity in the workplace, reflecting lower perceived gender inequalities.

Social Security (SS) Participants were asked whether they received support from coworkers, supervisors, and the organizational system as a whole. The response scale ranged from (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) through six items (SS1-SS6) included statements such as *"I can rely on my colleagues for emotional support,"* and *"Supervisors are approachable when I face difficulties at work"* and *"I received emotional support from my family or husband when I face difficulties at work."* This construct is grounded in the social support framework proposed by Cohen and Wills (1985), emphasizing its buffering role in the workplace. The factor loadings ranged from 0.965 to 1.010. Reliability (α ≈ 0.88) is excellent. The mean score has a higher average, reflecting the participant's stronger sense of having someone to rely on during work-related challenges.

Subjective Well-Being (SWB) was initially assessed with five items adapted from the (Topp, C. W., Østergaard, S. D., Søndergaard, S., & Bech, P., 2015). which measured women's overall satisfaction and positive emotional states within the workplace. *"I feel cheerful and in good spirits at work,"* and I feel that my life at work is filled with meaning."* The retained items had standardized factor loadings ranging from 1.012 to 1.066. The internal consistency of the scale was high (α ≈ 0.91), indicating excellent reliability. The mean score slightly reflected a positive experience of well-being among participants.

Table 1: Standardized Factor Loadings from Confirmatory Factor Analysis

| Factor	Indicator	Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Factor 1	SB1	1.000	0.000			1.000	1.000
	SB2	0.956	0.040	23.648	< .001	0.877	1.035
	SB3	1.011	0.039	25.984	< .001	0.935	1.088
	SB4	0.981	0.038	25.661	< .001	0.906	1.056
	SB5	1.010	0.036	28.187	< .001	0.940	1.081
	SB6	0.962	0.038	25.305	< .001	0.888	1.037
Factor 2	PEG1	1.000	0.000			1.000	1.000
	PEG2	1.042	0.046	22.579	< .001	0.951	1.132
	PEG3	0.987	0.047	21.072	< .001	0.895	1.078
	PEG4	1.045	0.040	26.099	< .001	0.966	1.123
	PEG5	1.041	0.039	26.813	< .001	0.965	1.117
	PEG6	1.063	0.048	22.300	< .001	0.970	1.157
Factor 3	SS1	1.000	0.000			1.000	1.000
	SS2	1.000	0.050	20.064	< .001	0.902	1.097
	SS3	1.010	0.050	20.306	< .001	0.913	1.108
	SS4	0.965	0.047	20.688	< .001	0.874	1.057
	SS5	0.987	0.045	21.918	< .001	0.899	1.075
	SS6	0.983	0.050	19.711	< .001	0.885	1.080
Factor 4	SWB1	1.000	0.000			1.000	1.000
	SWB2	1.066	0.044	24.096	< .001	0.979	1.153
	SWB3	1.037	0.047	21.847	< .001	0.944	1.130
	SWB4	1.039	0.043	23.948	< .001	0.954	1.124
	SWB5	1.012	0.045	22.282	< .001	0.923	1.101

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlations among variables. All variables showed moderately high mean scores, and each was significantly and positively correlated. Notably, social support was strongly associated with both PEG ($r = 0.728$, $p < .001$) and SWB ($r = 0.834$, $p < .001$); supportive environments play a central role in women's workplace well-being. Statutory benefits also showed moderate positive relationships with PEG ($r = 0.597$, $p < .001$), SS ($r = 0.463$, $p < .001$), and SWB ($r = 0.590$, $p < .001$). These findings offer preliminary support for the hypothesized structural relationships explored through SEM.

Structural Equation Modeling and Hypothesis Testing

We employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to assess the proposed framework linking statutory benefits (SB), perceived gender equity (PEG), and social support (SS) to subjective well-being (SWB). The model demonstrated an excellent fit to the data: CFI = 1.000, TLI = 11.002, RMSEA = 0.000 (90% CI [0.000, 0.017]), and SRMR = 0.036, confirming strong measurement and structural validity (Hu&Bentler,1999). As illustrated in Figure 1, statutory benefits had a small but statistically significant direct effect on subjective well-being ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < .01$), confirming Hypothesis 1. Perceived gender equity exerted a moderate and significant direct influence on subjective well-being ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .001$) (supporting Hypothesis 2). Social support emerged as the strongest predictor of well-being ($\beta = 0.57$, $p < .001$), (validating Hypothesis 3). However, the direct path from statutory benefits to social support was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.03$, $p = .344$), leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 4. In contrast, perceived gender equity had a strong positive effect on social support ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < .001$), confirming Hypothesis 5. Further, social support significantly mediated the relationship between perceived gender equity and subjective well-being, while the indirect effect of statutory benefits via social support was non-significant. These findings partially support Hypothesis 6, indicating that perceived equity enhances well-being both directly and indirectly through social support, while statutory benefits improve well-being only directly.

Figure 1 Standardized coefficients for direct and indirect paths in the structural equation model. The model examines the effects of statutory benefits (SB) and perceived gender equity (PEG) on subjective well-being (SWB), with social support (SS) as a mediating variable. Control variables were not included in the diagram for clarity. ***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$
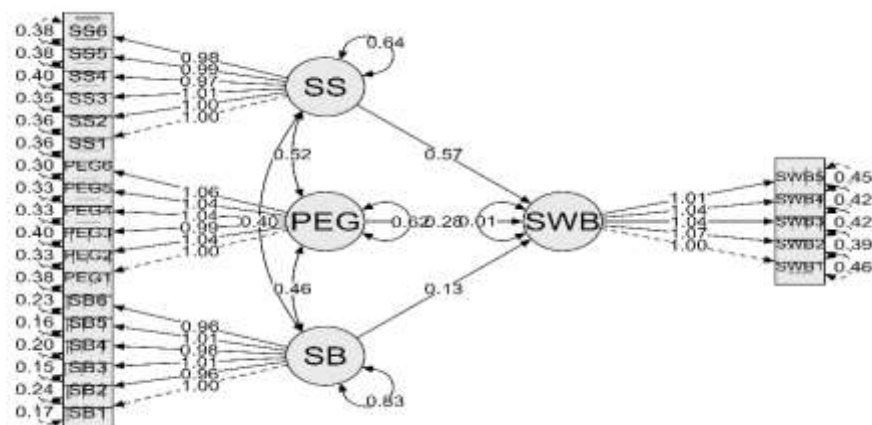
Mediation Analysis

We examined whether social support (SS) mediated the relationship between statutory benefits (SB) and perceived gender equity (PEG) with subjective well-being (SWB). It includes both direct and indirect effects in the model and uses bootstrapped estimates with 5,000 resamples to enhance statistical reliability. In Table 2, we tested two indirect paths: SB → SS → SWB and PEG → SS → SWB. We also tested four hypotheses: H4 and H5 predicted that SB and PEG would positively influence SS, while H6a and H6b proposed that SS would mediate the effects of SB and PEG on SWB, respectively.

The model revealed that PEG had a significant influence on SS ($\beta = 1.08$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 5. This found that SS significantly predicted SWB ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < .001$), confirming that the indirect path from PEG to SWB via SS was statistically significant and supported H6b. These results suggest that women who perceive gender equity at work are more likely to experience social support, which in turn improves their well-being.

However, SB did not significantly predict SS ($\beta = 0.03$, $p = .344$), which led us to reject Hypothesis 4. As a result, the mediation effect proposed in H6a was also not supported. Despite this, we found that SB directly predicted SWB ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < .001$), indicating that statutory benefits enhance well-being directly, but not through perceived support. While PEG enhances SWB indirectly through SS, SB influences SWB directly without mediation. These findings show that organizations must go beyond offering formal policies; they must also foster fairness and interpersonal support to sustain women's well-being in the industrial workplace.
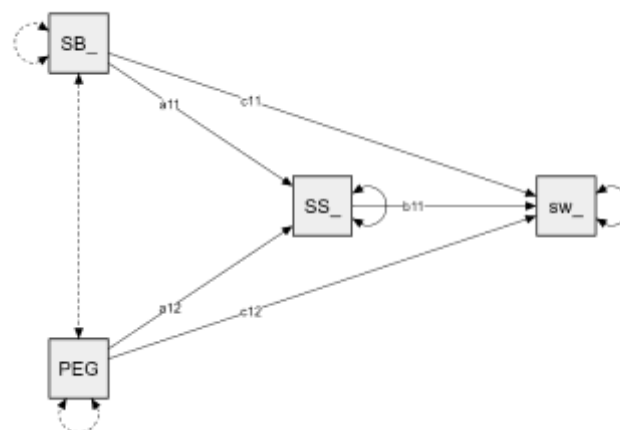
Figure 2 Mediation model illustrating indirect pathways from statutory benefits (SB) and perceived gender equity (PEG) to subjective well-being (SWB) through social support (SS). Standardized coefficients are presented along each path. Bootstrapped estimates (5,000 samples) were used to test the significance of indirect effects. ***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05.

Table 3

Indirect effects

	Estimate	Std. error	z-value	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
SB.TOTAL → SS_TOTAL → swb_total	0.016	0.020	0.802	0.422	-0.017	0.052
PEG_total → SS_TOTAL → swb_total	0.363	0.040	9.113	<.001	0.282	0.455

Note. Estimator is ML.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide support for the theory that women reported higher levels of emotional balance and satisfaction when they felt supported by their family, coworkers, and superiors. This confidante can significantly impact how women handle their obligations, both within and outside of the workplace. Perceiving gender equality in the workplace also had a strong impact. Women were more likely to feel respected, motivated, and confident when they believed they were receiving fair treatment and equal opportunities. This feeling of justice not only directly enhanced well-being but also contributed to the development of a more encouraging atmosphere. Statutory benefits such as paid maternity leave and job security did have a positive effect on well-being, but they did not lead to stronger feelings of support. This implies that despite policies being crucial, they need to be supported by sincere initiatives to promote compassion and trust in the workplace. Women must perceive and feel that these policies are being applied in a meaningful way; merely having rules in place is insufficient. The findings show that women's health improves when they feel supported, treated fairly, and safe under fair policies. Strong policies and a culture of respect and care must go hand in hand for workplaces to promote well-being.

Limitations and Future Study

The present study has some limitations. Firstly, cross-sectional design data were gathered at a single point in time. It is therefore still not possible to make firm statements regarding causal associations. Future longitudinal studies could shed more light on how such associations change over time. Secondly, the sample included only women working in the manufacturing sector in Dharwad district of Karnataka state. The limited scope can make it hard to apply the results to other areas or sectors. Future research could enhance the generalizability of the results by including women from other states, rural areas, and diverse industries. Thirdly, all data were self-reports, and this may have introduced bias. Respondents may have responded in a manner that they felt was socially desirable, especially when asked about fairness or support at work. Future research could combine self-reports with supervisor ratings or observational data to allow a more balanced view.

Practice Implications

At the practical level, this research suggests that to improve women's well-being at work. Implementing policies at the workplace is not the matter; raising awareness and fostering shared responsibilities should be strictly followed. Women must be aware of the inequalities they face, whether in access to benefits, recognition, or career growth, before they can seek change. Often, these disadvantages are normalized within workplace culture, which can prevent individuals from recognizing them as unjust. At the same time, the task of achieving gender equity should not fall only on women. When men understand the challenges their female colleagues face and when equity is considered a shared value rather than a women-only issue, they are more likely to support inclusive initiatives.

This collective awareness can create stronger, more united efforts to promote fairness at work. It is also important to identify commonalities that may seem neutral but exacerbate inequality. Companies should tell their workers to voice their opinions about patterns that hurt women, like having unequal workloads, not being able to be flexible, or not getting enough appreciation. This way of thinking helps change people's ideas about what is acceptable and makes everyone responsible.

Finally, increasing well-being suggests far more than just giving people maternity leave or flexible

hours. It involves building a culture where employees feel safe, valued, and supported. This includes open communication, respectful relationships, and leadership that actively supports gender equity. When both women and men work together to challenge bias and improve workplace conditions, organizations move closer to creating truly inclusive environments where everyone can thrive.

This research is critical to legislation such as the Code on Social Security, 2020, and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020. The codes will unite and enhance protections for the working class for all categories of work. But without support from facts and implementation, these reforms can fail.

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