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The socio-economic architecture of the household: An empirical analysis of the economic and social contributions of housewives in Imphal West, Manipur

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Abstract
The socio-economic framework of Manipur has historically been characterized by the robust and active participation of women. However, the precise economic valuation of housewives—particularly concerning their unpaid labor, financial decision-making authority, and structural contribution to household stability—remains systematically underrepresented. This empirical research paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the economic and social contributions of housewives, with a focused contextualization of the demographic and regional realities of the Imphal West district. Utilizing a primary dataset of 452 respondents, the research deploys descriptive statistical matrices, Relative Importance Index (RII) rankings, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). To ensure rigorous empirical focus, this study concentrates on a singular objective and hypothesis evaluating the causal impact of independent income generation. The SEM analysis proves that a housewife's role acts as a powerful catalyst for Women Empowerment in Decision Making and Resource Management (WEDMR), and that generating independent income acts as an undeniable force multiplier. The study concludes that recognizing unpaid labor and facilitating digital/flexible work opportunities are critical to unlocking the full economic potential of households in Imphal West.

Keywords: Housewives, imphal west, unpaid labor, socio-economic contribution, work-life balance, structural equation modeling, manipur economy

Introduction

The economic landscape of Manipur is currently navigating a profound, multi-dimensional transition, evolving rapidly from a traditional agrarian foundation to a diversified, structurally complex economic model. Within this transformative socio-economic context, the Imphal West district has emerged as the principal administrative, commercial, and demographic nucleus of the state. Characterized by an intensely dense demographic profile, Imphal West registers a population density of 998 persons per square kilometer and a highly significant urban population concentration of 62.33%. Against this backdrop of rapid urbanization and economic shifting, the role of women—and specifically the socio-economic status and valuation of the housewife—warrants rigorous empirical recalibration.

Historically, the socio-economic framework of Manipur has been uniquely defined by the robust, highly visible, and active participation of women. The women of Manipur, particularly Meitei women, have operated as the principal economic drivers of the region for centuries, balancing agricultural cultivation with household management and public trade. This powerful legacy is institutionalized in physical spaces such as the all-women Ima Keithel (Women's Market), an epicenter of trade and commerce in Imphal that serves as a living testament to female economic agency and resilience.

Despite this formidable historical inheritance, the contemporary economic identity of the Manipuri woman is increasingly complex, paradoxical, and structurally constrained. While the broader narrative of female empowerment and collective strength persists, a vast demographic segment of women in Imphal West currently serve primarily as housewives, operating entirely within the domestic sphere. The transition from visible market participants to localized managers of the domestic space has led to a systematic, macroeconomic underrepresentation of their economic valuation. The modern housewife in Imphal West emerges not as a passive, dependent entity as often depicted in orthodox economic models, but as a critical, highly active—yet entirely uncompensated—manager of the household micro-economy.

For decades, macroeconomic accounting systems and standard economic literature have largely neglected domestic work, treating it as an invisible externality. This unpaid labor, overwhelmingly carried out by women, is indispensable to the functioning of the broader market economy, sustaining individuals' capacity to work, enabling the reproduction of productive forces, and fundamentally shaping intergenerational human capital. The paradox lies in the fundamental importance of an activity that is rendered economically invisible, untaxed, and unrecorded. In Imphal West, this undervaluation perpetuates a cycle of economic dependency; because activities like childcare, eldercare, and daily household maintenance remain outside formal financial accounting, the housewife's substantial socio-economic contributions do not translate into formal structural power or bargaining authority within the home.

Literature Review

The existing literature on the socio-economic status of women in Manipur underscores a highly unique cultural paradigm that complicates the standard narrative of patriarchal subjugation. Traditional norms in Manipur dictate that women possess a much greater role in the economic life of the state compared to the rigid patriarchal norms dominant in other parts of the Indian subcontinent. Meitei women historically face lesser discrimination regarding mobility and have long enjoyed greater freedom in pursuing trade, commerce, and agricultural cultivation.

The foundation of the modern housewife's socio-economic dilemma rests upon the historical construction of domesticity and the persistent devaluation of domestic labor. The term "housewife" traditionally defined a married woman whose primary role was running or managing the family's home without engaging in formal, remunerated employment outside the home. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the role underwent a period of professionalization with the advent of "home economics," transforming the middle-class housewife into a domestic manager. However, it ultimately confined women's managerial expertise to the uncompensated private sphere.

Today, recognizing the real economic and social value of domestic work is paramount to understanding comprehensive household wealth. Studies combining time-use surveys with income databases consistently show that accounting for extended earnings—market earnings plus the imputed value of unpaid work—dramatically shifts the perspective on household economic wellbeing. Furthermore, traditional economic models of intra-household decision-making indicate that a woman's involvement in household finances and decision-making is significantly and positively related to her distinct share of the total household income. When women hold greater financial decision-making power, per capita household expenditure on critical intergenerational investments, such as children's education, increases significantly.

While the participation rates in economic activities are high and social visibility is undeniable, a vast portion of female labor in Manipur is concentrated in the informal sector, home-based micro-enterprises, and overwhelmingly in unpaid domestic chores. Consequently, the high social visibility of the Meitei woman does not automatically guarantee structural financial autonomy.

Objective of the Study

To systematically evaluate and mathematically quantify the causal impact of a housewife's capacity for independent income generation on her structural empowerment, specifically measuring her authority in household financial decision-making and resource management.

Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the need for focused empirical evaluation, the study tests the following singular hypothesis:

: There is a significant, positive causal relationship between a housewife's capacity for independent income generation and her structural empowerment in Women Empowerment in Decision Making and Resource Management (WEDMR).

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methodological approach utilizing both descriptive and inferential research designs. The descriptive design is used to profile the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, while the inferential design tests relationships between variables and mean differences across demographic and spatial segments. The quantitative data is structured to measure latent psychological and economic constructs related to empowerment, time poverty, and unpaid labor.

Data Collection and Sampling

The research is based on a primary survey conducted across the urban and peri-urban valley regions, highly representative of the socio-economic fabric of Imphal West and its surrounding administrative geography. A total sample size of 452 housewives was selected using a stratified random sampling technique. Data was collected via a structured interview schedule and closed-ended questionnaires utilizing Likert scales. The variables analyzed include demographic details (age, education, family structure), parameters of income generation and utilization, allocations of time, and perceptions of work-life balance.

Analytical Framework

The multi-tiered statistical approach comprises four distinct analytical phases:

1. Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile

The demographic baseline indicates a profound accumulation of human capital. Graduates form the largest single share of the respondent pool, accounting for 31.4% of the surveyed housewives. Furthermore, the highest concentration of this human capital resides in the prime working-age bracket, with 56.2% of the sample falling between the ages of 21 and 30.

Currently, a commanding majority of 53.32% of the respondents reside in nuclear families, compared to only 31.64% in joint families. This structural shift radically exacerbates the phenomenon of "time poverty," forcing the entire logistical and physical burden squarely onto the singular housewife. Regarding economic contributions, 75.66% of the respondents indirectly or directly contribute between 10% to 30% of the total household income. However, 51.33% of the supplementary income generated by the housewife is immediately absorbed into routine household expenses, and 37.61% is directed strictly into children's education and welfare. This leaves a statistically insignificant surplus for her personal wealth accumulation.

2. Relative Importance Index (RII)

An RII analysis was conducted to rank the challenges and opportunities for housewives:

- **Opportunities:** Working from home was ranked as the absolute highest opportunity catalyst , followed closely by the utilization of technology and digital platforms.
- **Perception of Unpaid Labor:** The highest-ranked sentiment across the entire sample is the explicit recognition that their unpaid labor contributes massively to financial stability . However, housewives strongly indicated that their continuous, unpaid labor fundamentally limits opportunities for skill development and creates financial dependency.
- **Work-Life Balance Barriers:** The primary cause of work-life imbalance is acute economic stress, with "Limited financial resources add stress" ranking highest , compounded by a severely restricted social life .

3. Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)

To explicitly test the singular hypothesis , a Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) was constructed. The data successfully passed the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.791) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity .

- **Empowerment Path:** The path mapping the Housewife construct (HW) to Women Empowerment in Decision Making and Resource Management (WEDMR) showed a near-perfect positive correlation.
- **Authority Path:** The path mapping HW to Decision in Financial Resource Sharing (DFRS) demonstrated overwhelming authority.
- **Validating:** The model mathematically isolates "Housewife Income" as the ultimate independent variable. The path demonstrating the causal flow from Housewife Income HW yielded a phenomenal path coefficient of . This mathematically proves that generating independent, personal income acts as an undeniable, profound force multiplier for a woman's structural power within the home, definitively confirming.

4. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

ANOVA testing revealed highly significant, localized disparities across the varied, highly dense wards of Imphal West:

- **Emotional and Physical Strain:** The variable measuring whether respondents "feel emotionally drained due to the demands of balancing home responsibilities" recorded an extraordinarily high regional variance . Impacts on physical health also showed a highly significant geographic split.
- **Social Isolation:** The limitation of social interactions due to unpaid labor yielded a massive between-group variance, proving that urban density severely dictates mobility and networking.

Synthesis and Conclusion

The comprehensive analysis of the empirical data forces a radical, evidence-based re-evaluation of the socio-economic architecture of the household in Manipur. The core of this study was directed by a single, unwavering objective: to evaluate the impact of independent income generation on a housewife's structural empowerment.

The findings confirm the presence of a deeply entrenched "dependent contributor" paradox in Imphal West. The modern Meitei housewife is the indispensable backbone of the family's operational and financial solvency. Yet, the exact nature of this localized, domestic labor systematically excludes her from formal wage accumulation, professional skill development, and independent wealth creation, thereby enforcing severe, long-term financial dependency.

The Structural Equation Modeling provides the definitive, quantifiable truth that resolves the core puzzle of this research. It proves mathematically that while housewives yield massive operational influence over daily consumption and the mechanics of resource sharing, true structural empowerment (WEDMR) is inextricably linked to, and catalyzed by, personal income generation. The near-perfect path coefficients demonstrate that when a housewife controls her own liquid financial inputs, her decision-making authority within the family matrix is fundamentally transformed from passive logistical management to empowered, strategic governance.

To harness the latent human capital represented by the highly educated 21–30 demographic, structural interventions are an absolute imperative. Policy frameworks must prioritize the massive expansion of flexible, digital, and work-from-home opportunities, while systemic governmental investments must be made in accessible, localized childcare and eldercare infrastructure. Unlocking the full economic potential of households in Imphal West demands transitioning the housewife from an invisible, uncompensated domestic manager into an empowered, financially independent, and structurally authoritative economic agent.

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