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GENERAL STUDIES 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE

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TOPIC: EMPLOYMENT

Rural women are working, informally. But are they doing well?

Context:

- Recent Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) show a rise in employment, especially self-employment, among rural women since 2017-18.

Increase in Rural Women's Employment:

- Many rural women are working as helpers in home-based enterprises.
- Question arises: how are these women managing to find time for income-generating activities while balancing domestic responsibilities?

Women's Time Spent on Domestic Work:

- A large part of rural women's daily time is spent on household chores, especially cooking.
- In rural Indore, women spend around 40 out of 60 weekly hours on cooking and cleaning, similar to a part-time job.
- About 75% of women rely on firewood and cow dung for cooking, which increases the time spent on these chores and poses health risks.

Impact of LPG Adoption on Women's Productivity:

- The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) promotes LPG for cooking to reduce these challenges.
- In rural Indore, LPG use saves about 30 minutes per meal compared to solid fuels.
- Women with LPG access spend less time collecting fuel—about 70 minutes less for dung and 10 minutes less for firewood weekly.

Reallocation of Saved Time:

- Despite the time savings, women don't significantly increase income-generating activities.
- The saved time (about 20 minutes per day) is often used for leisure.
- Time savings from LPG are not enough to take on full-time jobs outside the home.



Low Economic Incentives for Women's Work:

- The economic value of women's saved time is low due to the nature of available work, which is mostly low-wage, unskilled labor.
- The time saved (30 minutes daily) adds up to just about 5% of the rural household's monthly income, which is not a strong economic motivator.
- Flexible job opportunities are rare, and female labor force participation remains low at about 15%.

Limited Adoption of LPG for Regular Use:

- Although LPG connections have increased through PMUY, regular use is still low.
- Many households use mixed-fuel cooking, leading to minimal LPG refills.
- A four-member household would need about 12 LPG cylinders annually, but the average usage is only 3 refills per year.

Conclusion:

- The 2024 Time Use Survey shows a 1.5% increase in female employment and more time spent on work-related activities.
- However, the reasons behind the 20% increase in self-employment among rural women remain unclear.
- There is a need for updated, detailed data to assess whether women's work participation has truly changed or if it's just a result of changes in survey methods.

What is Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)?

- PMUY is a government scheme aimed at providing clean cooking fuel (LPG) to rural households that use traditional fuels like firewood, coal, and cow-dung cakes.
- Traditional cooking fuels harm women's health and the environment.

Objectives of PMUY:

- Empower women and improve their health.
- Reduce deaths due to unclean cooking fuels.
- Prevent respiratory illnesses caused by indoor air pollution.

Features of PMUY:

- Provides financial support of Rs 1600 for each LPG connection to Below Poverty Line (BPL) households.



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- Ujjwala 2.0 offers a deposit-free connection, free first refill, and a hotplate to beneficiaries.

Benefits of PMUY:

- Beneficiaries get a free LPG connection.
- They receive subsidies on the first six refills of a 14.2 kg cylinder or eight refills of a 5 kg cylinder.
- EMI facilities are available for the stove and first refill costs.
- Subsidies are transferred directly to beneficiaries' bank accounts through the PAHAL scheme.

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