

# (In)Visibility, Care and Cultural Barriers: The Size and Shape of Women's Work in India

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- ▶ Low levels: partly because women's work undervalued: both by the household and by the women themselves.
- ▶ Partly due to restricted definition of economic activity.
- ▶ This paper seeks to a) contribute to better measurement of women's economic activity by suggesting a few small changes in the existing NSS questionnaire ; b) understand factors that aid or impeded women's participation in the LF; c) quantify the (unmet) demand for work.

# Headline News?

- ▶ Recent international spotlight on low and declining female LFPRs in India: IMF, Economist, NYT



“Patriarchal social mores supersede economic opportunity in a way more associated with Middle Eastern countries ... enduring stigma of women being seen as “having to toil.”

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- ▶ How important are cultural norms, typically seen as social conservatism (taboos on mobility; having to cover face; Islam)?
- ▶ “Who Pays for the Kids”: is it the burden of childcare? Or the marriage penalty?

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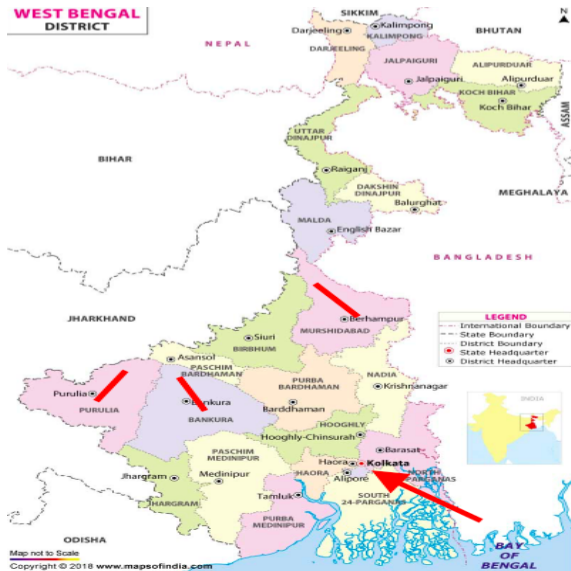
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- ▶ Murshidabad (highest proportion of Muslims); Howrah, North 24 Paraganas and South 24 Paraganas (in the top eight for Muslim share, as well as for per capita income); Bankura (one of the bottom three in per capita income); Purulia (one of the bottom three for income, as well as the one of the bottom two for Muslim share); Kolkata (richest district, fully urban).



# Survey Areas



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- ▶ Roughly 9% from Bankura, 16% from Howrah, 16.7% from Kolkata, 15% from Murshidabad, 25% North 24-Parganas, 9.7% from Purulia & 7.5% from South 24-Parganas.

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- ▶ We classify women as “working” if they answered “yes” to this question.

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- ▶ For each activity, a set of two questions: 1 whether they were involved in that activity; 2 if they did the activity not just for their home use, but for economic help or support in family's income generating work.

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- ▶  $ES + Working = \text{Extended Definition of LFPR}$



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- ▶ Our extended definition is not based on adding reproductive or care work to economic work, but is derived from including activities that fall within the conventional boundary, but women discount their contribution to these activities as part of routine housework, and are most likely unpaid.

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- ▶ Note that the boundary between “OLF” and “ES” is fuzzy.

# Female LFPR Estimates

Survey: total for 7 districts (2017)  
 NSS EUS (2011-12): total for all state.

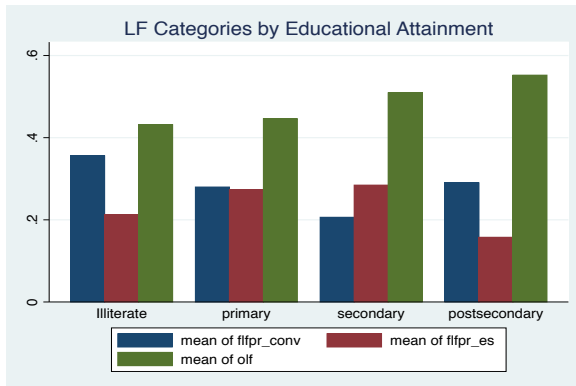
Principal Activity Status of Women, WBLFS, 2017								
% of women 16-60 yrs								
	Howrah	Murshidabad	Kolkata	North 24	Bankura	Purulia	South 24	Total Sample
<b>Conventional</b>	28.31	30.78	37.74	22.92	33.04	21.47	19.2	28
<i>N</i>	169	169	214	212	111	76	53	1,004
<b>Extended</b>	24.46	31.33	16.23	17.08	27.38	29.38	34.78	23.86
<i>N</i>	146	172	92	158	92	104	96	860
<b>OLF</b>	47.24	37.89	46.03	60	39.58	49.15	46.01	48.28
<i>N</i>	282	208	261	555	133	174	127	1,740
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	597	549	567	925	336	354	276	3,604
UPAS of Women, NSS 68th Round, Unemployment-Unemployment Survey, 2011-12								
% of women 16-60 yrs								West Bengal
<b>Working</b>	13.15	22.07	14.56	19.75	10.69	19.08	19.12	15.99
<b>Invol Unemp</b>	3.5	0.94	1.12	0.61	0.2	0.74	1.38	1.07
<b>Domestic</b>	74.41	64.61	75.94	71.12	77.15	65.98	72.42	73.6
<b>OLF</b>	8.94	12.39	8.38	8.53	11.95	14.2	7.08	9.34
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

# Descriptive Statistics for Women by LFPR

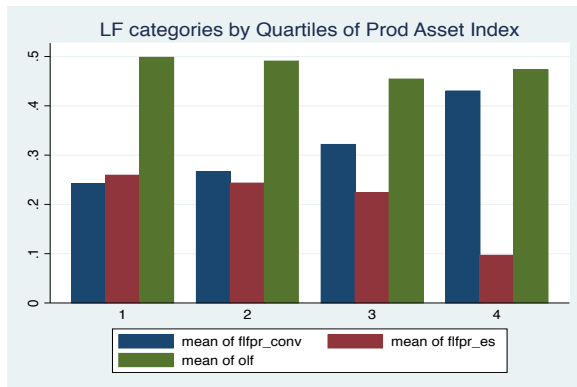
	Conventional	Expenditure Saving	OLF	ALL
	mean	mean	mean	mean
age	36.29	34.27	35.89	35.62
SC	0.27	0.25	0.27	0.26
ST	0.06	0.08	0.05	0.06
OBC	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13
Brahmin	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.04
UC	0.49	0.51	0.49	0.49
hindu	0.69	0.65	0.67	0.67
muslim	0.29	0.31	0.31	0.31
Rural	0.52	0.67	0.55	0.57
Urban	0.48	0.33	0.45	0.43
illit	0.31	0.22	0.22	0.24
primary	0.18	0.21	0.17	0.18
secondary	0.28	0.45	0.40	0.38
postsec	0.19	0.12	0.20	0.18
nev_married	0.07	0.03	0.05	0.05
married	0.84	0.94	0.92	0.90
widow	0.07	0.03	0.03	0.04
sep_div	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.01
under5 children:				
0	81.97	71.28	76.44	76.75
1	14.64	23.26	19.83	19.20
2	2.69	5.12	3.33	3.58
fhh	0.11	0.05	0.04	0.06
mpce	9392.95	6757.11	8810.42	8474.53
cattle	0.12	0.19	0.17	0.16
goat	0.09	0.11	0.09	0.09
chicken	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.09
veiling	0.58	0.70	0.59	0.61
dom_tasks	3.48	4.04	3.65	3.70
childcare	0.49	0.62	0.52	0.53
eldercare	0.69	0.66	0.73	0.71
N	1004	860	1740	3604



# LFPR by Education



# LFPR by MPCE and Prod Assets



# Estimating Probability of LF Categories

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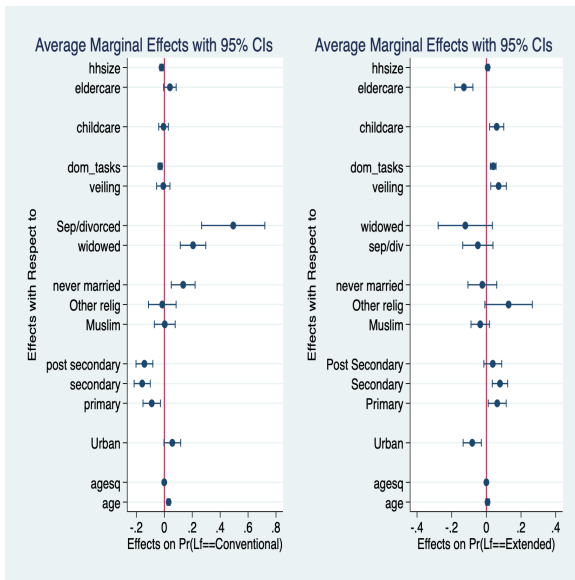
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- ▶ The second includes the effect of cultural norms: “veiling”, = 1 if the woman covers her face sometimes or always. Standard errors are clustered at the village level.

# Predicted Probability: Working



# Domestic Chores Matter More

- ▶ Western focus: burden of childcare key impediment in LFP.



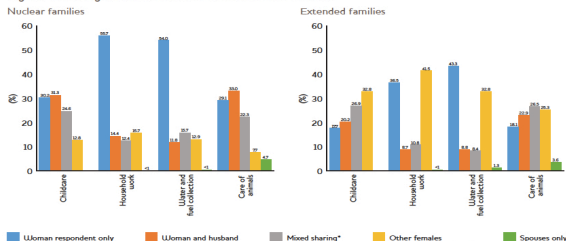
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- ▶ Chopra, D. (2017): India, Nepal, Rwanda, Tanzania Study

Figure 4 Sharing of tasks in nuclear and extended families<sup>20</sup>



Note: \* Both female and male household members carry out a specific task, irrespective of age.  
Source: Pluthons' own, project survey data.

# Domestic Chores and Lab Saving Devices

Who takes the main responsibility for domestic chores: cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, hh maintenance, collecting water

	(1)
	dom_tasks
N_labsaving	-0.419*** (-7.87)
_cons	4.208*** (96.90)
N	3604

*t* statistics in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

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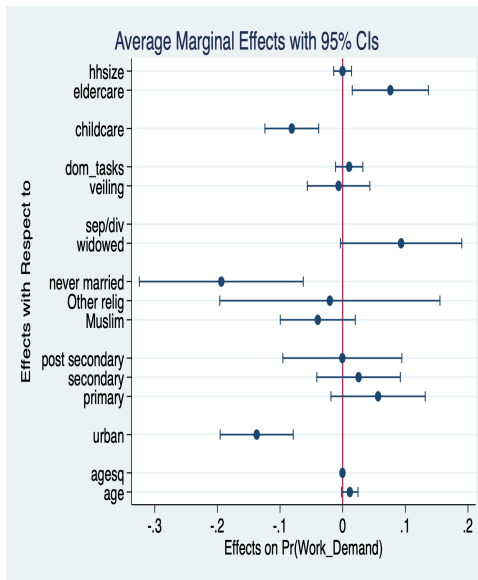
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- ▶ Perceptions about work: formal work is most desired and gives most satisfaction (work in progress)

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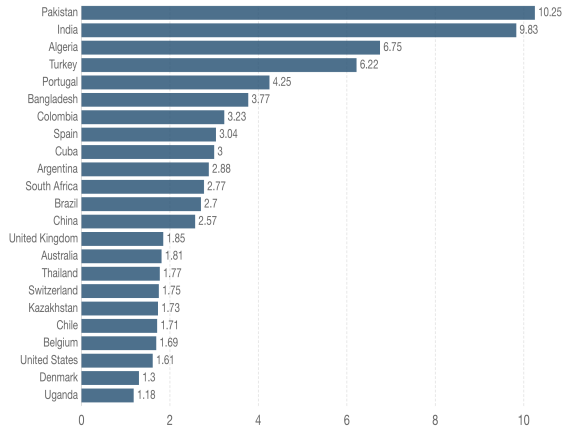
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- ▶ However, even accounting for that, the majority are “not working”, but involved in expenditure saving activities.
- ▶ There is a demand for work, especially if it is compatible with domestic chores.
- ▶ International attention on visible markers (burqa) or religion (Islam). But the real “cultural” norm that needs to change: sharing of domestic chores.

# Do Domestic Chores Explain International Variation in FLFP?

## Female-to-male ratio of time devoted to unpaid care work, 2014

Female to male ratio of time devoted to unpaid care work. Unpaid care work refers to all unpaid services provided within a household for its members, including care of persons, housework and voluntary community work.

Our World  
in Data



Source: OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database (2014)

[OurWorldInData.org/women-in-the-labor-force-determinants/](https://OurWorldInData.org/women-in-the-labor-force-determinants/) • CC BY

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Expenditure saving work.
- ▶ Unpaid work should not be seen as care work.
- ▶ Def of cultural norms to be rearticulated: unequal sharing of domestic, unpaid care work, from its current focus on religious differences, especially the spotlight on Islam or veiling as a constraint to labour force participation.