

THE STATUS OF WOMEN WORKFORCE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is an important goal in achieving sustainable development. It entails building an environment in a society where women can breathe without any kind of fear such as oppression, exploitation, trepidation and discrimination. Women empowerment depends on a number of factors such as geographical location, education, age, social and political status, employment opportunities and so on. The present study is an endeavour to analyse the status of women workforce in India. The study is based on secondary data. The data has been collected from the annual bulletins of Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India. The study highlights the trends in Indian female labour force participation in work. Further, the occupational and sectoral aspects of female workforce participation have been analysed and the status of female entrepreneurship in India has been discussed. The paper brings into light that there are wide gender wage disparities in India and these disparities adversely affect the economic growth of the country.

Key Words: Women empowerment, female workforce, gender inequality.

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is a dynamic and multifaceted social process that is helpful for people in gaining control over their own lives. Empowerment of women and girls is the key to the overall development of a nation. It brings political stability, economic growth and social transformation to a nation. According to Kofi Annan, 7th Secretary- General of UNO, the empowerment of women is the most effective tool for development. Noble Laureate, Professor Amartya Kumar Sen, advocates that women empowerment is a key to building a future of our choice (Tembre, 2018). Women empowerment leads to the well-being of whole

families and communities, thereby improving efficiencies and disseminating awareness and good qualities in the coming generations.

Since the gender parity and women empowerment has become a part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), continuous efforts have been made across nations to tackle this problem and raise the socio-economic level of women (Afsana, 2017). Governments are playing significant role regarding this. In India several schemes of women empowerment has been launched and various laws have been enacted to protect the rights of women.

Despite the deliberate efforts of women empowerment in the country, still the gender inequalities are not coming to a halt.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study has the following objectives:

1. To analyse the trends in female labour force participation in India
2. To analyse female workforce participation on the basis of occupation
3. To understand the status of female entrepreneurship in India
4. To assess the level of gender wage disparities in India
5. To make suggestions on the basis of findings

RESERACH METHODOLOGY

The secondary data sources have been used for the study purpose. Various internet sources such as websites, journal and books have been consulted. The statistical data has been collected from the Annual Report on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India from the website of MoSPI.

TRENDS IN FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN INDIA

The 'New Economic Policy' of 1990s has brought significant changes in the economy of India. It has broken the fetter of 'Hindu Growth Rate' and is bringing noteworthy transformation in the lives of workforce of India. However, this is not sufficient to bring gender equality. It is lopsided towards the male workforce.

This is shocking to know that female labour force participation rate (women who are either working or looking for a job) of India is much below the global average of 47 per cent for many years. Despite the decline in fertility rates of women and improvement in their education, female labour force participation rate (LFPR) in India is continuously declining. The World Bank estimates reveal that the female labour participation rate in India fell to 20.3 per cent in 2019. It was more than 26 per cent in 2005 and 31.9 per cent in 1983. This turns out to be much lower if compared with the neighbouring countries of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka where it stands at 30.5 per cent and 33.7 per cent respectively (Bhardwaj, 2022). This downturn in female labour force participation rate (LFPR) can be due to different factors such as conventional social set up, domestic responsibilities and lack of flexible working hours.

Annual bulletin of Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21 shows that the female labour force participation in India is lower than the males. In 2021, the male participation rate was 57.5 per cent, while for females it was 25.1 per cent only. It is evident from Table 1. The data show a little bit improvement in labour force participation rate (LFPR) of India from 36.9 per cent in 2017-18 to 41.6 per cent in 2020-21. But it is biased towards male workforce.

Table 1
Annual Labour Force Participation Rate in India

(In Per cent)

Year	Female	Male	All
2017-18	17.5	55.5	36.9
2018-19	18.6	55.6	37.5
2019-20	22.8	56.8	40.1
2020-21	25.1	57.5	41.6

Source: Annual Report on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21.

(https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Annual_Report_PLFS_2020%2021_0.pdf)

Table 2 reveals the labour force participation rate (LFPR) of different States/UTs of India. Wide disparities can be observed in the male and female labour force participation rates in almost all the States/UTs. Bihar is showing an alarming condition where the female labour

force participation rate is only 7.4 per cent. It is the lowest among male and female participation rates of all the States and Union Territories of the country. In every State, the female labour force participation rate is lower than the male labour force participation rate. In Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Lakshadweep, the female labour force participation rate is very poor.

Table 2

Female Labour Force Participation Rate According to Usual Status for Each State/UT for All Age Groups

(In per cent)

State/UT	Male	Female	All
Andhra Pradesh	60.8	36.1	48.4
Arunachal Pradesh	53.2	20.1	37.5
Assam	59.5	18.6	39.7
Bihar	46.0	7.4	27.9
Chhattisgarh	57.3	41.6	49.6
Delhi	58.0	10.7	36.0
Goa	55.5	22.6	39.6
Gujarat	60.9	26.4	44.3
Haryana	53.9	14.6	35.3
Himachal Pradesh	63.7	51.0	57.3
Jharkhand	55.0	31.7	43.6
Karnataka	60.4	28.9	44.7
Kerala	57.8	27.5	41.8
Madhya Pradesh	60.6	30.3	45.8
Maharashtra	59.1	28.7	44.2
Manipur	47.6	16.3	32.4
Meghalaya	47.4	32.0	39.4
Mizoram	55.8	33.3	45.0
Nagaland	57.8	37.2	47.9
Odisha	61.6	26.4	44.1
Punjab	59.5	18.5	39.4

Rajasthan	54.3	29.5	42.3
Sikkim	68.9	52.7	61.2
Tamil Nadu	62.2	35.4	48.5
Telangana	60.0	36.4	48.4
Tripura	60.8	24.8	43.3
Uttarakhand	54.3	24.7	40.1
Uttar Pradesh	54.4	16.7	36.0
West Bengal	64.6	23.4	44.0
Andaman & N. Island	66.8	38.5	53.1
Chandigarh	54.6	19.5	37.3
Dadra & Nagar Haveli & Daman & Diu	60.0	25.1	44.9
Jammu & Kashmir	55.8	32.8	44.6
Ladakh	57.1	53.3	55.4
Lakshadweep	52.0	15.3	34.4
Puducherry	61.7	23.4	41.3
All India	57.5	25.1	41.6

Source: Annual Report on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21.

(https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Annual_Report_PLFS_2020%2021_0.pdf)

Table 3 points out the rural urban divide of labour force participation in India. Female workforce participation rate in urban area is less than the labour force participation rate of females in rural area. Labour force participation rate of rural women is 27.7 per cent whereas it is 18.6 per cent for urban women. In both the areas-rural and urban, the male workforce is dominant.

Table 3
Area-wise Annual Labour Force Participation Rate in India

(In per cent)

Category of Persons	Rural	Urban	All
Female	27.7	18.6	25.1
Male	57.1	58.4	57.5
All	42.7	38.9	41.6

Source: Annual Report on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21.

https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Annual_Report_PLFS_2020%2021_0.pdf

Another noteworthy finding is that the female labour force is more vulnerable to the adversities. As per the recent quarterly Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), there is a significant decline in female labour force participation rate post-COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic of COVID-19, the participation rate was 17.10 per cent which declined to 15.5 per cent during the quarter of April-June 2020 due to the restrictions on movement (Bhardwaj, 2022).

OCCUPATIONAL AND SECTORAL ASPECTS OF FEMALE WORKFORCE

Occupational trends bring into light that females in urban areas are dominant in professional and technical roles. But, their legislative, official and managerial roles are much lower at 12.2 per cent as compared to males (18.1 per cent) in urban areas.

Similar picture is visible in rural areas too. In rural areas, female participation in technical and associate professional roles is higher than males at 3.2 per cent as compared to 1.9 per cent among males. Though, female participation in official, managerial, and professional roles is quite low.

Table 4
Participation of Workforce on the Basis of Occupation

(In per cent)

Occupation	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Division 1				
Legislators, senior officials and managers	6.3	3.2	18.1	12.2
Division 2				
Professionals	2.0	1.5	8.8	12.3
Division 3				

Technicians and associate professionals	1.9	3.2	5.8	10.2
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Source: Annual Report on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21.

(https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Annual_Report_PLFS_2020%2021_0.pdf)

The status of the Indian workforce according to the type of employment has been shown in Table 5. The table shows that the share of salaried /wage earning females (50.0 per cent) is more than males (45.3 per cent) in urban areas. In rural areas, the proportion of self-employed females (64.8 per cent) is higher than that of males (59.7 per cent). Employment in casual labour of rural areas is almost similar for both the genders, whereas it is a little bit higher for males in urban areas.

Table 5

Status of Female Workforce in Employment among Workers in Usual status

(In per cent)

Source of Incomes	Rural		Urban	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Self-employment	64.8	59.7	38.4	39.9
Regular Wage/Salary Earning	9.1	13.6	50.0	45.3
Casual Labour	26.2	26.8	11.5	14.9
All	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Annual Report on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21.

(https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Annual_Report_PLFS_2020%2021_0.pdf)

Another interesting trend is visible in Table 6. The table highlights that the maximum females in rural areas work in agriculture, followed by manufacturing, construction, trade and the hospitality industry. Comparatively, in urban areas, the maximum females are engaged in manufacturing followed by trade, hotel and restaurant, agriculture, construction and transport, storage and communications.

Table 6

Status of Female Workers in Usual status of Employment by Some Industry of Work

(In per cent)

Broad Industry Division as per NIC* 2008	Rural			Urban			Rural +Urban		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Agriculture	53.8	75.4	60.8	5.3	10.4	6.5	39.8	62.2	46.5
Mining & Quarrying	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.3
Manufacturing	7.7	7.4	7.6	19.5	23.0	20.3	11.1	10.6	10.9
Electricity, water, etc.	0.5	0.1	0.4	1.4	0.6	1.2	0.8	0.2	0.6
Construction	15.6	5.9	12.4	13.1	4.4	11.1	14.9	5.6	12.1
Trade, Hotel & Restaurant	9.7	3.5	7.7	27.4	16.2	24.8	14.8	6.1	12.2
Transport, storage & communications	5.3	0.3	3.7	12.2	3.7	10.2	7.3	1.0	5.4
Other services	7.1	7.5	7.2	20.7	41.6	25.5	11	14.4	12.0
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Annual Report on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21.

(https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Annual_Report_PLFS_2020%2021_0.pdf)

NIC*: National Industrial Classification

Employment share of females in self-employed category is the highest at 64.8 per cent in rural areas. It seems to be attractive only as figure. These figures do not reveal that the most women are unpaid for their work in family whether they work in family businesses; family farms or take care of livestock of their families.

FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN INDIA

Women in India face a number of blockades in obtaining and retaining appropriate economic position. Women can show up their extraordinary entrepreneurial skills, if adequate support is given to them. Entrepreneurship is another way of productive participation in the workforce.

Unfortunately, India is not concerned about the index of female entrepreneurship in the country. According to the sixth economic census of India by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), only 13.76 per cent of total establishments in India were owned by women and provided employment to 13.45 million persons. This is not a rosy picture for the country. There are a numerous barriers in the way of women entrepreneurship. The most significant barrier is the accessibility to finance for setting up business enterprises.

GENDER WAGE INEQUALITIES IN INDIA

As for as wages of men and women are concerned, the data bring into light the gender wage disparity. Males and female workers get different wages for the same work. The data given below presents a comparative view of wages earned by male and female workers.

Table 7
Wage Earnings for Regular Salaried Employees in India

Area	Male	Female
Rural	₹ 14300- ₹16100	₹9400 – ₹10700
Urban	₹21100 – 21400	₹16000 – ₹16700

Source: Annual Report on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21.

(https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Annual_Report_PLFS_2020%2021_0.pdf)

Table 7 reveals that in both the rural and urban area female workers are getting salaries less than their male counterparts. Similarly wage differences are apparent in case of casual labourers (Table 8). Wage earning per day for male worker is higher than that of female workers in rural and urban areas.

Table 8

Average Wages per day for Casual Labour Engaged in Work other than Public Works in India

Area	Male	Female
Rural	₹326 – ₹348	₹212 – ₹229
Urban	₹406 – ₹416	₹266 – ₹281

Source: Annual Report on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21.

(https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Annual_Report_PLFS_2020%2021_0.pdf)

In Table 9 average gross earnings of male workers from self employment ranged from ₹9800 to ₹17000 whereas average gross earnings of female workers stood at ₹4400 to ₹ 7200. The gender wage gap is quite high. This is a cause of concern for policy makers to bring the gender equality in practice.

Table 9

Average Gross Earnings during Last 30 Days from Self-Employment in India (July 2020 – June 2021)

Area	Male	Female
Rural	₹ 9800 -₹10500	₹ 4400- ₹4600
Urban	₹15900 -₹17000	₹7000 -₹7200

Source: Annual Report on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21.

(https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Annual_Report_PLFS_2020%2021_0.pdf)

Disparities and discrimination at workplaces are a serious concern not only for the betterment of women but also for the betterment of an economy. Disparities and inequalities are detrimental to economic growth. For inclusive and sustainable growth, it is pertinent to bridge the gender gap and gender wage differentials.

SUGGESTIONS FOR GENDER EQUILITY AT WORKPLACE

Above analysis brought forward the facts related to the women workforce in India. It can be easily understood from the data of Annual Bulletin of Periodic Labour Force Survey of the government of India that women workers not enjoying their lives at par with their men counterparts. Female labour force participation rate is far behind the male labour force participation rate across the country. When it comes to the earnings of the female workers, they are not getting salaries/wages equal to men. Their participation as entrepreneurs in the economy is also very limited. In rural areas, they are engaged in agriculture and household work whereas maximum number of women in urban areas is engaged in manufacturing. However, women are playing professional and technical roles significantly but their role in legislative, official and managerial field is much lower as compared to men. Being brief, gender inequality is persistent in India. Though government is trying hard through various schemes and policies such as Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme, Ujjawala Scheme, women helpline scheme, one stop centre scheme, working women hostel, nirbhaya, sawadhar greh etc. to empower women and to lower down the gender gaps at different levels, yet not succeeding in her mission of women empowerment. Women empowerment can not be brought in a single day. It needs constant and deliberate efforts by the government, society and the women themselves. The following steps can help to empower women and ensure gender equality at workplaces:

1. Government should ensure free educational access to every girl child.
2. Focus on skill development of women thorough skill development programmes
3. Effective implementation of government policies related to women empowerment
4. Provision of equal employment opportunities to men and women.
5. Fair and unbiased selection process during recruitments
6. Equal and fair pay to female workers
7. Facilities of maternity leave, crèche, working women hostel etc.
8. Flexible work arrangements (remote work, hybrid work and flexible scheduling)
9. Private sector must pay attention to the laws necessary to reduce gender gaps.
10. In relevant professions where gender gaps are wide, reservation of women should be ensured.
11. Moreover, adequate access of women to finance should be ensured so that they can start their own enterprises/business.

CONCLUSION

Women participation in work is as important as is of men for inclusive and sustainable development of India. Statistical data on women labour force participation in the country compel us to be pro-active to eliminate gender inequalities at work and workplaces. Though women these days are aware to be economically independent, they try their best to get work/job. But due to certain circumstances only a few women are able to find good jobs. A number of women are either partially employed or busy in their household work for which they do not get any remuneration. The most women are underpaid for their work. There are a lot of issues related to women workforce in India. They can be resolved only when women themselves are educated and strong enough to fight for their rights; and the government and society is fully supportive to them.

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