



India's Women and the Workforce

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This article is based on **“India’s women and the workforce”** which was published in The Hindustan Times on 08/03/2021. It talks about the declining women’s employment in India.

Women’s education has increased over the last two decades, and fertility rates have fallen — both have contributed to increasing participation of women in the paid labour force in the world. However, this is not the case in India.

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey, 2018-19, the female labour force participation rates (LFPR) among women aged above 15 years are as low as 26.4% in rural areas and 20.4% in urban areas in India.

The pandemic is already worsening the **deep inequalities facing women and girls**, erasing years of progress towards gender equality.

Both supply and demand factors contribute to the low levels of employment among women — especially the burden of domestic responsibilities, including the reproductive roles played by women, coupled with the lack of adequate and appropriate job opportunities.

Reasons for Declining Women’s Employment in India

- **Societal Pressure:** Generally there is a fear of women being stigmatized by the community that might see their work as a marker of low status, i.e. the inability of the husband, the main breadwinner, to provide for the family.
Further, there is a rise in conservative attitudes that believe a woman’s place is inside the home and kitchen, and that if the woman steps outside the socially approved threshold, it would invite a backlash.
- **Growing Informalization of Work:** Over the last three decades, there has been a massive decline in agricultural jobs, which has not necessarily been accompanied by an increase in rural non-farm employment or livelihood opportunities.
There has been movement out of agriculture into informal and casual jobs, where the work is sporadic, and often less than 30 days at a stretch.

- **Women’s Work Not Being Counted As Work:** There is also the problem of much of women’s work not being counted as work.
Data indicate that the decline in LFPRs is driven by women moving from paid to unpaid work and hence not getting counted as “workers”, even though they might continue to be involved in unpaid economic work in family enterprises (farming, livestock, kirana shops, handmade products for sale and so on).
- **Inadequate Social Security Protection:** Even for women who are in the workforce, the nature of their employment is such that most of them are out of the purview of labour laws, including the recently passed Social Security Code.
 - This automatically leaves out women in self-employment and those in informal jobs, together constituting more than 90% of the female workforce.
 - Moreover, with land in agriculture continuing to be mostly in the name of men, women are not even recognized as farmers, although a large proportion of them are involved in agricultural work.
 - This also keeps women away from accessing various schemes and resources such as priority sector loans, income support cash transfers, and so on.

Way Forward

- **Bringing Women in Leadership Role:** Subdued gender participation emanates from social-economic issues, which can be treated by bringing behavioural change. This can be changed if more women are given leadership positions.
Thus, there is a need to ensure equal representation– from company boards to parliaments, from higher education to public institutions -- through special measures and quotas.
- **Recognizing Invisible Work:** There is a need to invest significantly in the care economy and social protection, and redefine Gross Domestic Product to make work in the home visible and counted.
- **Imbibing Gender Equality:** There is a need to remove barriers to women’s full inclusion in the economy, including through access to the labor market, property rights and targeted credit and investments.
Women-oriented government initiatives such as **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**, **Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing (KIRAN) Scheme**, represent steps in the right direction.
- **Checking Violence Against Women:** India should enact an emergency response plan to address violence against women and girls, and follow through with funding, policies, and political will to end this scourge.

Conclusion

It is clear that Covid-19 has impacted women’s employment even more than that for men. Concerted efforts towards ensuring enabling conditions for women to be employed including transport, safety, women’s hostels along with social security provisions for all in the form of

maternity benefits and child care arrangements are required for providing a level playing field for women entering the labour market.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the supply and demand factors that contribute to the low levels of employment among women in India.



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This editorial is based on **“Let SPACs in, with stringent riders”** published in The Economic Times on March 10th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.