



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE TOWARDS A PROSPEROUS AND INCLUSIVE JHARKHAND VISION AND STRATEGIES

Empowering Women and Enhancing Gender Equality in Jharkhand

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1. Introduction

Gender equality and women's empowerment are acknowledged as a crucial catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Agenda, given that improvements in women's lives generate positive impacts throughout society. Achieving universal and lasting progress in gender equality demands the eradication of all forms of discrimination faced by women and girls. Attaining this goal necessitates confronting deep-rooted social structures that have historically disadvantaged women. Studies indicate that advancing equality in education, employment, health, and nutrition is essential for enhancing women's overall well-being (Vignitha et al., 2024; Jain, 2023). These disparities are frequently rooted in complex and interconnected social, economic, and political factors that influence women's daily experiences.

In India, Jharkhand continues to confront persistent challenges in advancing gender equality, manifesting in disparities both within households and the public sphere. This paper examines gender equality in Jharkhand through selected indicators to gauge progress and pinpoint domains necessitating intensified policy focus. The objective is to furnish an evidence-based appraisal of these disparities, informing targeted interventions that propel substantive women's empowerment and SDG 5 attainment.

The study relies exclusively on secondary data sources for its analysis. Labour force participation, unemployment, and education-specific labour force data derived from Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) reports for 2017-18 and 2023-24. Health and women's empowerment indicators are sourced from National Family Health Survey (NFHS) rounds 4 and 5 for both India and Jharkhand. The Jharkhand Economic

Survey 2023-24 supplemented by All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) reports furnish data on enrolment rates. In addition, maternal mortality rate (MMR) data from Census and National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data on crimes against, while the SDG India Index Report enables comprehensive evaluation of Jharkhand and India's SDG 5 performance. Extracted data undergo analysis to assess gender equality and women's empowerment trends in Jharkhand relative to national benchmarks.

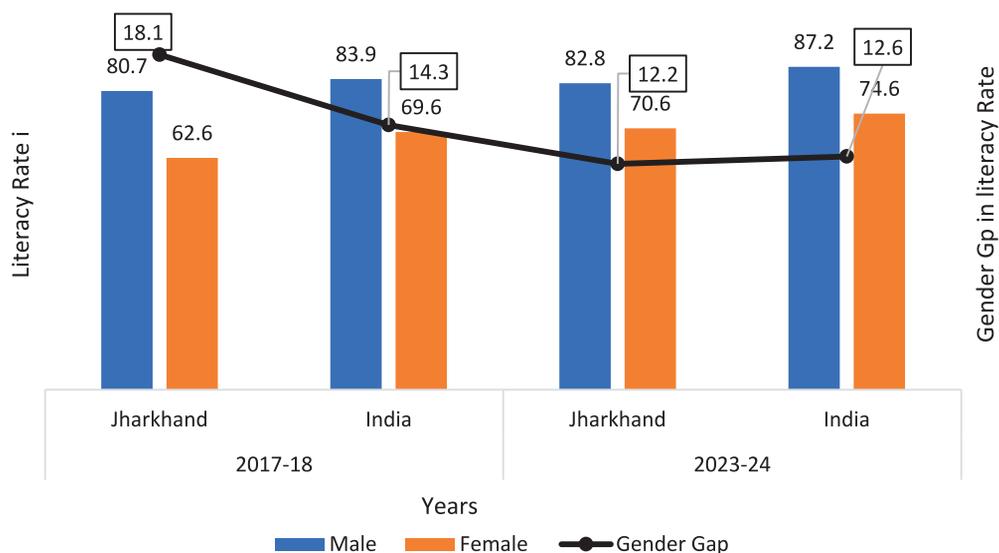
This paper makes a timely contribution to existing understanding on level of development in Jharkhand by providing a comprehensive, seven-year trend analysis (2017-24) of women's empowerment and gender equality indicators in Jharkhand. It integrates multiple dimensions of education, labour markets, health, violence, and SDG 5 indicators to reveal the level of development and remaining policy gaps. The analysis highlights Jharkhand's rapid catch-up potential while identifying structural barriers, offering evidence-based recommendations for targeted interventions under SDG 5 that can inform policymaking and accelerate national progress toward gender parity by 2030.

2.1 Literacy Rate

The literacy data for Jharkhand and India between 2017-18 and 2023-24 show a clear upward trend, with improvements for both men and women (Figure 1). However, the two regions depict a difference in pace and pattern of progress. In Jharkhand, male literacy increased modestly by 2 percentage points, while female literacy rose sharply by 8 percentage points. This led to a notable reduction in the gender literacy gap from a high 18.1 percentage points in 2017-18 to 12.2 in 2023-24, indicating that the state has made considerable progress in addressing gender-based educational disparities. At the national level, male rate increased by 3.3 percentage points, and the female rate rose by 5 percentage points. As a result, the gender gap reduced from 14.3 percentage points to 12.6 percentage points over the study period.

When comparing Jharkhand to the national average, the state continues to have lower overall literacy levels for both men and women. However, with a faster rate of improvement, especially among women, it has achieved a slightly lower gender gap in literacy rates than India.

Figure 1
Gender gap in literacy rate of Jharkhand and India between 2017-18 and 2023-24



Source: PLFS annual reports for 2017-18 & 2023-24

2.2 Level of Education

The level of education of women in Jharkhand has increased over the last seven years (Table 1). In 2017-18, the percentage of women (15 years and above) in Jharkhand with no education was much higher than the percentage of men, resulting in a gender gap of 21.2 percentage points. Corresponding proportions were lower at 16.8 percentage points for India. By 2023-24, the percentage of women in Jharkhand with no education fell sharply by nearly 10 percentage points, narrowing the gender gap to 15 percentage points, bringing it closer to the national level gender gap of 14.6 percentage points. This progress suggests expanding educational access and improving gender parity.

Considering secondary and higher secondary education levels, in 2017-18 and 2023-24, men in Jharkhand consistently show higher proportions than women, resulting in a gender gap of 9.2 percentage points and 6.5 percentage points, respectively. Thus, the gender divide narrowed slightly over the 7 year study period and also reduced below all-India levels in 2023-24. As far as the share of women with graduate and above levels of education is concerned, in 2017-18, 5.1 percent reached this level,

and proportions showed a marginal increase to 6.4 percentage points in 2023-24. The result is a negligible decline in the gender gap from 4.3 percentage points to 4.1 percentage points. At the all-India level, as well, though the proportions for women and lower than that for men, the gender gap is lower at 3.5 percentage points with no improvement over the study period.

Table 1

Comparison of Completed Educational Levels of Women and Men (15 years and above) in Jharkhand and India between 2017-18 to 2023-24

Year	Region	Gender	Not literate	Below secondary	Secondary & Higher Secondary	Graduate & above
2017-18	Jharkhand	Male	23.8	39.5	27.2	9.4
		Female	45.0	31.9	18.0	5.1
	India	Male	18.5	39.3	30.1	12.1
		Female	35.3	34.7	21.2	8.6
2023-24	Jharkhand	Male	20.5	39.7	29.3	10.5
		Female	35.5	35.3	22.8	6.4
	India	Male	15.0	38.7	31.4	14.8
		Female	29.6	34.7	24.4	11.3

Notes: Below secondary level includes primary and middle levels of education. Secondary and Higher secondary include certificate/diploma also

Source: PLFS annual reports for 2017-18 & 2023-24

2.3 Enrolment in Higher Education

Table 2 compares gross enrolment in higher education (ages 18–23) in Jharkhand and India, highlighting both levels and gender gaps over time. The data show that Jharkhand consistently lags behind the all-India average in gross enrolment ratios for higher education. In 2017–18, Jharkhand’s total enrolment ratio was 15.9 percent compared to 24.6 percent for India, implying that Jharkhand was about 9 percentage points below the national level. By 2021–22, though Jharkhand’s total enrolment ratio rose to 18.6 percent against 28.4 percent at the all-India level, the state continues to exhibit a structurally lower level of participation in higher education.

In both Jharkhand and India, the gender gap in gross enrolment in higher education is negligible, tilted slightly in favour of women, signalling progress towards gender equality in access to tertiary education. In Jharkhand, female gross enrolment marginally exceeds male enrolment in both 2017–18 and 2021–22, with the female-

favouring gender gap moving from 0.3 to 0.1 percentage points. At the all-India level also, the gap shifts from 0.1 to 0.2 percentage points. This indicates that girls who complete school in Jharkhand have similar chances as boys to enter higher education, suggesting relatively equal access within the state in terms of access to educational opportunities.

Table 2
**Comparison of Gross Enrolment in Higher Education (18-23 years)
in Jharkhand and India between 2017-18 and 2023-24**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Gender Gap</i>
2017-18	Jharkhand	15.8	16.1	15.9	-0.3
	India	24.5	24.6	24.6	-0.1
2021-22	Jharkhand	18.6	18.7	18.6	-0.1
	India	28.3	28.5	28.4	-0.2

Source: Jharkhand Economic Survey 2023-24 & AISHE (all India survey on Higher education report 2021-22)

The data shows that while Jharkhand has achieved near gender parity, its overall progress in men's and women's enrolment in higher education remains slower than the national average. This reveals that both boys and girls in Jharkhand face greater structural barriers, reflecting a need for greater investment in higher education infrastructure, targeted support for tribal and rural girls, and policies that strengthen transitions from secondary to tertiary education to ensure that gender parity translates into meaningful empowerment.

2.4 Labour Force Participation of Women

Labour force participation rates for women in Jharkhand and India surged significantly between 2017-18 and 2023-24, resulting in a reduction in gender gaps. The rates for women in Jharkhand increased significantly from 15.4 percent in 2017-18 to 49.8 percent in 2023-24. However, the all-India LFPR has risen from 45.1 percent in 2017-18 to 63.8 percent in 2023-24 (Table 3).

In 2017-18, Jharkhand exhibited an extreme gender gap of 58.5 percentage points, exceeding India's gap of 52.5 percentage points, reflecting limited opportunities for women. By 2023-24, the increase in participation rates for women in Jharkhand compressed the gender gap to 28.5 percentage points, while that for India, the gap narrowed at a relatively higher level of 37.1 percentage points.

The rise in labour force participation rates for women is a positive sign of women's empowerment. It may be indicative of the positive impact of government schemes and initiatives aimed at promoting women's employment.

Table 3
Comparison of Labour Force Participation Rate (aged 15 years and above)
in Jharkhand and India between 2017-18 to 2023-24 (%)

Year	State	Male	Female	Gender gap
2017-18	Jharkhand	73.9	15.4	58.5
	India	75.8	23.3	52.5
2023-24	Jharkhand	78.3	49.8	28.5
	India	78.8	41.7	37.1

Note: LFPR is according to usual status (ps+ss)

Source: Jharkhand economic survey: 2024-25

Table 4 further examines the above positive trends in terms of the completed education levels of women and men. Women's LFPR rose dramatically across education levels from 2017-18 to 2023-24 in both Jharkhand and India, with the sharpest gains at lower education levels and more modest increases at higher levels. A general trend for both regions is that of a decrease in participation rates as education level of women increases to that of higher secondary levels. Thereafter, it shows an increasing trend from graduate to post-graduate levels.

In 2017-18, the gender gaps in participation rates were extreme and widened by around 50 percentage points and above for all education levels of women in Jharkhand, though it declined from 58.9 percentage points for illiterates to 53.6 percentage points for post-graduates. These gaps were slightly narrower for women in India, showing a declining trend from 52 percent for women with no education to 40.3 percent for those with a post-graduate level of education.

In 2023-24, participation rates for women show a surge across all education levels for both Jharkhand and India, stronger at lower levels and modest at graduate and above levels, indicating informal sector pull for low-skilled women. As a result, gender gaps narrowed dramatically but peaked at higher education levels, underscoring persistent barriers to educated women's formal employment. Among graduates, the gap was of the magnitude of 54 percentage points in Jharkhand and 48 percentage points in India. Similarly, among post-graduates, gap was relatively higher for women in Jharkhand (56.3 percentage points) than India (38.3 percentage points).

Table 4
Comparison of Labour Force Participation Rate (aged 15 years and above) by Completed Levels in Jharkhand and India between 2017-18 to 2023-24 (%)

Year	Region	Gender	Not literate	Middle Secondary	Higher secondary	Graduate	Post graduate & above	All	
2017-18	Jharkhand	Male	77.1	71.8	63.2	56.7	79.7	95.1	73.9
		Female	18.2	13.4	9.7	8.8	20.2	41.5	15.4
	India	Male	79.8	78	65.1	58.9	80.6	85.9	75.8
		Female	27.8	17.6	14.6	13.5	29.2	45.6	23.3
2023-24	Jharkhand	Male	76.4	77.5	70.6	68.8	88.5	96.3	78.3
		Female	59	42.3	33.6	32.6	34.5	40	49.8
	India	Male	78.2	81.2	68.1	67	86.4	89.4	78.8
		Female	50.4	38.2	29	25	38.4	51.1	41.7

Note: UR is according to usual status (ps+ss)

Source: PLFs annual reports for 2017-18 & 2023-24

1.5 Unemployment Rate

The data on unemployment rates by completed education levels offer important insights into the relationship between educational attainment and differences in labour market outcomes of men and women. The trends for 2017-18 and 2023-24 indicate that the unemployment rate for women in Jharkhand increases with an increase in their education levels (Table 5). In 2017-18, it stood at 27 percent for graduates and 35.1 percent for postgraduates, significantly higher than that of men at 19.7 percent and 5.3 percent respectively. High unemployment among educated women often discourages younger women from pursuing higher studies because the perceived returns on education appear low (Kanjilal-Bhaduri and Pastore, 2018; Chatterjee et al., 2018). By 2023-24, unemployment rates declined sharply for the higher educated women. As a result, between 2017-18 and 2023-24, the gender gap declined from 7.3 percentage points to 2.8 percentage points for graduates and from 29.8 percentage points to 14.4 percentage points for post-graduates.

Between 2017-18 and 2023-24, while both Jharkhand and India narrowed female disadvantage gender gaps in graduate unemployment, Jharkhand achieved a proportionally greater reduction than India. Similarly, at the post-graduate level, Jharkhand substantially narrowed its extreme female-disfavouring post-

graduate unemployment gap, while India's smaller gap slightly widened, highlighting Jharkhand's faster relative progress. These reductions signal improving labour market absorption for educated women in Jharkhand, though persistent gaps may be indicative of barriers like skill mismatches and biases in rural-tribal contexts.

Table 5
Comparison of Unemployment Rate (aged 15 years and above) by Completed Education Levels in Jharkhand and India between 2017-18 to 2023-24 (%)

Year	Region	Gender	Not literate	Middle Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduate	Post graduate & above	All	
2017-18	Jharkhand	Male	2.8	8.9	8	13.9	19.7	5.3	7.9
		Female	0	7.6	12.4	17.7	27	35.1	5.2
	India	Male	1.8	5.8	5.7	9.4	14.7	10.4	6.1
		Female	0.2	4	6.3	15.4	27.5	24.3	5.6
2023-24	Jharkhand	Male	0.1	1.3	1.1	2.4	6.9	3.7	1.8
		Female	0	0	0	0	9.7	18.1	0.5
	India	Male	0.4	1.8	2	4.3	10.6	7	3.2
		Female	0.1	0.9	1.7	4.5	20.4	22.5	3.2

Note: UR is according to usual status (ps+ss)

Source: PLFs annual reports for 2017-18 & 2023-24

1.6 Gender Wage Disparity

Gender wage disparities in the Indian labour market persist, with women earning lower salaries than men, exerting a dampening effect on female labour force participation. It hinders both female empowerment and economic growth (Gupta and Kothe, 2024). Reducing the wage gap would elevate women's economic status, boost India's GDP, and contribute to broader social advancement.

Table 6 presents a comparison of average wage earnings of regular salaried workers in Jharkhand and India. The wage data reveal persistent wage disparity in Jharkhand such that in 2017-18, women earned ₹11,303 per month, less than half of men's earnings (₹22,592). This gender wage gap was much wider than the national gap of ₹3803 per month. By 2023-24, although overall wages shifted slightly, gender disparities in Jharkhand remained almost unchanged. Women earned ₹10,203 while

men earned ₹21,340, again showing that women make roughly half of what men earn. In contrast, the earnings gap narrowed more at the national level, with women earning ₹17,034 compared to men's ₹22,375. This reflects that even when women enter the labour market, they experience persisting forms of gender discrimination that significantly lower their economic returns in comparison to men.

Table 6

Comparison of Average Wage/salary Earnings among Regular/wage Salaried of the Period Apr-June 2024 in Jharkhand and India between 2017-18 to 2023-24

Year	Region	Male	Female	Person
2017-18	Jharkhand	22593	11303	20460
	India	17698	13890	16848
2023-24	Jharkhand	21340	10203	18664
	India	22375	17034	21103

Source: PLFS annual reports for 2017-18 & 2023-24

2.7 Health Status of Women

Women's health indicators in Jharkhand shows mixed progress relative to India, with improvements in maternal mortality rate (Patnaik et al., 2025), but persistent disadvantages in child marriage, adolescent fertility, and anaemia. Overall, Jharkhand tends to lag national averages on many service and nutrition indicators, even where outcome indicators like sex ratio look favourable.

A comparison of data for NFHS-4 (2015-16) and NFHS-5 (2019-20) shows that Jharkhand continues to exhibit deeper gender inequalities than national averages in areas related to women's health (Table 7). Jharkhand's overall sex ratio improved sharply from 1002 to 1050, surpassing the national figures in both rounds, indicating a favourable demographic balance among the total population. However, the sex ratio at birth declined from 919 to 899, while for India, it improved from 919 to 929. This widening gap signals persistent gender bias at birth in Jharkhand, pointing to son preference and limited autonomy of women in reproductive decisions. This may further be supported by higher fertility rates in Jharkhand, particularly the adolescent fertility rates. Though fertility for women in Jharkhand declined between 2015-16 and 2019-21, but remains above replacement and national levels. Adolescent fertility rate reduced from 77 to 64 per 1,000 in Jharkhand but stays far higher than India's 43 (down from 51), reflecting early childbearing and associated maternal and child

health risks. Weak reproductive autonomy of women is also reflected in low use of modern family methods by currently married (15 to 49 years) women in Jharkhand. Despite an overtime increase, the percentages remain lower than the national averages. Use of modern family planning among married women in Jharkhand rose from 37.5 percent to 49.5 percent, narrowing the gap with India but still trailing national uptake, which limits women's control over fertility and spacing.

Child marriage remains a major gender inequality concern. Although the prevalence of early marriage among young women (20 to 24 years old) declined from 37.9 percent to 32.2 percent, it remains significantly higher than the national rate. Early marriage among young men also exceeds the national average, reinforcing the broader socio-cultural norms that restrict educational and economic opportunities for girls and boys.

Jharkhand performs comparatively well on some mortality measures but lags on service coverage. Its maternal mortality rate (MMR) improved over the study period from 61 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births to 54 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, better than India's rate of 88 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2019-21. Underfive mortality declined from 54.3 to 45.4 deaths per 1,000 live births, yet remaining above the national average of 41.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2019-21, signalling slower gains in child survival. However, in terms of maternal care, only 38.6 percent of the mothers in Jharkhand received at least four antenatal visits in NFHS5 versus 58.1 percent mothers nationally. Also, postnatal care within two days dropped sharply from 69.1 percent mothers to 44.4 percent mothers in Jharkhand, depicting a trend reverse to that of India. This decline is especially concerning and shows worsening support during a critical period. On the other hand, skilled birth attendance improved significantly in Jharkhand (from 69.6 percent to 82.5 percent), moving closer to the national average of 89.4 percent in 2019-21.

Anaemia remains a critical burden for women in Jharkhand and is consistently worse than the national average. Among pregnant women, anaemia levels fell from 62.6 percent in 2015-16 to 56.8 in 2019-21, but continue to stay above India's level of 52.2 percent. In the case of 15 to 49 years old women, the prevalence rate in Jharkhand is remains unchanged at around 65 percent in both the study years, leaving Jharkhand at a higher level than the all-India averages. This may be indicative of broader dietary and infection-related deficits that indirectly affect women through household food allocation and care chains

Table 7
**Comparison of Trends in Health Indicators of Women in Jharkhand
 and India between 2015-16 and 2019-21**

Indicators	NFHS4		NFHS 5	
	2015-16		2019-21	
	Jharkhand_4	India_4	Jharkhand_5	India_5
<i>Sex ratio</i>				
Sex ratio of the total population (females per 1,000 males)	1002	991	1050	1020
Sex ratio at birth for children born in the last five years (females per 1,000 males)	919	919	899	929
<i>Child Marriage</i>				
Women age 20-24 years married before age 18 years (%)	37.9	26.8	32.2	23.3
Men age 25-29 years married before age 21 years (%)	30.5	20.3	22.7	17.7
<i>Fertility Rate</i>				
Total fertility rate (children per woman)	2.6	2.2	2.3	2
Adolescent fertility rate for women age 15-19 years	77	51	64	43
<i>Family Planning</i>				
Current Use of Family Planning Methods (currently married women age 15-49 years) Any modern method (%)	37.5	47.8	49.5	56.5
<i>Mortality Rate</i>				
Maternal Mortality Rate*	61	103	54	88
Under-five mortality rate (U5MR)	54.3	49.7	45.4	41.9
<i>Maternal Care</i>				
Mothers who had at least 4 antenatal care visits (%)	30.3	51.2	38.6	58.1
Mothers who received postnatal care from doctor/nurse/LHV/ANM/midwife/other health personnel within 2 days of delivery (%)	69.1	62.4	44.4	78
Births attended by skilled health personnel10 (%)	69.6	81.4	82.5	89.4
<i>Prevalence of Anaemia</i>				
Pregnant women age 15-49 years who are anaemic (<11.0 g/dl)22 (%)	62.6	50.4	56.8	52.2
All women age 15-49 years who are anaemic22 (%)	65.2	53.1	65.3	57
Men age 15-49 years who are anaemic (<13.0 g/dl)22 (%)	29.8	22.7	29.6	25

Note: *MMR: The maternal mortality rate is the number of these maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in a given population over a specific time period.

Source: Rounds of NFHS 4 & 5

2.8 Violence against Women (VAW)

Violence against women, commonly termed crimes against women (CAW), includes any gender-based acts resulting in physical, sexual, psychological harm, or suffering to women, such as threats, coercion, or arbitrary liberty deprivation in public or private spheres (Pooja et al., 2024).

As per the data provided by the National crime records bureaus (NCRB), in 2017, Jharkhand reported an incidence of 5,911 crimes against women, resulting in a crime rate of 35.6 per lakh female population, much lower than the national rate of 57.9. By 2023, the incidence rose to 6,989, yet the crime rate increases only marginally to 36.1, while India's rate rises sharply to 66.2 (Table 8). This indicates that although the absolute number of cases in Jharkhand increased, the rise is proportionally much smaller compared with the national trend. In relative terms, women in Jharkhand experience a lower recorded crime rate than the national average, which may reflect differences in reporting, policing practices, population growth, or actual prevalence of violence.

Table 8
Comparison of Trends in Incidence and Rate of Violence against Women in Jharkhand and India between 2017 and 2023

Year	Region	Incidence	Mid-Year Projected Female Population (In Lakhs 2023)	Rate of Total Crime against Women
2017	Jharkhand	5911	166.3	35.6
	India	359849	6211.5	57.9
2023	Jharkhand	6989	193.6	36.1
	India	448211	6770.4	66.2

Source: NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) data for 2017 and 2023

Further, examining the composition of incidents of violence against women reveals an important contrast between Jharkhand and India. Almost across all categories (Table 9), Jharkhand records lower crime rates than India in both 2017 and 2023. For example, cruelty by husband or in-laws is far lower in Jharkhand (6.0 in 2017, falling to 4.0 in 2023) compared with India's much higher and rising rates (16.8 to 19.7). Similarly, rates of assault on women with intent to outrage modesty and kidnapping.

On the other hand, dowry deaths, although declining in Jharkhand (from 1.5 to 1.1), remain slightly higher than the national rate in both years. Jharkhand's rape rate

increased from 5.5 in 2017 to 6.3 in 2023, surpassing India's rate, which declined from 5.2 to 4.4. This widening gap signals persistent vulnerabilities for women in Jharkhand, including unsafe public spaces, weak enforcement, and social norms that do not sufficiently deter sexual violence. Unlike cruelty or assault, sexual violence appears more severe in Jharkhand than nationally, pointing to deeper gender inequalities that affect women's bodily autonomy and mobility.

At the aggregated level, total IPC crimes against women in Jharkhand decreased slightly from 25.7 to 23.6, while India saw an increase from 50.7 to 53.2. While this suggests relative stability in Jharkhand, it also indicates limited progress in strengthening women's safety and justice systems. India's rising rates may partially reflect better reporting and legal awareness, while Jharkhand's lower numbers may mask social barriers that prevent women from accessing police or legal support.

Table 9
Comparison of Trends in the Composition of Violence against Women in Jharkhand and India (IPC) between 2017 and 2023

Categories of Violence against Women	2017				2023			
	Jharkhand		India		Jharkhand		India	
	I	R	I	R	I	R	I	R
Dowry Deaths	248	1.5	7466	1.2	218	1.1	6156	0.9
Cruelty by Husband or his relatives	998	6.0	104551	16.8	770	4.0	133676	19.7
Kidnapping & Abduction of Women	1033	6.2	66333	10.7	1253	6.5	88605	13.1
Human Trafficking	19	0.1	662	0.1	37	0.2	1211	0.2
Rape	914	5.5	32559	5.2	1221	6.3	29670	4.4
Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her Modesty	748	4.5	86001	13.8	944	4.9	83891	12.4
Insult to the Modesty of Women	104	0.6	7451	1.2	4	0.0	8823	1.3
Other Crimes	210	1.3	10192	1.7	118	0.6	8329	1.2
Total IPC Crimes against Women	4274	25.7	315215	50.7	4565	23.6	360361	53.2

Note: IPC; I implies Incidence; R implies rate calculated as

Source: NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) data for 2017 and 2023

Overall, the data suggest that Jharkhand has lower recorded crime rates against women than the national level, but this does not directly translate into stronger empowerment. Instead, it underscores the need for better reporting systems, stronger gender-responsive policing, and social support structures to ensure that women can exercise their rights and seek justice without fear or barriers.

3. Progress in Terms of SDG 5

This section summarizes the progress made by Jharkhand in terms of attaining the targets under the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which aims at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, encompassing parameters like ending discrimination (5.1), eliminating violence (5.2), ensuring economic participation (5.5), and recognizing unpaid care work (5.4).

Jharkhand's SDG 5 index score stands at 42 in 2023 (Table 10), below India's national score of 49 (out of 100), indicating slower overall progress toward gender equality and women's empowerment despite over time progress. The key advances include improvement in women's agency within households, with 90.9 percent of married women participating in three key decisions (e.g., health, purchases), surpassing India's average of 88.7 percent. Female-to-male LFPR ratio improved to 0.6, outperforming India's ratio of 0.48. Women in managerial positions per 1,000 persons reach 208 in Jharkhand, matching India's level of 210, signalling gradual gains in female leadership.

Nevertheless, critical deficits undermine empowerment of women. The sex ratio at birth (899) in Jharkhand is significantly lower than both the national average (929) and the SDG target (950), pointing to enduring gender bias, son preference, and barriers to female survival at birth. Similarly, women's economic empowerment remains weak because of female to male wage ratio of just 0.6, far below both India's 0.76 and the ideal of parity. This wage gap directly limits women's financial independence and bargaining power within households and labour markets. Experiences of spousal violence remain alarmingly high in Jharkhand, with 31.4 percent of ever-married women reporting violence, higher than the national rate and far from the target of zero. This underscores deep rooted patriarchal norms, weak institutional protection, and limited autonomy and safety for women inside their homes.

Women hold only 11.3 percent of operational land holdings, well below national levels and extremely far from the target of 50 percent. Digital access remains another challenge. Only 49 percent of women in Jharkhand own a mobile phone, significantly below the national figure (53.9 percent) and even farther from the target (80.6

percent). This digital divide reduces women’s access to information, financial services, safety tools, and employment opportunities. Access to modern contraceptive methods is also lower in Jharkhand (67.6 percent) than the national average (74.1 percent), signalling lingering gaps in health autonomy and reproductive rights.

Taken together, the indicators show that while Jharkhand has strengths in women’s labour participation and household decision-making, it faces greater challenges in safety, economic equality, asset ownership, digital access, reproductive autonomy, and structural discrimination. These gaps highlight the need for targeted interventions that address both social norms and institutional barriers to achieve substantive women’s empowerment.

Table 10
**Progress of Jharkhand in Attaining the Targets under SDG 5
in Comparison to India as per 2023 data**

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Jharkhand</i>	<i>India (National)</i>	<i>Targets (India)</i>
Sex Ratio at Birth	899	929	950
Ratio of Female to Male Average Wage Earnings	0.6	0.76	1
% of Ever-Married Women (18–49) Who Experienced Spousal Violence	31.40%	29.20%	0
Female to Male LFPR Ratio (15–59 yrs)	0.6	0.48	1
Women in Managerial Positions (per 1,000 persons)	207.55	210.24	245
% of Married Women (15–49) Whose Family Planning Needs Are Met by Modern Methods	67.60%	74.10%	100
% of Female-Operated Operational Land Holdings	11.27%	13.96%	50
% Women (15–49) Owning a Mobile Phone They Use	49%	53.90%	80.63
% Married Women (15–49) Participating in 3 Household Decisions	90.90%	88.70%	100
SDG 5 Index Score	42	49	100

Source: SDG India Report

4. Discussion

The analysis of trends in varied women empowerment and gender equality indicators for Jharkhand over a 7 year timeframe indicates that while Jharkhand is improving in reducing illiteracy and expanding secondary education for women, substantial

gender inequality persists. The gender gap in graduate and above completion levels has remained higher than India's average. Overall, the data shows that even though Jharkhand has improved in reducing overall unemployment by 2023–24, higher educated women remain disadvantaged. The persistently high unemployment rates among educated women reduce incentives for families to invest in girls' higher education. The difficulty they face in securing employment weakens the transformative potential of higher education. This creates a cycle where limited enrolment leads to fewer women with higher qualifications, which in turn restricts their access to better jobs and economic independence. The persisting gender wage gap further imposes a discouraging impact on women's labour market engagement.

Health data reveal mixed SDG 5.6 progress on reproductive rights and autonomy, intertwined with SDG 5.2 on violence elimination, with Jharkhand outperforming India on maternal mortality rate. Improvements appear in skilled birth attendance, yet service coverage like antenatal and postnatal care lags significantly. Persistent high anaemia prevalence, elevated child marriage and adolescent fertility rates, and declining sex ratio at birth signal ongoing reproductive and nutritional challenges. On a positive note, Jharkhand has made notable advances in maternal survival and increased skilled birth attendance, highlighting effective interventions in critical healthcare access.

Jharkhand records relatively lower overall crime rates against women compared to national levels, with declines in certain domestic violence categories like cruelty by husbands. However, rises in rape incidents and persistent dowry deaths indicate vulnerabilities in sexual violence and public safety. Lower rates likely reflect underreporting due to social norms and access barriers rather than true reductions. Spousal violence remains alarmingly high, eroding women's agency and intersecting with economic barriers. Enhanced reporting, policing, and support systems are essential for meaningful progress under SDG 5.2

Jharkhand shows moderate progress toward SDG 5, lagging behind national benchmarks overall. Strengths emerge in household decision-making agency, labour force participation ratios, and female leadership roles, reflecting gains in economic and intra-family empowerment. Critical deficits persist in sex ratio at birth, wage equality, spousal violence, land ownership, digital access, and contraceptive autonomy, underscoring entrenched discrimination and resource gaps. These imbalances highlight the need for targeted policies addressing norms, safety, and infrastructure to achieve substantive gender equality.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of gender equality and women's empowerment trends in Jharkhand over 2017-24 reveals a state of positive transition, marked by notable strides alongside entrenched challenges. Educational gains in terms of reduced illiteracy and expanded access to secondary education do signal progress under SDG 5.1, yet stagnant graduate completion gaps limit pathways to higher education. An improvement in unemployment rates is required with respect to the generation of attractive formal job opportunities for women with graduate and above levels of education. This necessitates targeted strategies to attract and retain girls in higher education while ensuring adequate returns on education through improved labour market outcomes. Jharkhand's improvements in maternal survival and skilled birth attendance highlight successful healthcare interventions, marking important steps toward advancing women's health. Nevertheless, persistent challenges in terms of high anaemia rates, early child marriage, adolescent fertility, and a declining sex ratio at birth indicate ongoing reproductive and nutritional issues that must be addressed. Incidents of violence against women expose the vulnerabilities of women. Alarming high spousal violence erodes their agency, demanding robust SDG 5.2 measures like gender-responsive policing.

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