



## Women Workforce and Crime Against Women

This editorial is based on [“Crimes Against Women Keep Them out of the Job Market”](#) which was published in the Livemint on 01/12/2021. It talks about how the increase in crime against women is linked to decline of women in labour force participation.

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 elsewhere in the world. However, this is not the case in India.

India’s [Female Labour Force Participation Rate \(FLFPR\)](#) has fallen from 31.2% in 2011-12 to 24.5% in 2018-19.

Among several other factors including domestic responsibilities, societal norms, limited opportunities and lack of supportive infrastructure, a major explanation for women dropping out of the labour force is the fear of sexual violence (broadly categorising crime against women).

### The Plight of Female Labour Force Participation in India

- **Declining FLFPR:** India’s female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) is a puzzling feature of its economy.
  - Though output has more than doubled and the number of working-age women has grown by a quarter over the last two decades, the **number of women in jobs has declined by 10 million**.
- **Data Presented by Gender Parity Indices:** Global indices and gender empowerment measures also paint a dismal picture.
  - The [Global Gender Gap Index, 2021](#) revealed that **India ranks 140<sup>th</sup> of 156** countries, compared to its 98th position in 2006.
  - India’s FLFPR (24.5% in 2018-19) has also been **declining** and is **well below the global average of 45%**.
- **Current Education and Employment Scenario:** India neared [gender equality at the primary level](#) about a decade after the enactment of the [Right to Education Act, 2009](#). Between 2011 and 2019, there has been an increase in the rate of women enrolling in [higher education](#).
  - With more women pursuing higher education, a larger number of women is also expected to enter the job market. However, the actual situation is contradictory.
  - India’s FLFPR has suffered since the start of the 2000s; the unemployment rate of women in the country has rapidly been increasing.
  - **Notwithstanding the higher number of women being educated, they are less likely to join the workforce.**
- **Factors Impeding Women’s Labour Market Choices:** Evidence shows strong correlations between a declining FLFPR and barriers that impede women’s labour-market choices. These barriers include:
  - **Domestic responsibilities** and the burden of unpaid care
  - Occupational segregation and **limited opportunities to enter non-traditional sectors**

- **Inadequate supportive infrastructure** such as creches or piped water and cooking fuel
- **Lack of safety** and mobility options
- The interplay of **social norms** and identities
- **Crimes against women and girls (CaW&G)**, it is arguably the most prevalent barrier to women's equal participation in and contribution to society.

## Crime Against Women Affecting FLFPR

- **An NCRB Report based Study:** A study analysed data from [Crime in India](#) published by the [National Crime Records Bureau \(NCRB\)](#) and assessed crimes that deter women from stepping out to work and raise perceptions of lack of safety.
  - It found out that while the all-India **FLFPR saw an 8 percentage-point decline**, the rate of **CaW&G more than tripled** to 57.9% between 2011-17.
  - The rates of **K&A (Kidnapping and Abduction)** and sexual harassment **increased by more than three times**, and the rates of rape and molestation about doubled.
- **FLFPR Inversely Proportional to Rise in CaW&G:** The same study found that there is a **negative correlation** between the **FLFPR and rate of CaW&G** and the FLFPR and K&A rate.
  - The two can be considered a strong factor that can influence women's willingness and ability to step out for work.
    - It **discourages women** from participating in the workforce.
  - This **strengthens the hypothesis** that CaW&G leads to the **regressive societal norm** of why women should not step out of their homes.
- **State Related Data on FLFPR and CaW&G:** The states of Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Chhattisgarh and Sikkim **maintain a high FLFPR against a lower rate of crime** in comparison with other states and Union territories.
  - The states which had the lowest FLFPR, Bihar, Delhi, Assam and Tripura, also had among the highest crime rates.
    - **Bihar's rate of CaW&G approximately tripled while FLFPR nearly halved** in the time period of 2011-17. It had the lowest FLFPR in India.
    - **Tripura also saw the biggest decline (by 24% points) in FLFPR along with a rise in CaW&G** by 51% (in 2017).
    - **Delhi's rate of CaW&G rose** by more than four times from 31% to 133% as its **FLFPR declined marginally**.
    - In **Assam**, the **rate of CaW&G quadrupled and its FLFPR declined**.

## Way Forward

- **The SAFETY Approach:** While violence against women and girls is one among several barriers that restrict their mobility and reduces the likelihood of their labour force participation, a **comprehensive mechanism** is needed **that involves the state, institutions, communities and households** to address this challenge.
  - Adopting a **'SAFETY'** framework that focuses on **Services, Attitudes, Focus** on community, **Empowerment** of women, **Transport** and other infrastructure, and Youth interventions can be a **critical element in framing policies** and interventions to stop crimes against women and girls.
- **Breaking the Restrictive Societal Norms of Keeping Women Indoors:** The public focus on external violence is not only misplaced in the context of women's employment, but the consequent push to keep women indoors also completely masks the fact that the bulk of violence against women is perpetrated by those known to them — husband, partner, family, friends.
  - Keeping women locked indoors is absolutely the wrong policy for multiple reasons; most of all it **fails in its stated objective, i.e. to protect them from violence**.
  - Staying indoors is not what the women need, but a **better policy approach and access to job opportunities and self-reliance** is required to keep them safe inside and outside the house.
- **Realising the Significance of Women Participation:** Achieving gender equality could annually add \$770 billion to India's GDP by 2025. This opportunity predominantly hinges on women participating in the labour force in greater numbers.
  - The [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#) estimates that **India's GDP would be 27% greater if women participated in economic activities** in numbers equal to those of

- men.
- There are no quick fixes to addressing gender inequality; this requires a **substantial transformation of gender norms in India.**

## Conclusion

Increase in the number of women in higher education does not automatically imply an increase in the female labour force participation. Restrictive societal norms, lack of opportunities and the fear of becoming victims of sexual crimes are still major hurdles in their path to become an active participant in the country's economy. **Education and economic independence are the only solution for women's empowerment.**

### ***Drishti Mains Question***

Discuss the factors that impede female labour force participation rate and suggest the measures that can be taken to overcome the same.

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