



Women's labor force participation in India

Introduction

Women's labor force participation is abysmally low, and persistent gender gaps characterize the Indian labor market. It is alarming to note that women have been continuously dropping out of the labor market since the mid-2000's. Their participation has been declining despite rise in GDP, increasing educational attainments, rising household incomes, and declining fertility. We find that women have notably lower employment rates than men, even though their enrolment in schools and colleges have risen. Read this report to see the updates and highlights on women's labor force participation in India.



Key Highlights

- Several researchers have found a positive relationship (Bhalla and Kaur, 2011) while others have found a negative relationship (Das and Desai, 2003) between education and women's labor force participation. Some studies also suggest a stagnation in labor force participation despite higher educational achievements of women than ever before. Klasen and Pieters (2015) highlight that while the gender gap in educational attainment has declined in urban India, women's labor force participation remains stagnant.
- Employers are less likely to invest in their skilling since they expect that women could leave the job due to their household obligations and other reasons. This exacerbates the problem of poor training of women, and reinforces the biases and barriers that women face.
- Conservative social norms impact women's mobility and are a major barrier to women's work, as these norms attribute primary responsibility of unpaid care and domestic work to women, simultaneously establishing men's role as the primary breadwinner in the family. Several studies illustrate how women's paid work is limited due to prevailing social norms which influence marriage, fertility and their role outside the household.
- Men's labor force participation doesn't depend much on their family situation as much as women's. On the other hand, it indicates that stereotypical gender roles still govern household decisions, such as the distribution of unpaid work, and which members should engage in gainful employment activities. It has been found that women in India spend the most time on unpaid work (351.9 minutes per day), on the other hand men spend 51.8 minutes on unpaid work.
- Significant differentials in female labor force participation exist by region, social status and religion. With respect to regional differences, there is a large variation in female labor force participation across Indian states, with Bihar reporting the lowest rate at 4.5 percent, and Himachal Pradesh reporting the highest participation of women in the labor force, standing at 64 per cent. Besides, states in the south and west of India generally display higher participation rates than those in north India.
- The marital status of women also significantly affects their labor force participation rate. Being married reduces the likelihood of an urban woman in the labor force by 17 per cent. Besides, the role of children is also noteworthy here, The presence of young children is associated with lower participation-women in households with young children aged less than 5 years of age are less likely to participate in the labor force across rural and urban areas.
- Social group and religion also play a dominant role in determining women's paid work participation in India. Addressing these challenges will require critical attention of facilitating job creation in micro, small and medium enterprises, and diversification of manufacturing jobs. Besides, it will require improving workers skills and linkages to jobs.

Concluding Remarks

The paper provides a careful and comprehensive examination of the key labor market trends for women in India, providing insights on the drivers of low female labor force participation, job quality, gender, social and regional disparities. A multifaceted and comprehensive framework for policy action is necessary, and such policies will contribute to the availability of stable and well-



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paying jobs. The main aim should be to narrow the gender gap in the labor market, and reshape social norms and attitudes that surround the role of women at work.

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