

Faculti Summary

<https://faculti.net/liminality-as-wage-penalty-for-indias-women-community-health-workers/>

This video discusses the concept of liminality, primarily in the context of work and occupations, drawing on anthropological theories from Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner. Liminality refers to transitional states characterized by uncertainty and marginalization, often seen in rites of passage. The speaker is particularly interested in applying this concept to labor dynamics, especially regarding the rise of non-standard employment such as gig and contract work.

The speaker highlights the experiences of a specific group of workers in India — Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), a workforce of around one million women responsible for community health services. Despite their significant contributions, ASHAs are classified as volunteers rather than workers, which undermines their legitimacy and leads to chronic underpayment and lack of worker rights.

The speaker's ethnographic research in Punjab reveals systemic issues, including confusion over incentive payments tied to their work, which often leads to delays or denials. ASHAs are subjected to additional pressures and control from supervisors, illustrating how their liminal occupational status further exacerbates their vulnerability.

Ultimately, the speaker argues for the need to reclassify ASHAs as workers and ensure fair pay. They emphasize that understanding how wages are structured is as crucial as the amounts being paid, pointing out that the institutionalization of informal labor practices is contributing to the worsening gender wage gap in India's public health sector. The need for fair labor practices is not just about justice for these workers but also about improving overall health outcomes in the communities they serve.