

Women Participation in Workforce: A Scenario of India vis-a-vis Punjab

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Abstract

The female work participation rate (FWPR) is a growing concern amongst various developing countries. A growing trend of this rate indicates development. The present study, based on secondary data, exhibits a picture of the status of FWPR in the country and Punjab. India has not been performing well, indicated by the declining rank of the country in overall FWPR. Despite a slight improvement in national figures for the FWPR in 2011 over 2001, the different states exhibit varied trends. Punjab, a benchmark progressive agrarian state is worse off among the state list with the lowest FWPR despite the improvement in sex ratio and literacy rate. The rural-urban trends of FWPR indicate that the gender gap in WPR (work participation rate) was narrower in rural areas than the urban areas. Non-availability of work, attending to household duties and being the sole care takers of the family were reported as some of the reasons for the increase in rate of involvement in household activities by women. The study highlights that beyond strengthening educational qualifications, vocational training, apprenticeship and entrepreneurial training were crucial to improve the economic role of women in the society.

Keywords: WPR, Gender gap, Domestic duties

JEL Classification: C65, C81, O15

Introduction

Labour is one of the prime factors of production which influences growth and development. The workforce of an economy determines the potential for growth and thus, studying the role of labour in the economy becomes crucial. The two main countries which capture the spotlight in terms of population, India and China, are often considered to be

growing based on cheap labour economies. The population of a country that is working, irrespective of gender, and is within the age group of 15 to 60 years is often considered as workforce. The mounting concern nowadays is about the proportion of women in total workers. Implementing effective, evidence-based policy to increase female labour force participation (LFP), i.e. proportion of population that are able to work in a country, and women's economic activity could have a

large impact on economic growth. Increasing women's LFP by 10 percentage points could add US \$700 billion to India's gross domestic product (GDP) by 2025 i.e. a 1.4 per cent increase in GDP (Woetzel *et al*, 2015). A 10 per cent increase in the female-to-male ratio of workers would increase per capita net domestic product in India by eight per cent (Esteve-Volart, 2004).

Previous studies showed that participation of women in workforce varied considerably across developing economies far more than men (Chaudhary and Verick, 2014). Also, labour market gender gaps are more pronounced in developing countries, than the developed. The LFP curve follows a U-shape and is a consequence of structural transformation in the economy (Goldin, 1994; Klasen and Pieters, 2015). As countries develop, their female labour force participation rate (LFPR) initially decreases but then starts to increase at a later stage of development. The work-force participation rate (WPR), worked out as the proportion of working population to total population is dependent on factors like sex, age composition, attitude and willingness to work, job opportunities, ability to work, etc., vary both inter and intra country. The growth story of India is coined as one of the fastest growing economies but its female LFPR and WPR have not been following the established U-shaped story of female LFPR (Dasgupta and Verick, 2016). Despite evident economic growth, rising wages and incomes, there has been a notable fall in the engagement of women in the Indian labour force. In India, women constitute around 49 per cent of the population but their participation in economic activities is only 26-30 per cent (GoI, 2011). In India, most of the women have been engaged in the household or agricultural activities,

but their work could not get recognition in the society and they were hardly involved in any commercial activity (Kumar and Gill, 2006). Women participation in the rural sector is always found to be higher than the male members of the society, but more women participated in the low paying menial works in the rural areas (Borkar, 2016). On the supply side, Indian households often require that women prioritize housework and may even explicitly constrain work post marriage. The reproductive work and domestic roles on the supply side along with religious and social restrictions prove to be significant variables in influencing female LFP (Borkar, 2016). Further, of the 131 countries with available data, India ranked 11th from the bottom in female LFP as per the ILO's Global Employment Trends report (ILO, 2013).

The total FWPR in age group of 15 years and above in India during the year 2018 was only 23.61 per cent (World Bank, 2019) and ratio of female to male labour force participation rate was merely 34.5 per cent in 2017 (ILO, 2017). India's LFPR for women fell from over 37 per cent in 2004-05 to 29 per cent in 2009-10. Reasons like rising educational enrolment of young women, lack of employment opportunities, effect of household income on participation and measurement of the female workforce were identified as the prime reasons for falling FWPR in India (Kapsos *et al*, 2014). There has been considerable increase in girl child education but the inability of the job market to create jobs for the women led to lesser involvement of women as workers. The culprit could be the nature of economic growth in different sectors of the country that could not readily absorb women, especially in the rural areas (Mazumdar and Neetha, 2011).

To make matters worse, the lack of awareness about the rights of working women creates further grounds of exploitation of women. The NSSO report (2014) exhibits that three in four Indian women were not employed while the gender pay gap was 34 per cent.

Punjab, even after being a birthplace of the Green Revolution in the country and India's most prosperous state in 1970s and 1980s, has the lowest female WPR (13.9%) in 2011. The male and female population during the year 2011 was 14.64 million (52.7%) and 13.10 million (47.2%) respectively while the share of male and female in the total working population in the state was 81.58 per cent and 18.42 per cent respectively. The women who could easily be equal contributor to growth are hardly employed and this number has been declining over a period of time. The participation of women in Punjab was less as compared to their male counterpart and WPR of women is not increasing even with the rise in level of education (Nagaich and Sharma, 2015).

With this backdrop, the present study was carried out with an objective to analyse the trends of female work participation in Punjab and India and to study different reasons for declining FWPR and thereby increasing domestic activity participation.

Data Sources and Methodology

The present study is based on secondary data collected from various issues of reports by National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), International Labour Organization (ILO), World Bank, Statistical Abstract of Punjab and Agricultural Statistics at a Glance. The data were analysed using statistical tools like percentages, averages, graphs and ranks.

Results and Discussion

The picture of overall FWPR in India seems to have improved since 2001 as this rate was about 26 per cent in 2001 and increased to about 28 per cent in 2011 (Table 1).

Females constituted about 48 per cent of the total population of India comprising only 27.8 per cent of working female population during 2011. During 2001, the total female population in the country was 48.26 per cent while the working female population was 25.7 per cent. On the other hand, in Punjab when female population rose from 46.62 per cent to 47.23 per cent during the period 2001 to 2011, the female WPR worsened from 19.1 per cent to 13.9 per cent. Among different states, Punjab state which ranked 24th in terms of FWPR during 2001 had slipped to 28th rank in 2011 with lowest female WPR (13.9%).

The analysis of data for gender gap for a decade i.e. 2001 to 2011 indicated that the male WPR increased from about 52 per cent to 53 per cent at national level. For Punjab also, it improved from 54 per cent to 55 per cent (Table 2). It was also observed that at the national level WPR for urban females remained almost the same i.e. about 30 per cent. However, the situation in rural areas was the one needed to be mulled over. The rural females in Punjab state contributed lesser to WPR in 2011 (14.3%) as compared to 2001 (23.15%) while that for urban females, it increased from 9.74 per cent to 13.2 per cent during the same time period. The gender gap increased from 35.4 to 41.25 for the state while it witnessed a minor increase from 26.3 to 27.82 for the whole nation.

Further, analysis of male and female WPR for Punjab over time indicated that the male

Table 1: Female WPR across different states in India

State /Union Territories	Female WPR (%)		Rank	
	2001	2011	2001	2011
Himachal Pradesh	43.7	44.8	2	1
Nagaland	38.1	44.7	6	2
Chhattisgarh	40.0	39.7	3	3
Sikkim	38.6	39.6	5	4
Manipur	39.0	38.6	4	5
Mizoram	47.5	36.2	1	6
Andhra Pradesh	35.1	36.2	8	7
Arunachal Pradesh	36.5	35.4	7	8
Rajasthan	33.5	35.1	10	9
Meghalaya	35.1	32.7	9	10
Madhya Pradesh	33.2	32.6	11	11
Karnataka	32.0	31.9	12	12
TamilNadu	31.5	31.8	13	13
Maharashtra	30.8	31.1	14	14
Jharkhand	26.4	29.1	18	15
Orissa	24.7	27.2	19	16
Uttarakhand	27.3	26.7	16	17
Tripura	21.1	23.6	22	18
Gujarat	27.9	23.4	15	19
Assam	20.7	22.5	23	20
Goa	22.4	21.9	21	21
Jammu & Kashmir	22.5	19.1	20	22
Bihar	18.8	19.1	25	23
Kerala	15.4	18.2	28	24
West Bengal	18.3	18.1	26	25
Haryana	27.2	17.8	17	26
Uttar Pradesh	16.5	16.7	27	27
Punjab	19.1	13.9	24	28
Telangana*	NA	NA	NA	NA
Union Territories				
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	38.7	25.3	1	1
Andaman & Nicobar island	16.6	17.8	4	2
Pondicherry	17.2	17.6	3	3
Chandigarh	14.2	16.0	5	4
Daman & Diu	18.6	14.9	2	5
Lakshadweep	7.3	11.0	7	6
Delhi	9.4	10.6	6	7
India	25.7	27.8		

Source: Source: Statistical Abstract of Punjab, 2017

*The state was formed in 2014

Note: NA means not available

Table 2: Distribution of rural-urban WPR and gender gap in India and Punjab (Per cent)

Category	India					
	2011			2001		
	Male	Female	Gender gap	Male	Female	Gender gap
Total	53.26	25.51	27.75	51.93	25.67	26.3
Rural	53.03	30.02	23.01	53.03	30.03	23.0
Urban	53.76	15.44	38.32	53.76	15.44	38.3
	Punjab					
Total	55.15	13.9	41.25	54.10	18.68	35.4
Rural	54.90	14.3	40.6	54.45	23.15	31.3
Urban	55.50	13.2	42.3	53.42	9.74	43.7

Source: Agricultural Statistics at a Glance, various issues

WPR remained almost nine times more than that for females since 1980s (Fig 1). With the passage of time, the male WPR increased from about 54 per cent to 55 per cent while that for females increased from about seven per cent during 1980s to about 19 per cent in 2001 but then plummeted drastically to 13.91 per cent in 2011.

A detailed study of the female and male population and there of the gender-wise WPR in Punjab helps to analyse the worse-off and better-off districts and thereby highlight the potential for further improvement. Though the state was one of the benchmark progressing agrarian ones in the country, with one of the

highest per capita income, the gender based disparity of the WPR does not speak well about the development scenario. The state witnessed an improvement in the sex ratio and the gender-based literacy rates. The sex ratio improved from 876 in 2001 to 895 in the year 2011 and also gender based disparity in literacy rate declined as the female literacy rate increased from 63.5 per cent to 70.7 per cent during the respective years. But surprisingly, there has been no improvement in the women WPR. Analysis for change in female WPR in relation to literacy rate in different districts of Punjab indicated that though the literacy rate had increased for all the districts in the state

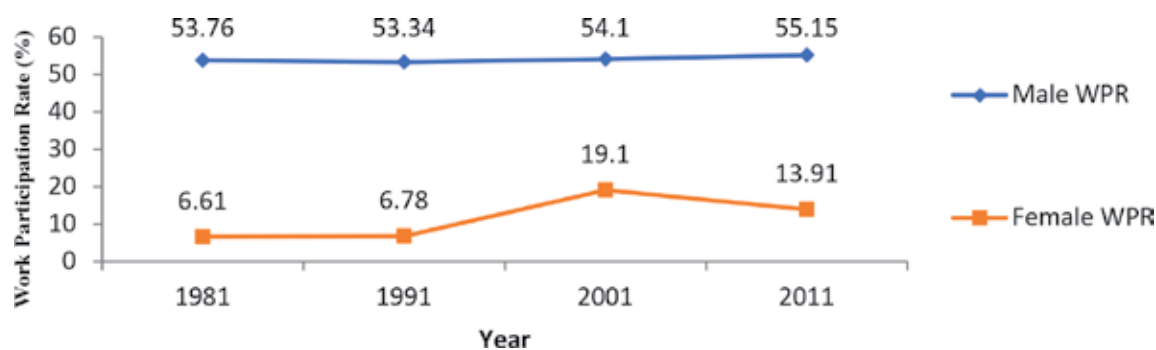


Figure 1. Male and female WPR over time in Punjab

with positive change during 2001 to 2011, the FWPR had shown negative change as in all the districts of the state, except Mansa leading to wider gender gap (Fig 2).

The data given in Table 3 further highlights the worrisome situation. It was found that the percentage change in sex ratio in Punjab had improved in all districts except Bathinda showing a decline of 0.23 per cent in sex ratio,

in 2011 as compared to 2001 but the gender gap in the WPR has also increased. For Punjab as a whole, the sex ratio had increased for the above-mentioned period by 2.17 but the gender gap had increased tremendously by almost eight times and was found to be 16.67. The estimates for the country show that the sex ratio had improved by 1.07 per cent but the gender gap of WPR had increased about

Table 3: Change in sex ratio and female work participation in Punjab

Districts	% change in sex ratio	% change in gender gap
Amritsar	2.07	8.94
Barnala*	NA	NA
Bathinda	-0.23	41.55
Faridkot	0.79	20.55
Fatehgarh Sahib	1.99	23.64
Fazilka*	NA	NA
Firozpur	0.9	13.39
Gurdaspur	1.91	3.06
Hoshiarpur	2.78	18.1
Jalandhar	3.16	2.63
Kapurthala	2.82	8.91
Ludhiana	5.95	4.98
Mansa	0.46	0.34
Moga	0.68	37.54
Pathankot*	NA	NA
Patiala	1.83	16.16
Rupnagar	2.92	31.03
Sangrur	1.72	44.48
SAS Nagar*	NA	NA
SBS Nagar	4.38	89.82
Sri Muktsar Sahib	0.56	29.48
Tarn Taran*	NA	NA
Punjab	2.17	16.67
India	1.07	6.11

Source: Statistical Abstract of Punjab, 2017

*These districts were part of other districts in 2001

Note: NA means not available

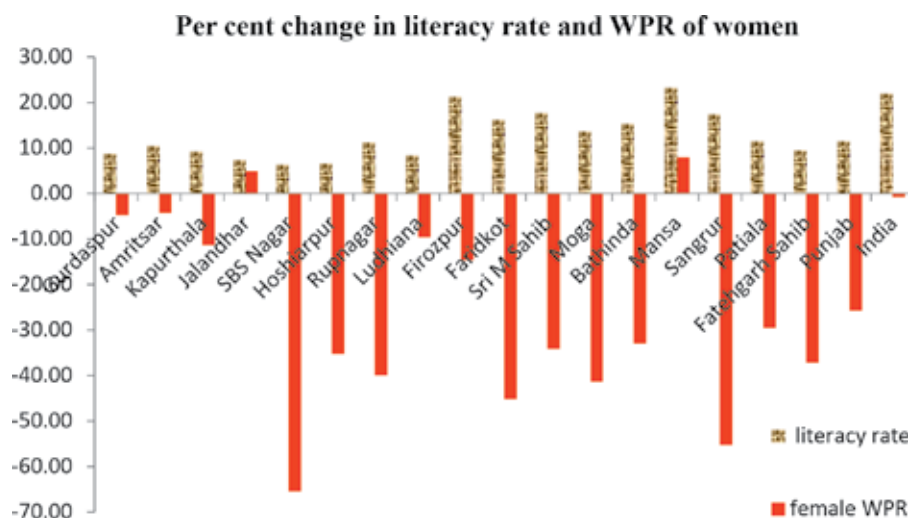


Figure 2. Change in literacy rate and FWPR

six times and was 6.11. The difference in the state and country averages show that though various efforts on the part of the government and individuals had improved the sex ratio, there was a dire need to improve the WPR also.

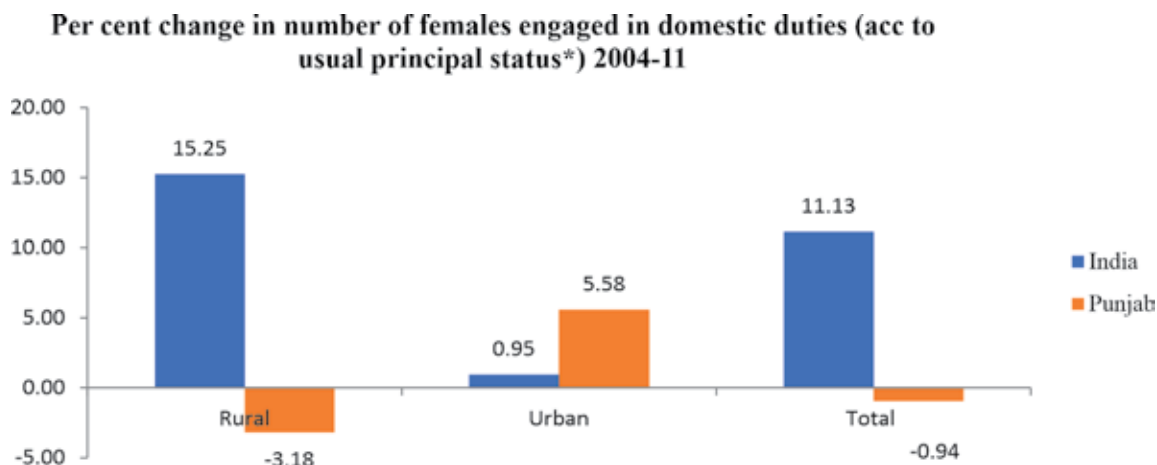
Among women in the age group of 15 years and above, about 60 per cent belonged to rural areas and 64 per cent of women belonged to urban areas were engaged in domestic duties in the country. These percentages were 76 per cent and 70 per cent respectively for the Punjab state (NSSO, 2014). It was observed that the percentage of women engaged in household duties in rural areas of Punjab had declined since 2001, by 3.18 per cent contrary to Indian scenario wherein the rural women participation in household activities had increased (Figure 3). On the other hand, the urban women engaged in household activities had increased for both Punjab and India. A higher percentage decline in the women engaged in the household duties could be an indirect contribution of the women in working pool which could have had an effect both ways by either increasing the working

women population thereby increasing FWPR or by increasing women available for work, thereby decreasing FWPR. Ideally, this section of women who were no more engaged in the household duties need to be targeted to improve the FWPR as they are now available for work.

A perusal of Table 4 exhibits the proportion of females required to spend most of the time in domestic work, given the family and society set up, per 1000 females that were actually engaged in the domestic work.

It was found that of the total women required for household duties in India, 61.3 per cent had willingness to work but were bound to household work due to non-availability of family members help for the same job, while about 15 per cent did not take up work other than domestic work due to social and religious constraints. In Punjab these figures were about 51 per cent and 14 per cent respectively. The reason of the inability to afford hired help was conveyed by about nine per cent of females in the country and about 11 per cent in Punjab.

The distribution of females engaged



Source: NSSO, 2014 and NSSO, 2007

* The activity status on which a person spent relatively long time during the 365 days preceding the date of survey by NSSO was considered as the usual principal activity status of the person. Each woman categorised as usually engaged in domestic duties in the principal status included those who attended domestic duties only along with those who attended domestic duties and were also engaged in free collection of goods, sewing, tailoring, weaving, etc. for household use.

Figure 3. Distribution of females engaged in domestic duties

in domestic work, according to the usual principal status, who were not required to spend most of their time on domestic work, by reason for still pursuing domestic work revealed that of the 81 females per 1000 females, in India and 54 in Punjab, engaged in domestic work that were not required to do so (Table 5).

A majority were engaged in domestic work due to personal preference while about 19 per cent of these females in India and about six per cent in Punjab were engaged in the household jobs due to non-availability of work. The analysis of data for type of assistance required by women to get them engaged in work at the household premises revealed

Table 4: Distribution of females of age 15 years and above by reason for spending most of their time on domestic work (Per cent)

Category	Reason for spending most of their time on domestic work				No. of females required to spend most of the time in domestic work per 1000 females engaged in domestic work
	No other member to carry out the domestic work	Cannot afford hired help	Social and/or religious constraints	Other reasons	
India	61.3	8.7	15.3	14.6	919
Rural	60.1	8.7	15.8	15.5	917
Urban	64.1	8.8	14.2	12.9	922
Punjab	50.5	10.5	24.6	14.4	946
Rural	47.6	10.8	28.1	13.5	936
Urban	55.9	9.9	18.2	16	966

Source: NSSO, 2014

Table 5: Distribution of females of age 15 years and above by reason for spending most of their time on domestic work that were not required to spend most of their time on domestic duties (Per cent)

Category	Reason for still pursuing domestic work			Per 1000 no. of females engaged in domestic work though not required to spend most of the time in domestic work
	non-availability of work	by preference	other reasons	
India	18.5	49.4	30.9	81
Rural	17.1	50	31.7	82
Urban	19.2	51.3	29.5	78
Punjab	5.6	79.6	14.8	54
Rural	6.3	79.7	14.1	64
Urban	5.9	76.5	17.6	34

Source: NSSO, 2014

that majority of them felt the requirement of initial finance on easy terms was imperative as reported by about 37 per cent women at national level and about by 35 per cent at state level. Females across the globe complain about lack of financial resource as a major constraint in their way to success (Halkias *et al*, 2011). In the Indian context, a study by Charumathi (1998) established that banks and financial institutions historically viewed women entrepreneurship as more doubtful propositions than men entrepreneurship. Other reasons like training (reported by 23 per cent women at national level and 18 per cent at state level), working finance facilities (reported by about 19 per cent and 18 per cent respectively) were suggested as other support required to take up their desired activity (Table 6). The proportion of women who required the assistance of assured market to take up their choice of work at the household premises was about seven per cent at national and 16 per cent at state level.

It was further found that women who were engaged beyond requirement in the

household activities preferred working from home rather than venturing outside the house (NSSO, 2014). Among various occupations, tailoring, non-commercial dairy farming, food processing were the most preferred expected occupations while the others included poultry, spinning, manufacturing of wooden, cane and leather products

Conclusion and Policy Implications

As compared to the national figures of FWPR, which itself are not very promising, the situation in the Punjab is not praise worthy. The increasing FWPR indicates economically stronger and independent women which indirectly improves the overall well-being of the family. Despite being among the major developed states of the country with improving literacy and sex ratio, the FWPR in Punjab is deteriorating. Empowering females of our society, in terms of sustained employment with better remunerating jobs is need of the hour. Moreover, vocational training and apprenticeship avenues with the objective to encourage small entrepreneurship

Table 6: Distribution of women (rural and urban) of age 15 years and above usually engaged in domestic work and willing to accept work in the household by type of assistance required

(Per cent)

Category	Type of assistance required							
	No assistance	Initial finance on easy terms	Working finance facilities	Easy availability of raw materials	Assured market	Training	Accommodation	Others
India	3.90	37.50	18.60	3.20	6.40	22.80	0.80	6.50
Punjab	5.30	34.70	16.80	3.90	16.00	17.70	2.90	2.80

Source: NSSO, 2014

would go a long way in improvement of the gender based economic growth as most of the women engaged in domestic duties could be made economically active and financially independent. Government welfare schemes that ease availability and access of finance would surely play an imperative role in transforming the afore discussed socio-economic situation in the country. It goes without mentioning that government support and strong social foundation can help intensify women's engagement and role in comprehensive development.

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