

GENDER EQUALITY: A MUST FOR VIBRANT ECONOMY

Dr. Mahendra R. Mishra, Mrs. Jasmine Gulshan Rai

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics
K. J. Somaiya College of Arts and Commerce (Autonomous)
Vidyavihar, Mumbai – 400077
mahendra.mishra@somaiya.edu

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce
K. J. Somaiya College of Arts and Commerce (Autonomous)
Vidyavihar, Mumbai – 400077
jasmine@somaiya.edu

INTRODUCTION

Equality and empowerment of women are crucial for economic growth. It is also applicable in the case of labour force participation at various workplaces. In India, there have always been issues with gender equality and labour participation. Even while things have improved significantly over the years, there are still differences. The percentage of those in the workforce within the age group of 16–64, who are either employed or looking for work is known as the labor force participation rate. Individuals who are 64 years of age or older, housewives, and those pursuing education are not included in the labor force. The working-age population's contribution to the economy is gauged by the rate at which they are employed. The overall number of people who are either employed or eager for work is commonly called the participation rate. When the economy is not expanding or is experiencing a recession, this is a crucial indicator. People are looking at the unemployment statistics currently. Since it has an impact on income distribution, productivity, and overall development, labor force participation plays an essential role in the Indian economy. For the nation to thrive inclusively and sustainably, women's involvement in the labor force and access to good employment are crucial. Increased female labor force participation benefits the economy on a macro level.

As per the data published by the **UNDP 2021-22**, the average labour force participation of **men is 68.4 %**, and **women 52.6 %** in very high human development countries. When it comes to **developing countries**, the **labour force participation rate of men is 72.8 % and women is 44.4 %**. Now, when it comes to India, the labour force participation rate of women in **India is only 19.2 % as compared to 70.1 % of men (UNDP 2021)**. The status of women in the labor market has been demonstrated by the 2023 Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences, Dr. Claudia Goldin, who has contributed the first sophisticated understanding of women in the labor market in the US.

Several factors impact women's engagement in employment that vary from cultural standards, social expectations, and educational options to economic prospects. Policies to improve education access, job training initiatives, enhancing skill ability, encouraging women to start their businesses, and putting legislation in place are a few measures that would prevent discrimination in the workplace and promote gender equality.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As stated by **Sumanjeet (2016)**, cultural norms, social practices, and inadequate infrastructure and service delivery serve as the foundation for gender imbalance. Reducing gender inequality is not something that can be done quickly or easily. Raising awareness, implementing cultural and basic restructuring, changing mindsets, and expanding access to public services without discrimination based on gender may be the only ways to bring about change. State and federal governments alike cannot bring about lasting change on their own. In India, gender inequity needs to cease.

According to the studies conducted by **Castellano & Rocca, (2014)**, Gender disparity in the workplace and the conditions surrounding the female labor market are complex issues with many different economic, social, and cultural contexts. This makes it challenging to measure and compare these factors across national borders. The statistics show that the conditions for women in the labor market are best in Scandinavia and Ireland, while several Eastern and Southern European nations score worse.

According to **Das (2006)**, social norms in India typically give men the primary responsibility for earning a living through the job, while women are supposed to dedicate their time to taking care of the home. This results in variations in the factors that determine participation for men and women as well as gender disparities in employment outcomes, such as sectoral and occupational segregation. In India, women tend to possess lower levels of education and skill than men. In addition, women have less access to finance, land, and financial capital, which may make it more difficult for them to obtain compensated employment. The norms about female participation vary widely by social group, religion, and geographic area.

A research study by Sen (**1987**) shows how important it is to include the coexistence of conflict and collaboration in disparities between genders in every theory of economic growth.

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The primary objective of this research study is to establish trends, summarize the hindering reasons, and identify potential areas for females. The following are the main objectives of the research study:

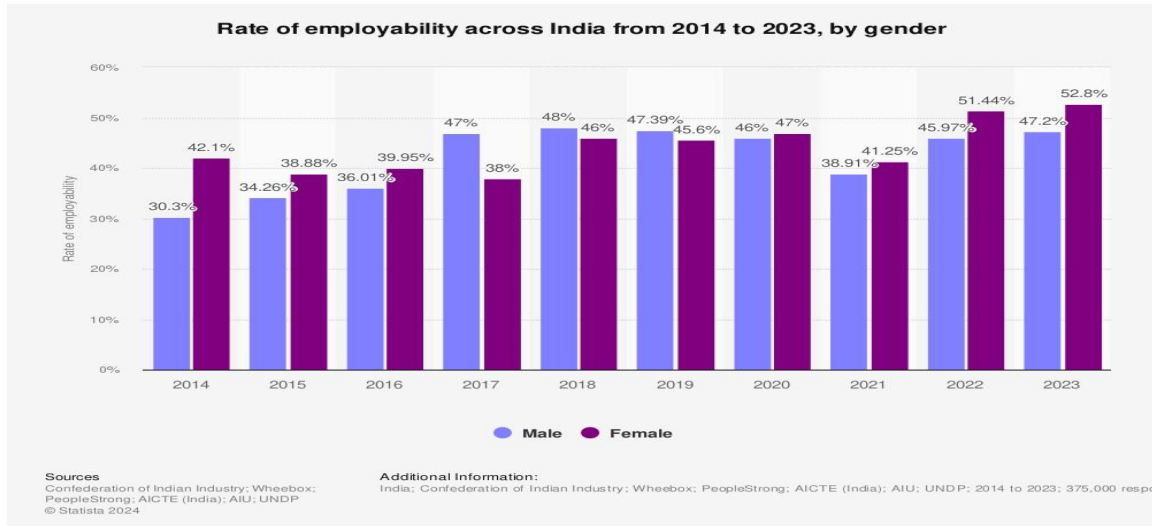
- To showcase a representation of a woman in the workforce.
- To sum together the causes of India's low female labor force participation.
- To be specific, many women who are not in the labor force are engaged.
- To become acquainted with data on the female labor market for gender analysis and policy making.
- To draw attention to ongoing labor market disparities

Labour Force Participation and Gender Disparities in India

Women's status in the Indian labor market is inferior to men's when it comes to income and job prospects. There are still disparities between them, particularly in the labor market, common education, service sector, health sector, and many other areas, despite industrialization, modernization, economic growth, and development in primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors resulting in less women participation in every field. Even though gender inequality has decreased significantly over the past few years, it remains a major problem in the Indian labor market. Certain commitments that prevent women from entering the workforce include the need to provide unpaid care for family members. Women face a disproportionate number of obstacles in their quest for employment. This research study examines the issue of disparities between genders in India's labor economy. The rates of unemployment, labor force participation, and work participation were used as proxies for gender inequality. Gender disparity persists as a major concern even with recent improvements in female education, declining fertility, high economic growth, and rising returns on education.

According to the **Nobel laureates, Esther Dufloas and Abhijit Banerjee (TOI, 2023)**, the US labour force participation of women in **2020** was **47 %** and it was **25 %** in **1920**, hundred years ago. They contend that women's participation in the labor force in India in 2021 has been compared to that of the United States of America a century ago. **The Gender Inequality Index (GII)** shows that **India ranked 122nd out of 191st countries in the world** in 2021 (UNDP, 2021).

The **World Economic Forum** introduced the **Global Gender Gap Index** first in 2006. This index aims to measure the global advancement of gender parity in four areas: political leadership, health, education, and economic possibilities. In the **World Economic Forum's 2022 Gender Gap Report**, **India** came in at number **135 out of 146 nations**, trailing behind its smaller neighbors, **Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka**. It is one of five countries where gender inequality is higher than five percent, along with **China, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, and Qatar**.



Source: UNDP; Confederation of Indian Industry; Wheebox; People Strong; AICTE (India); AIU, February 2023

In India, the number of men and women who are employable increased in 2023 compared to the year before. The employability rate for women was close to 53% in that year. In 2016, a greater proportion of women than men made up India's employable talent. This signified a notable expansion of the nation's social institutions in addition to the corporate sector. The ability to find and keep a job is referred to as employability.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that the gender disparity in employment in India is **50.9%**, with only **19.2% of females** and **70.1% of males** in the labor force. Women's status in the Indian labor market is inferior to men's when it comes to income and job prospects. There are still disparities between them, particularly in the labor market, common education, service sector, health sector, and many other areas, despite industrialization, modernization, economic growth, and development in primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors resulting in less women participation in every field.

Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) is a multidimensional agglomeration of structural and socioeconomic factors. The percentage of women in the labor force has been growing and increasing over the years.

Encouraging and welcoming females to higher participation in the labour force is vital for economic growth. The latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report for 2022–2023 shows that India's female labor force participation rate (LFPR) has grown. Though it is lower than the male, female LFPR is significantly increasing over the years, and at present, around one-third of women have joined the labour force.

Table 1 indicates the increasing trend in the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for persons aged 15 years and above. In rural areas, LFPR increased from 50.7% in 2017-18 to 60.8% in 2022-23 while for urban areas it increased from 47.6% to 50.4%. LFPR for males in India increased from 75.8% in % to 37.0%.

Survey Period	All-India								
	Rural			Urban			Rural + Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
2017-18	76.4	24.6	50.7	74.5	20.4	47.6	75.8	23.3	49.8
2018-19	76.4	26.4	51.5	73.7	20.4	47.5	75.5	24.5	50.2
2019-20	77.9	33	55.5	74.6	23.3	49.3	76.8	30	53.5
2020-21	78.1	36.5	57.4	74.6	23.2	49.1	77	32.5	54.9
2021-22	78.2	36.6	57.5	74.7	23.8	49.7	77.2	32.8	55.2
2022-23	80.2	41.5	60.8	74.5	25.4	50.4	78.5	37	57.9

Table 2 indicates the increasing trend in Worker Population Ratio (WPR) for persons aged 15 years and above. In rural areas, WPR increased from 48.1% in 2017-18 to 59.4% in 2022-23 while for urban areas it increased

from 43.9% to 47.7%. WPR for males in India increased from 71.2% in 2017-18 to 76.0% in 2022-23 and a corresponding increase in WPR for females was from 22.0% to 35.9%.

All-India									
Indicator	Rural			Urban			Rural+Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
2017-18	72	23.7	48.1	69.3	18.2	43.9	71.2	22	46.8
2018-19	72.2	25.5	48.9	68.6	18.4	43.9	71	23.3	47.3
2019-20	74.4	32.2	53.3	69.9	21.3	45.8	73	28.7	50.9
2020-21	75.1	35.8	55.5	70	21.2	45.8	73.5	31.4	52.6
2021-22	75.3	35.8	55.6	70.4	21.9	46.6	73.8	31.7	52.9
2022-23	78	40.7	59.4	71	23.5	47.7	76	35.9	56

Table 3 indicates the decreasing trend in Unemployment Rate (UR) for persons aged 15 years and above. In rural areas, UR decreased from 5.3% in 2017-18 to 2.4% in 2022-23 while for urban areas it decreased from 7.7% to 5.4%. UR for males in India decreased from 6.1% in 2017-18 to 3.3% in 2022-23 and the corresponding decrease in UR for females was from 5.6% to 2.9%.

All-India									
Indicator	Rural			Urban			Rural+Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
2017-18	5.7	3.8	5.3	6.9	10.8	7.7	6.1	5.6	6
2018-19	5.5	3.5	5	7	9.8	7.6	6	5.1	5.8
2019-20	4.5	2.6	3.9	6.4	8.9	6.9	5	4.2	4.8
2020-21	3.8	2.1	3.3	6.1	8.6	6.7	4.5	3.5	4.2
2021-22	3.8	2.1	3.2	5.8	7.9	6.3	4.4	3.3	4.1
2022-23	2.7	1.8	2.4	4.7	7.5	5.4	3.3	2.9	3.2

When men and women are equally represented and involved in different spheres of society, such as politics, work, education, and leadership positions, this is referred to as **gender parity**. It attempts to resolve gender disparities and build a more equitable and equitable society in which people of all genders enjoy the same opportunities and rights.

Several variables can impact gender parity, such as **social norms and cultural attitudes, economic factors, legal and policy frameworks, education, institutional biases, and lack of representation**. The persistence of gender inequity and the advancement of gender parity might be limited by the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles and decision-making bodies. To reach genuine gender parity, addressing these variables would require comprehensive initiatives that include policy changes, societal shifts, and attempts to fight prejudices and biases.

The Role of Economic Trends and Government Initiatives

Understanding the trajectory of the labour market is essential to addressing these disparities. Nobel Laureate Claudia Goldin's extensive research on the US labour market illuminates the changing gender gaps and employment opportunities over centuries.

Different economic and social elements that interact intricately at both the home and macro levels determine women's decision to enter the labor field as well as their ability to do so. The age of marriage and fertility rates, economic growth and its cyclical consequences, urbanization, and education attainment are some of the most significant determinants, according to studies from multiple countries. Apart from these problems, societal conventions that dictate women's place in the public sphere also influence the results. To create policies that work, it is essential to understand what is happening to the economy in India. The Indian government has made great strides toward giving women economic power. Many programs and projects have been introduced to increase the number of women who work.

The **Government of India** has implemented various policies and initiatives to address gender parity and promote gender equality. Some key policies and initiatives include:

- **Constitutional Provisions**
- **The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005:**
- **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013**
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):**
- **Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK):**
- **Reservation for Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs):**
- **Various schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) focus on improving access to and quality of education for girls.**

These policies and initiatives reflect the government's commitment to addressing gender disparities and promoting gender equality across different sectors of society. However, challenges remain in implementation and achieving full gender parity, requiring continued efforts and advocacy.

Challenges and Opportunities

Several factors contribute to the low participation of Indian women in the labor market. Important barriers include societal standards, a lack of access to high-quality healthcare and education, and a lack of representation in positions of decision-making. Women are further discouraged from actively seeking employment because of the persistent gender wage gap and discrimination in the workplace.

However, amid these challenges lie immense opportunities. A key factor in women's empowerment is education. Education spending, especially in rural areas, can give women the tools they need to contribute significantly to the workforce. Additionally, promoting entrepreneurship among women can lead to the creation of job opportunities and economic growth. Various initiatives schemed by the Government of India have led to the creation of opportunities to magnify the role of women's labour force participation and build up the gender disparity.

Skill India Initiatives have been instrumental in promoting gender equality in labor force participation by focusing on skill development and empowerment of women. Some of the key initiatives under Skill India that contribute to gender equality in the labor force include:

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY): PMKVY aims to provide skill training to youth across India, including women, to enhance their employability and productivity. Special efforts are made to ensure the participation of women in skill development programs through targeted outreach and awareness campaigns.

Skill Development Initiatives for Women: Skill India has specific schemes and programs tailored to the skill development needs of women, such as the Udaan scheme for women in Jammu & Kashmir and the **STEP (Support to Training and Employment Program for Women)** scheme, which focuses on providing vocational training to women for enhancing their employability.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): Skill India promotes the recognition of prior learning, which allows individuals, including women who have acquired skills through informal means, to get their skills assessed, certified, and formally recognized. This facilitates their entry into the formal labor force.

Entrepreneurship Development Programs: Skill India encourages entrepreneurship among women by providing training, mentorship, and financial support through initiatives like the **Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana** and the **Stand-Up India scheme**. These programs aim to empower women to start and manage their businesses.

Placement Assistance and Job Fairs: Skill India facilitates placement assistance and organizes job fairs to connect skilled individuals, including women, with potential employers. These efforts help women access employment opportunities in various sectors and bridge the gender gap in the labor force.

Gender Sensitization and Awareness: Skill India conducts gender sensitization and awareness programs to challenge stereotypes and biases and create a conducive environment for women's participation in skill development and employment. These programs aim to promote a culture of gender equality and inclusion in the workforce.

By implementing these initiatives, Skill India endeavors to create a more gender-inclusive workforce by providing women with the necessary skills, training, and support to participate effectively in the labor force and contribute to India's economic growth and development.

Suggestions:

To address gender inequality in labor force participation, several mechanisms can be put in place:

Equal Employment Opportunity Policies: Creating and upholding rules that guarantee men and women have equal access to hiring, promotion, and training opportunities will help close the disparity between men and women in the workforce.

Anti-Discrimination Laws: These laws offer a legal framework for resolving complaints about gender inequality by outlawing harassment, unequal pay, and other forms of unfair treatment. They are also enacted and enforced.

Gender-Sensitive Work Environment: Fostering an inclusive and gender-neutral workplace can help draw and keep a diverse staff. This entails promoting a work-life balance, allowing for flexible scheduling, and combating prejudice and preconceptions.

Training and Awareness Programs: Educating companies and workers about gender inclusion, diversity, and equality through training programs can help create a respectful and equal work environment.

Gender-Responsive Policies and Programs: Creating and executing policies and initiatives that tackle the unique requirements and obstacles encountered by women in the workforce, like access to childcare help, maternity leave, and skill development and education, can boost women's involvement and longevity in the workforce.

Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms: Adding mechanisms to track progress on key indicators, collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data, and regularly assess policies and programs can help identify deficiencies and areas for improvement in equal opportunity initiatives in the workplace.

Access to Finance and Entrepreneurship: Giving women equal access to credit, financial resources, and encouragement for starting their businesses will help them become more financially independent and increase their participation in the workforce.

Supportive Legal Framework: Reducing and implementing legislation concerning childcare, maternity and paternity leave, and work-life balance can help foster an atmosphere that is conducive to women entering the workforce without encountering prejudice or obstacles.

Policymakers, employers, and other stakeholders can collaborate to overcome gender disparities in labor force participation and establish more inclusive and equitable workplaces by putting these tools into place.

CONCLUSION: EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR A PROSPEROUS INDIA

Gender equality and empowerment play an important role in economic development. Women's active engagement in the labor force is essential for a healthy economy, not just for the sake of gender equality. India can fully utilize its workforce and achieve **robust economic growth and development** by addressing the obstacles women encounter in the labor market and giving them equal opportunities. The issue of gender disparity in the workforce is a complicated one. It is deeply rooted in the history, culture, and customs of Indian civilization. In addition to having to work for extremely little pay and having no job security or social security benefits, women's working conditions are particularly poor. As a result, a comprehensive strategy is needed to solve this issue. The goal of government initiatives should be to increase women's access to opportunities in the areas of **employment, education, and health**. But community mobilization is also required. The promotion of gender equality, the creation of more job possibilities, the enhancement of work policies, the availability of appropriate childcare, and the support of women entrepreneurs are all necessary to boost the number of female entrepreneurs and jobs in India. India's growth trajectory hinges on cultivating a hospitable environment that uplifts women, necessitating periodic assessments of initiatives to debunk myths and encourage female involvement in the labor market. Hence, to empower working women, there is an urgent need to transform them into 'skilled workers' through suitable programs and policies. After analyzing various challenges faced by women in workplaces, it can be suggested that suitable policy measures through gender equality shall improve the employability of women. It is imperative to enhance HRD and training policies by considering gender perspectives and considering regional norms and traditions. In addition, to facilitate the

enrollment of women, the skill development process must be made accommodating and flexible. As India develops, it is essential to improve current programs, make investments in healthcare and education, and foster an atmosphere that supports women's professional success. India can set the stage for a better, more affluent future in which all citizens, male or female, make significant contributions to the advancement of their country by empowering their women.

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