



Women's Work in Select States in India: Opportunities and Challenges

Background

India's persistently low Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP) remains a critical concern. On the supply side, women face multiple barriers such as unpaid domestic responsibilities, skill-job mismatches, and restrictive gender norms. Additionally, traditional methods of measuring work often underreport women's economic contributions. On the demand side, the labour market offers limited suitable opportunities for female workers, compounded by recruiters' bias, wage disparities and a lack of safe, inclusive workplaces.

Rationale of the Study

This study aims to holistically analyse the supply and demand side factors contributing to low FLFP in India, while testing improved methods to measure women's work. The findings from the study reveal the household and workplace constraints on women's participation, highlight policy-level enablers for increasing FLFP, and offer recommendations for refining how women's work is measured nationally.



Study Objectives

- To develop mechanisms for better capturing women's work using innovative survey methods and refined tools.
- To explore supply and demand-side factors influencing the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) across a representative sample from selected states.
- To assess how FLFPR estimates change when the data is collected through male proxy respondents.
- To analyse the informant bias associated with inaccurate reporting of women's time use pattern and labour participation.

Methodology

- A large-scale household survey, based on electoral-roll sampling, was conducted across Delhi, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, covering 4,713 women. This approach aimed to capture regional variations in FLFP. To account for proxy reporting bias — a common limitation in labour surveys — male members from 20 per cent of the respondent households were also interviewed.

- An enterprise survey was conducted in Jharkhand and Karnataka to understand barriers and enablers to women's workforce participation. It covered 1,238 entrepreneurs (both male and female) across sectors, with women comprising 18 per cent of the enterprise workforce. The study also assessed whether employer demand for female workers aligns with women's willingness to engage in paid work.

Key Findings

- Skilled women are 39 per cent more likely to join the labour force. However, rural women continue to lag in access to skill training.
- Women prefer workplaces within a commuting time of 20 to 25 minutes from their homes.
- Women with childcare responsibilities are 26 per cent more likely to leave the labour force. Investments in women-friendly workforce infrastructure can significantly improve retention.
- Access to piped water, electricity, and cooking gas positively influences women's decision to seek employment.
- Recruiters' bias against female candidates persists. Female profiles were 25 per cent less likely to be 'hired' than equally qualified male profiles, regardless of job type.

- **Gender norms govern women's workforce participation:**
 - Married women are significantly less likely to participate in the labour force.
 - Women from wealthier households are more likely to fall in the 'never worked' category, but once employed, their socioeconomic status reduces their likelihood of exiting the workforce.
 - A husband's income level strongly influences the wife's decision to participate in paid work.

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IWWAGE – An Initiative of LEAD at Krea University

Block M 6, Second Floor, Kharera,
Hauz Khas New Delhi, Delhi - 110016
+91-11-49403983



www.iwwage.org