

The Impact of Skill Training and Employment Generation Programs on Muslim Women in Bihar

Nazia Rahman

Research Scholar
University Department of Geography
T.M. Bhagalpur University, Bhagalpur-812007

Abstract:

Skill training and employment generation programs have emerged as critical interventions for addressing the socio-economic marginalization of Muslim women in Bihar, a state where this community constitutes approximately 17% of the population but faces low literacy rates (around 31.5% in some studies) and workforce participation (15.1%). This paper examines the impact of key initiatives such as the Bihar Skill Development Mission (BSDM), Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), JEEViKA (Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society under NRLM), Hunar Programme, and minority-specific schemes like Nai Roshni and Seekho Aur Kamao. Drawing on secondary data from government reports, academic studies, and program evaluations, the analysis reveals initial gains in employability, income generation, and empowerment through self-help groups (SHGs) and vocational training. However, challenges including socio-cultural barriers, caste-based discrimination, low program inclusivity, salary mismatches, and high attrition rates limit long-term sustainability. The study finds mixed outcomes: short-term employment boosts of up to 29 percentage points in some programs, but near-zero sustained effects due to structural constraints. Recommendations emphasize culturally sensitive, community-led training, better rural infrastructure, and targeted monitoring for Muslim women to enhance economic independence and social inclusion.

Keywords: Skill training, employment generation and women empowerment etc.

Introduction:

Muslim women in Bihar represent one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of socio-economic indicators, characterized by limited access to education, employment, and financial resources. Despite national and state-level efforts under schemes like the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and Bihar Skill Development Mission (BSDM), their participation in the formal workforce remains disproportionately low. Skill training programs aim to bridge this gap by providing vocational skills, entrepreneurship support, and livelihood opportunities, particularly through self-help groups (SHGs) and domain-specific training. These initiatives align with broader goals of gender equity and minority empowerment under schemes like Nai Roshni and Hunar. However, deep-rooted socio-cultural norms, mobility constraints, discrimination, and uneven implementation often hinder their effectiveness. This paper evaluates the impact of such programs on Muslim women in Bihar, highlighting both achievements and persistent barriers.

Objectives:

1. To assess the extent to which skill training and employment generation programs have improved employment opportunities and economic status of Muslim women in Bihar.

2. To identify socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers affecting their participation and retention in these programs.
3. To propose policy recommendations for enhancing the inclusivity and long-term impact of these programs on Muslim women's empowerment.

Literature Review:

The literature on skill development and women's empowerment in Bihar provides valuable insights, though studies specifically focused on Muslim women remain limited. The following seven key studies/reviews are examined:

B. Chakravorty and A. S. Bedi (2019)¹, in their study 'Skills Training and Employment Outcomes in Rural Bihar', examined the effectiveness of vocational skill training programmes in improving employment opportunities in rural Bihar. The study found that skill development initiatives positively influenced employability, income generation, and self-employment opportunities among rural youth and women. However, the researchers also observed that social barriers, low educational levels, and limited market linkages restricted the full benefits of these programmes, particularly for minority women. The study emphasized the importance of targeted training and post-training support for sustainable employment outcomes.

P. Kumar and N. Shadab (2024)², in the article 'Impact of Skill Training Programs in Bihar: A Pathway to Economic Empowerment', analyzed the role of skill development programmes in enhancing economic opportunities for marginalized communities in Bihar. The study revealed that vocational training improved employment prospects, entrepreneurship, and financial independence among women participants. It further highlighted that women from economically weaker and minority backgrounds experienced increased self-confidence and social participation after receiving skill-based training. The researchers concluded that skill training can serve as an effective tool for poverty reduction and women's empowerment.

S. Farheen (2020)³, in the study 'Attitude towards Education and Employment among Muslim Women', explored the perceptions of Muslim women regarding education and employment. The study found that although Muslim women increasingly recognize the importance of education and employment for economic security and social empowerment, traditional social norms and family restrictions continue to limit their participation in the workforce. The research emphasized that vocational education and skill development programmes can help Muslim women achieve greater economic independence and social mobility.

National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and the Bihar Education Project Council (2008–2012)⁴, through the 'Hunar Programme Reports', evaluated programmes aimed at providing vocational education and skill training to minority girls and women in Bihar. The reports highlighted that the Hunar Programme significantly improved literacy, vocational skills, and employment awareness among Muslim women. Training in tailoring, embroidery, handicrafts, and other income-generating activities enabled many women to contribute financially to their households. The programme also encouraged greater participation of Muslim girls in continuing education and skill-based learning.

Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI) and World Bank⁵ evaluations on JEEViKA and NRLM programmes examined the impact of self-help groups and livelihood initiatives on rural women in Bihar. These studies found that participation in SHGs improved women's access to credit, savings, entrepreneurship opportunities, and community participation. Minority and Muslim women associated with these programmes experienced better financial inclusion, enhanced decision-making power, and increased livelihood security. The evaluations emphasized that livelihood and skill development programmes play a crucial role in reducing poverty and promoting women's socio-economic empowerment in Bihar.

S. Singh (2024)⁶, in the working paper 'The Gendered Impact of Skill Training on Employment and Migration in India', analyzed how skill training programmes affect employment patterns and migration

among women. The study observed that women who received vocational and technical training were more likely to secure employment opportunities and improve household income. However, gender discrimination, limited mobility, and socio-cultural restrictions continued to affect women's access to better employment opportunities. The study suggested that gender-sensitive training policies and safe working environments are essential for maximizing the benefits of skill development programmes for women, especially among socially marginalized communities such as Muslim women in Bihar.

Methodology:

This study adopts a desk-based qualitative and secondary data analysis approach. Data were sourced from peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports (BSDM, NRLM, Ministry of Minority Affairs), program evaluation documents, and academic PDFs accessed via public repositories. Key inclusion criteria were relevance to Bihar, skill/employment programs, and Muslim/minority women. Thematic analysis was used to synthesize impacts, barriers, and outcomes. No primary data collection was undertaken; findings rely on existing empirical evaluations (e.g., quasi-experimental designs in DDU-GKY studies) and official statistics. Limitations include reliance on secondary sources and potential underreporting of Muslim-specific disaggregated data.

Overview of Key Programs:

Bihar's skill ecosystem includes BSDM's Kushal Yuva Program (KYP) and Domain Skilling Centres (high female enrollment, ~48-61% in some streams), DDU-GKY for rural youth, JEEViKA/NRLM SHGs, Hunar for minority girls, and targeted schemes like Mukhyamantri Alpsankhyak Rozgar Rinn Yojana and Nai Roshni. These focus on tailoring, beauty, digital literacy, healthcare, and entrepreneurship.

Positive Impacts:

Programs have facilitated entry into non-agricultural jobs, SHG-based micro-enterprises, and improved confidence. Healthcare and digital training have enhanced agency in rural areas. Hunar and SHG models demonstrate community trust leading to higher uptake among Muslim girls. Some evaluations report 60%+ placement and income gains.

Challenges and Limited Sustainability:

As per DDU-GKY evidence, initial employment spikes fade due to discrimination and economic mismatches. Muslim women face additional hurdles: purdah norms, family resistance, low awareness, rural infrastructure deficits, and underrepresentation in beneficiary lists. Employment rates remain low, with many trained women reverting to unpaid domestic work.

Intersectional Factors:

Caste, SES, and family type exacerbate exclusion, as seen in attitude studies. While general women's skilling shows progress, Muslim-specific inclusion lags.

Conclusion:

Skill training and employment programs have laid a foundation for empowering Muslim women in Bihar, offering pathways to economic independence and social mobility. However, without addressing inclusion gaps, post-training support, and cultural sensitivities, their transformative potential remains unrealized. Sustained impact requires targeted quotas, community partnerships (e.g., via madrasas/SHGs), flexible scheduling, and integration with financial literacy/microfinance. Future research should include longitudinal primary studies on long-term outcomes. Policymakers must prioritize disaggregated data and monitoring to ensure equitable benefits, ultimately contributing to Bihar's broader development goals.

REFERENCES:

1. Chakravorty, B., & Bedi, A. S. (2019) : Skills Training and Employment Outcomes in Rural Bihar. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41027-019-00167-8>
2. Kumar, P., & Shadab, N. (2024) : Impact of Skill Training Programs in Bihar: A Pathway to Economic Empowerment. *JETIR*.
3. Farheen, S. (2020) : Attitude towards Education and Employment among Muslim Women. *Journal of Indian Research and Review*.
4. National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) & Bihar Education Project Council. (2008–2012) : Hunar Programme Reports.
5. ADRI & World Bank-related evaluations on JEEViKA/NRLM (various years).
6. Singh, S. (2024) : The Gendered Impact of Skill Training on Employment and Migration in India. ISID Working Paper.