

An In-Depth Analysis of Women's Labor Force Participation in Pakistan

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Abstract: Women in Pakistan are subjected to severe employment discrimination. Theorist claims that female employment has positive impact on country economy and women wellbeing. Labor force data from Pakistan bureau of statistics and World Bank suggests that labor force participation of women in Pakistan, as percentage of total women workforce and percentage of total countries work force is below par when compared to international standard and developed countries. Moreover majority of women are accumulated in informal sectors mostly agriculture. The reason for this gender discrimination is ingrained in political, legal, economic and cultural factors that adversely affect the status of women, limit the employment opportunities and employment options for women. It is suggested that holistic change approach should be initiated in country by the country, supported by media and accepted by masses.

Key words: Women • Labor force • Formal Sector • Informal Sector • Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Employment is essential for individual and collective wellbeing. It provides for sustenance and enhances the quality of life, not only of the employee but the related people too. In addition, it leads to economic growth and development of human resource, either men or women. Ever since the advent of human race, women have been putting in their share of economic and social effort, although immensely undermined. Their participation in labor force remains thin due to less employment and developmental opportunities for women, cultural and social barriers, discriminatory environment and low salaries. Moreover their economic efforts remains imperceptible because the majority of women are working in informal sectors of labor market [1]. Miserable situation of women in Pakistan is no exception from majority of developing countries [2]. A surprisingly vast majority of the population is economically, politically and socially deprived from their human and legal rights. In Pakistan poor treatment to women is widespread and it is not uncommon to deprive them from inheritance rights. Their efforts to claim the due rights are mostly in vain, subjected to discrimination in every walk of life [3] and their males counterparts are at an advantage in this society [4] including access to employment opportunities.

Proponents of human rights, feminist and economist advocates the participation of women in economic activities. Since women are almost half of the world's population, there has been a global realization and effort to increase their participation in the total workforce of a country, based on belief that development of human resource is incomplete without involving women [5, 6]. Currently the situation worldwide is quite grim and needs extensive improvement [7]. The annual Human Development Report (HDR) initially developed by Mahbub ul Haq in 1990 [8], followed and improved by Amriya Sen and adopted by United Nations Development Programme considered gender equity in all socio-economic domains of society as issue of utmost important. Recognizing the importance of gender equality and its impact on economy of a nation, HDR advocates provision of facilities for expanding capabilities and functioning of every individual without any gender discrimination. Ever since its commencement, HDR addresses the economic and social discrimination occurring towards women of the world thus leading to gender inequality [9]. Defining gender inequality, Dorius and Firebaugh [10] posits that gender inequality occurs if distribution of females and males deviate in some characteristics (such as life expectancy, education, labor force, political power or economic wealth) from their ratio

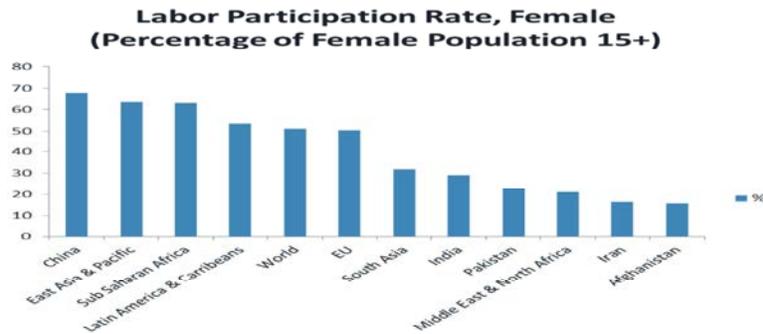


Fig. 1: Female Labor Force Participation, selected regions and countries of world, source: world development indicator, World Bank 2011

in population. In this case either women or men have disproportionally small share in those particular characteristics.

Several researchers claimed that participation of women in economic activities outside their homes can help them achieve political and social liberation. The perceptions of families that girls are going to contribute family income, leads to greater investment in their health and education [11]. Women employment is linked to low fertility rates and greater trends of family planning, thus helping to control the population of country [12]. Studies have found that women working outside their homes gain more self-confidence, independence, influence over families and awareness about health and enhanced social activities [13, 14].

Women in Pakistan are half of the population, yet they constitute one-fourth of the total labor-force. This means that massive human resources is presently untapped, neither contributing to economic development of the nation, nor to enhance their own status in society. Pakistan belongs to those few developing nations where labor force participation (LFP) of women is one of the lowest in world and less than world average of 51.2%. On the contrary some countries like China and some regions like East Asia has LFP of women as high as 67.7% and 63.1% respectively. By LFP of women it means the percentage of women currently working as ratio of total women capable of employment in the population. Figure 1 compares LFPs of some regions of world and neighboring countries with Pakistan.

Apart from work force participation, gender imbalance vis-à-vis women exist in other domains as well. For instance, women of Pakistan make up a major portion of poverty stricken segment and this poverty exist not only in terms of financial resources but access to facilities and entrepreneurial resources too [15, 16]. Similarly discrimination exists towards women in

accessing education facilities, trainings opportunities and social services[17]. There is visible gender inequality in literacy rate of Pakistan. Literacy in women of age 10 and above is 47.1% as compared to 70.7% in males[18]. Similarly at all level of education the participation of women in labor force is less than males, indicating some unseen barriers from society and prevalent gender discrimination in labor market. Even though more and more women are opting for higher education yet this does not guarantee their entry into main stream labor market[17] and their participation at all education level remains low [19].

In spite having low labor force participation rate in statistics, considerable number of women participates in economic activities. Yet their contribution is largely undermined and due to socio-cultural and economic factors, their status is considered less than men [20]. In Pakistan the case is same as all over the world where human capital value of women is considered less than men which force them to concentrate in informal sectors of labor market [21]. Majority of working women in Pakistan are employed in informal sector, mainly agriculture. There is a substantial difference between jobs of informal sector and formal sectors. In informal sectors, jobs are more documented, tend to apply some rules and regulation which benefits employees and more prone to abide the employment laws of a country, which is not characteristics of informal jobs [22]. Informal sector employees are contractually hired without any documented agreement (often verbal agreements) and are often paid at rates which are often less than minimum wages recommended by the government [23]. Their working conditions vis-à-vis females are often hazardous; having long working hours, no medical benefits, no job security, subjected to job discrimination, verbal abuse and sexual harassment and no support from male oriented labor unions [24].

Table 1: Labor force statistics of Pakistan, Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Survey 2012-13

Labor Force Statistics	Males	Females	Total
Population (million)	93.29266	87.64734	180.94
% of population	51.56	48.44	100
Rural Population (% of Total Population)	34.11	32.23	66.34
Urban Population (% of Total Population)	17.44	16.21	33.66
% of Total Work Force (Urban)	77.12	22.88	100
% of Total Work Force(Rural)	51.11	20.08	71.19
% of Total Work Force (Urban)	26	2.81	28.81
Children in employment, (% of children ages 7-14)	12.5	13.5	13
Unemployment (% of labor force)	5.73	9.19	6.54
Labor participation rate (% of population ages 10+)	70.03	22.79	47.06
Labor participation rate (% of population ages 10+) (Rural)	71.46	29.88	51.06
Labor participation rate (% of population ages 10+) (Urban)	67.5	9.54	39.78

A lot of focused on industry specific studies have been done upon working women of Pakistan, yet a gap existed in term of a qualitative study which holistically review the situation of women employment all over Pakistan. The purpose of the current study is to explore the reasons that contribute to low LFP of women in Pakistan. Moreover the study endeavors to find out the possible reasons for accumulation of majority of working women in informal sectors especially agriculture and the problems faced by working women which violates the equal employment opportunity for women in Pakistan. Labor force statistics for current research are drawn from Pakistan bureau of statistics, labor force survey 2009 and 2012 [18, 25] and world bank's world development indicators data, 2011 [26]. Discussion is based upon the trends depicted in the women labor force statistics of Pakistan in conjunction with qualitative review of relevant research and new reports.

Study Objectives: The objectives of current study are related to gender inequality in terms of women employment in Pakistan:

- Overview of participation rate of working women in Pakistan and their segregation as per sectors, occupations and industries
- Analysis of causes that lead to low proportion of women in workforce relative to their proportion in population of country and violation of equal employment opportunities.
- Why women are restricted to some particular jobs especially agriculture and other informal jobs.

Composition of Working Women in Pakistan: Although women comprises 49.1% of total population their proportion in labor force is 21.6% [25] whereas their participation rate as percentage of total population of

females, as of 2011 is only 22% [26]. The gender comparison of labor force statistics in Pakistan are presented in Table 1.

These statistics indicate a male oriented labor market which is characteristics of many developing countries around the globe [1]. In a country where poverty prevails, living standards are below average and majority of population do not has access to basic facilities such as clean water, sanitation, education and an acute power crises, expectedly social indicators also depicts a miserable picture [27]. Of the 187 countries indexed, Pakistan is positioned at lower end of continuum at 146th number having HDI value of 0.515; an increase of 53% from 1980. Similarly the Gender Inequality Index (GII) of Pakistan is 0.567, ranking at 123 out of 148 countries indexed, yet again at the lower side, depicting once again a sorrow picture for the women.

Nonetheless, over the past few years, the human development indicator have indicated positive trend as in years 1999-2000 women constituted only 13.7% of total workforce in Pakistan [25]. Yet if we compare it in whatever manner, either by percentage of total women population, as percentage of total workforce in the country or as an increase of participation over the years, the figures are quite below the global averages. A comparison of women workforce as percentage of female population above age of 15 with world (51.2%) and South Asia (31.8%) from year 2003 till 2011 is depicted in Figure 2[26]. Although the slope in Figure 2 is leveled for globe, a significant decrease in female labor force participation is registered in South Asia;whereas an increase of 8% is registered in Pakistan during these years.

Of the total working women, 26.03% (5.51% of total workforce) are employed in non-agriculture sector. Major occupation groups as percentage of total women work force in Pakistan are legislator and senior manager

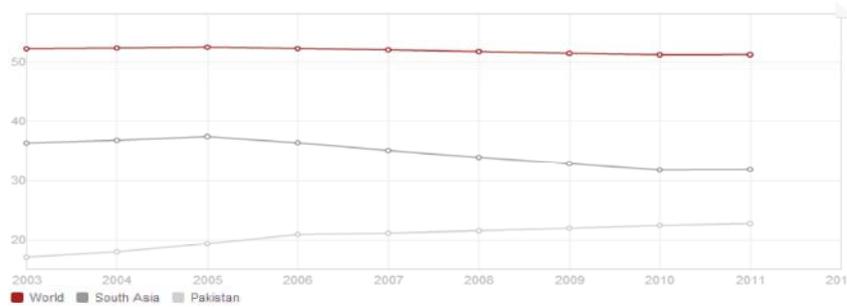


Fig. 2: Labor participation rate female as% of female participation, source: World Bank(World Bank, 2012)

Table 2: Division of female labor force in Pakistan, Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force Survey, 2008-2009*

Division	Sub-Division	% of Total Labor Force			% of Female Labor		
		Overall	Rural	Urban	Overall	Rural	Urban
Total		21.2	17.9	3.28	100	84.5	15.5
Sector	Agriculture	15.6	15.2	0.49	74.0	71.7	2.31
	Formal Non-Agriculture	1.52	0.60	0.92	7.18	2.83	4.35
	Informal Non-Agriculture	3.99	2.12	1.87	18.85	10.01	8.83
Employment Status	Employer	0.02	N/A	N/A	0.09	N/A	N/A
	Self-Employed	2.77	N/A	N/A	13.08	N/A	N/A
	Unpaid Family Helpers	13.77	N/A	N/A	65.04	N/A	N/A
	Employees	4.62	N/A	N/A	21.82	N/A	N/A
Industry	Agriculture	15.66	15.18	0.49	73.97	71.71	2.31
	Manufacturing	2.51	1.52	0.99	11.86	7.18	4.68
	Construction	0.09	0.05	0.04	0.43	0.24	0.19
	Wholesale, Retail and Repair	0.31	0.19	0.12	1.46	0.90	0.57
	Hotels and Restaurants	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.14	0.09	0.05
	Transport and Storage	0.05	0.01	0.04	0.24	0.05	0.19
	Financial Intermediation	0.03	0	0.03	0.14	0.00	0.14
	Real Estate, Renting and Business Activity	0.02	0	0.02	0.09	0.00	0.09
	Public Administration and Defense	0.09	0.01	0.08	0.43	0.05	0.38
	Education	1.38	0.5	0.88	6.52	2.36	4.16
	Health and Social Work	0.35	0.15	0.2	1.65	0.71	0.94
	Community and Domestic Work	0.42	0.21	0.21	1.98	0.99	0.99
Occupation groups	Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers	0.36	0.19	0.17	1.70	0.90	0.80
	Professionals	0.25	0.06	0.19	1.18	0.28	0.90
	Technicians and Associate Professionals	1.53	0.6	0.92	7.23	2.83	4.35
	Skilled Agriculture	12.87	12.48	0.39	60.79	58.95	1.84
	Sales and Services	0.09	0.03	0.06	0.43	0.14	0.28
	Trade and Craft	2.47	1.53	0.93	11.67	7.23	4.39
	Unskilled Occupations	3.55	2.98	0.56	16.77	14.08	2.65

(1.7%), professionals (1.18%), technical and associate professionals (7.22%), clerks(0.13%), service workers and sales force (0.45%), skilled agriculture and fishery (60.8%), craft and trade workers (11.66%), plant machine operators and assemblers (0.11%) and unskilled occupations (16.76%). Formal sector women work force make up 1.52% of the total women workforce whereas 3.99% works in informal sectors other than agriculture. In the informal sector women mostly works on hourly, daily, monthly wages or per piece basis in manufacturing (5.67%),

construction (0.21%), whole sale and retail (0.76), hotels and restaurants (0.06), education (1.3%), health and social work (0.23%), transport and financial intermediation (0.04%) and private households (0.56%). Married working women constitute 65.7% of total women workforce. The average salary for females (Rs. 5188/month) is considerably less than males (Rs. 7997/month) [25].

The distribution of women workforce with respect to Sector, Industry and Employment Status and Occupation groups is depicted in Table 2.

According to statistics provided by Ministry of Labor and Manpower in 2010 [28] in public sector, the total representation of women is less than 2%, which further reduces as we move up in the hierarchy. Most of the women in public sector are employed in education and health sector and there is minimal representation in other sectors such as trade and finance, engineering, telecom or public administration. Similarly in private Formal sectors there majority women serve in health and education industries. More than 75% of women labor force is working in agriculture sector which comprises of informal jobs [29]. Combining agriculture and other informal sectors, 92% of total urban and rural women workforce are employed here [25].

Analysis of Low LFP in Women: Currently Pakistan is passing through an era of political instability [30] and economic turmoil as inflation peaks in the region [31] and prices of food, fuel and accommodation have skyrocketed. In this situation women mostly work to acquire economic independence [32]. In some cases women work to supplement the family income mostly generated by males in Pakistan and yet in few cases they are sole bread earner of their families either due to inability or absence of other male family members to earn (for instance sick, dead or chronic unemployed father, brother or husband). There are many multi-dimensional attributes such as religious, cultural, social, economic and political leading to gender inequality in employment. According to Khan [33] ingrained conservativeness in culture coupled with lack of political will are a strong barrier for women in employment.

Moreover, the plethora of problems faced by working women is a strong barrier towards women employment. They have to face daunting challenges such as limited job options, discrimination in wages, bonded labor, lack of social security, medical insurance, old age benefits [2] along with hostile working environment and a double burden of labor at work and at home. Traditionally Pakistani males, are no exception to majority of other Asians cultures and generally do not participate in domestic chores [34]. When it comes to giving birth, the cultural trends indicate non-participation of women in decision of raising a family [35] and an anti-trend towards family planning. According to Siddiqui [36], men in Pakistan do not participate in domestic activities whereas women even if they are doing job have dual responsibility. The informal sector is especially notorious when it comes to providing non-discriminatory working environment and complies with legal requirements of employment. For instance majority of informal

organizations (and some formal as well) do not pay women even the recommended minimum salary as made compulsory by the government [2]. Moreover the average monthly salaries of women in Pakistan are less than those of men depicting economic discrimination in the context. All these factors act as demotivating factors for those women who possess some education and skills and are considering opting for an employment.

Who makes decision regarding women doing job? In a typical Pakistani household, Males are decision makers, hence in a better position to restrict women as per their wish. Women are mostly not in decision making position. There are some causal variables which significantly influence women employment decision. These are women age, education, marital status, absence (or presence) of a male member, children, family size, financial status, number of dependents and neighborhood [32]. Analysis of these variables means that doing job for women in Pakistan is not a primary activity, as for men. Mostly the women are unaware of their rights. They are not empowered to take any step by their own. Rarely they take employment decisions by themselves, otherwise someone else (typically a male member) do it for them. In either case high level of chances exist that a women do not opt for an employment.

Analysis of Women Labor Force Distribution: All over the globe, specifically in industrialized setups, jobs are sexually divided as typical males and females jobs. Some females dominating jobs around the globe are nurses, teachers, domestic cleaners, childcare, secretaries and assistances [37]. The religious implication of purdah (veil), segregation of sexes and restricted outdoor activities confine women to limited job options. For instance, traditionally one can find them employed either in a sexually segregated workplace (such as female schools, female colleges, certain female banks or hospitals), confined within premises workplace (such as banks, computer departments, call centers etc), women oriented jobs (such as midwives, nurses, domestic jobs, family business) or low (or no paid in case of family helpers) paid jobs (such as packing in industry, agriculture workers, textile workers etc). Since they have limited job options and their education level is below par, this leads to an accumulation of women workers in informal sectors such as agriculture. Women in informal jobs usually are not protected by any employment laws. Hence they are devoid of facilities such as job security, maternity benefits and medical benefits and are subjected to wage discrimination.

The reason of employment of majority of women in agriculture sector lies in the fact that economy of Pakistan is primarily agriculture based with 75% people living in rural areas and 25% in urban areas. Statistics reveals that agriculture sector in Pakistan generates jobs for 45% of total labor force, of which 29% are males and 16% are females. Agriculture sector is believed to be the backbone of Pakistani economy and women are a crucial support for this backbone as they contribute with males in every related activity such as weeding plants, seed cleaning, drying, storage and binding of crops [38]. Their work is cumbersome, often non-paid or if paid less than males and the facilities such as medical, maternity, educational are nil. Under the obligation of the male family member or influential landlord, most of the agri-workers are non-paid family helpers. Similarly the reason women are preferred in some of the other informal sectors like manufacturing is due to their low salary demand. Although 83% of total male workforce is employed in informal sectors, 93% of females are employed in agriculture and informal sectors. This is an indication of clear gender discrimination. There are some such jobs too which are not yet accessible to the women.

One of the other reasons for the women to enter in the informal sector is their not receiving any education at all. Majority of the illiterate adults are women in Pakistan [25, 26]. Even if they begin their education, either they do not complete it or if complete the school education they do not get some professional training. Due to poverty and inadequate income when they come to do some work, they are to opt informal sector and jobs like agri-workers, lowest paid jobs in manufacturing, domestic maids. Of the small number of women working in formal sectors such as education, health and public administration, the employment conditions are not much favorable. For instance Khan, *et al.* [2] in a study on private school female teachers in Bahawalpur concluded that they are subjected to severe wage discrimination as it is often less than the minimum wages suggested by Government.

Recommendations and Implications: In our society women have multiple roles to play which are largely determined by social, religious and cultural factors. Thus in an effort to encourage women to participate in labor force activities, one should keep in mind the true religious and ethical implications of the society, which are meant to benefit the society as a whole. For instance, Islam does not prohibit women to earn her living

although it strongly recommends chastity to be maintained. It mentions that earning livelihood and bearing the expenses of family is not the liability of woman but of man who is the head of the family but if she works willingly she has the full authority and access on her earnings. In this way Islam prohibits the forced labor of women and empowers them to make the decision regarding their employment. A married woman in Pakistan is to practice her duties as a mother, wife and house hold worker. She should work provided she has some provisions and facilities which make her life comfortable, access to her earnings, safe working conditions, good wages compatible to a male worker of the same status and moreover her willingness to do that work. If she is forced to do job against her will, it would be severe violation of fundamental human rights. Similarly it has been seen that women in Pakistan are often force to do bounded labor. In some cases they are put into prostitution forcefully [39]. We recommend a strong legal intervention to stop the violation of basic human rights towards women in forced employment.

Pakistan has well established employment and equal employment opportunities laws. The constitution of Pakistan specifically mentions human working conditions and equal employment opportunities regardless of sexes. For instance Article 25 of the constitution of Pakistan specifically bans any kind of gender discrimination whereas article 26 bans gender discrimination in employment related decisions. Furthermore provisions have been made for humane and safe working conditions and maternity benefits for working women[40]. All these provision in constitution are implemented by various statues, ordinances, labor policies and acts of parliaments. Yet historically Pakistani government lacks practical steps especially when it comes to wellbeing of women. We encourage the future researchers to probe deeply into the gap that exist between laws and policies on paper and implemented on ground. Moreover the laws that facilitates women at workplace needs to be brought up at par with international standards and recommendations of international labor organization. The issue of informal women workers should be brought up in front of legislators. General practice in Pakistan is not to apply employment laws to the informal workers, hence depriving them from any protection provided by legal framework of country. It is recommended that informal workers, specifically women due to their vulnerability must be given due legal protection by the employers, enforced by state.

CONCLUSION

We are still a long way to reduce gender in-equality and discrimination of employment in Pakistan vis-à-vis women. Although the picture may not be as bright for males for employment opportunities in our society, yet it is much bleak for the women, since males enjoy greater discretionary powers and autonomy upon their actions. Efforts directed towards revision of political, social and cultural values needs to be made by government, endorsed by media and adopted by general public. For instance, in-order to improve the economic condition of women and their participation in economic activities, women empowerment holds a key. Malhotra and Schuler [41] proposed a comprehensive framework of women empowerment based upon economic, socio-cultural, legal, political and psychological dimensions across house-hold, community and broader arenas. Thus women access to employment, credit, trade associations and markets is one aspect of broad concept of empowerment.

However the recent economic growth and serious efforts to empower women has improved women status within and outside homes. According to Hou [42] in Pakistan, greater number of women are getting education and opting for employment of their choice when they have been empowered and decision making powers. If women in a household had higher participation in decision making, greater spending had been reported in education, medical, clothing, fuel and lightning. On the contrary if males are solely making decision, higher spending shifts to food and transportation. This indicates that women of Pakistan, if capable to efficiently manage house hold financial and economic activities, would perform no less than their male's counterparts in organizations. Recent efforts for women empowerment in Pakistan largely owe to interventions and initiatives taken by government, international agencies and very recently media. If the effort continues in this way and the people realize the importance of women entering into main stream workforce, there is no doubt that in few years we will witness significant improvement of LFP amongst women of Pakistan. Similarly as more and more women will enter the workforce they will get greater economic and social freedom and enhanced educational facilities. In addition we need an effort to alter the conservative cultural values and open diverse employment opportunities for them so that they can play their part as diverse workforce, generally considered male oriented jobs in Pakistan. Researchers who plan to work in this domain must attempt

a quantitative study, empirically analyzing the causal relationship between variables such as culture, norms, political influence, economic factors and international influence upon LFP of women in Pakistan and possible choices of employment.

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