

The Labour Market Behaviour of Working-Age Women in Surat City

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Abstract: Female labour force participation has always been associated with the socioeconomic development of a country. India being one of the most progressive economies of recent times, it is important to understand gender parity in the workforce of the country and its implications, especially for the strata of highly educated individuals. Though many studies examine female labour force participation in India, the need for domestic study is recommended considering the unique socio-economic fabric of that place. Surat being one of the major economic hubs of western India, understanding labour market behaviour of highly educated working-age women in this city brings fresh prospective to the labour market potential for the future economic progress of the city. This study examines the labour market behaviour of highly educated working-age women from Surat city with reference to social, economic, academic, and infrastructural factors. The present study being descriptive in nature, data were collected from 796 female respondents, working-age women (16–59 years) from Surat city. Data were collected through a digital survey from women who have received a graduation, master, or more than a master degree from Surat city. Though the women respondents included in this study had a high education level, 34.6% of highly educated women are still not working. In social factors, gaining financial independence (55%) turned out to be one of the major driving forces for being a part of labour force; in financial factors, having financial independence (55%) and the responsibility to run a family (24.3%) turned out to be major reasons to work. 63.2% of respondents recommended the need for a more practical-oriented course structure for higher education degrees. 16.8% of respondents are not satisfied with the infrastructure facilities available at the workplace. Though it is difficult to alter the socio-economic fabric of the place, offering relatively equal pay, female-friendly HR policies, and appropriate infrastructural facilities can encourage highly educated females to be a part of the labour force.

Keywords: Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP), working age, labour force, Indian labour force

Introduction

Female labour force participation can be considered as the source of inclusive growth and wellbeing (Sorsa, et al., 2015) for any country. Many studies discussed the U-shape relationship between per capita GDP and female labour force participation in different types of economies, such as low-income, lower middle income, upper middle income, and high-income economies (Boserup (1970), Goldin, (1994), Mammen, (2000)) as shown in Figure 1. This U-shape relation indicated high female labour force participation in low-income countries with a relatively low effect on GDP; for middle-income countries, as men get highly paid work, female labour force participation declines, and in high-income countries, female labour force participation is high with a high impact on GDP.

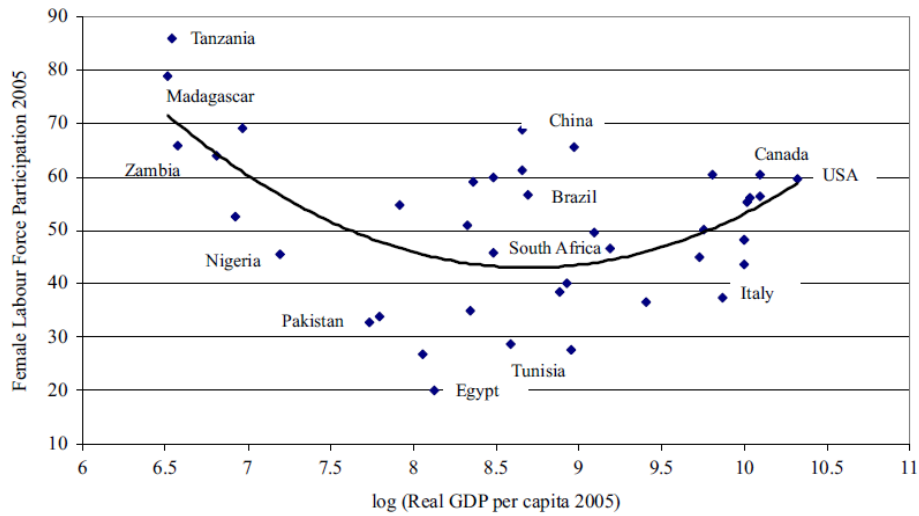
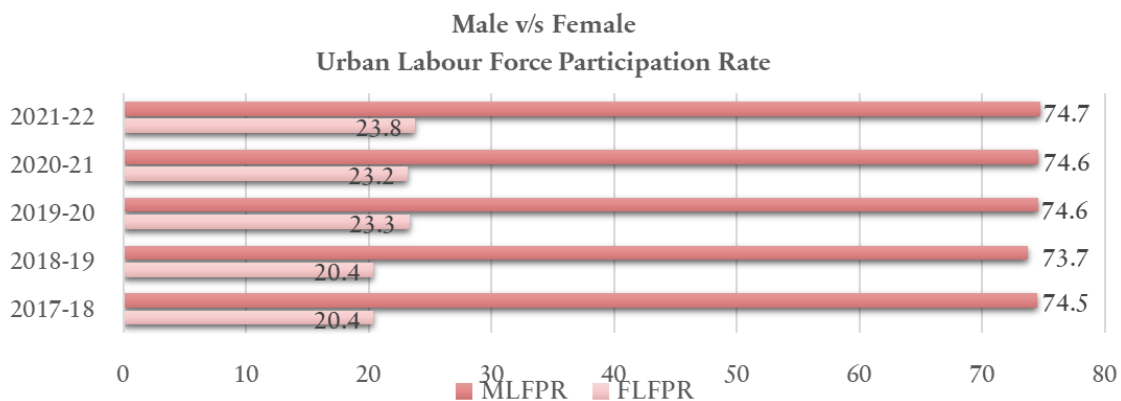


Figure 1: Relationship between FLFP and GDP of different countries (from: Misbah Tanveer Choudhry, 2018)

Verick, (2014) explains the importance of women’s labour force participation with reference to the demand and supply side. More female labour supply leads to faster economic growth or development of any economy, which can lead to improvements in women’s capabilities, which enable them to work outside the home. Due to this two-way relationship, we can say that women’s labour force participation can contribute to the economic growth of a country. Consequently, it is important for policymakers to monitor female labour force participation and understand it in more detail. As mentioned in Industry, (2021) report which focuses on the post-COVID landscape of talent demand and supply in India, women are more employable in India than men. Among employable talent in India, 41.25% of women were found employable, while 38.91% of men are employable. While women consist of 36% of the total workforce and men consist of 64% of the total workforce, this statistic indicates India’s women as the biggest resource pool in the coming years. It is quite evident from the Periodic Labour Force Survey Annual Report of India that there is a huge gap between the labour force participation of male v/s female as well as between rural v/s urban females, as shown in Figure 2. This substantial gap in labour force participation indicates the high untapped potential of the Indian labour market.



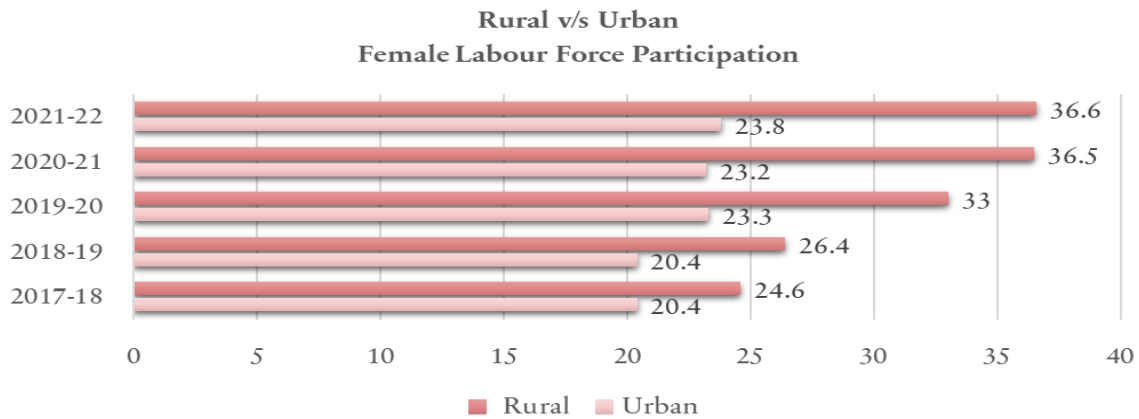


Figure 2: Comparison between Male vs. Female Labour Force Participation and Rural vs. Urban Female Labour Force Participation (Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey Annual Report, India)

This study aimed at understanding FLFP in Surat city with special reference to highly educated women. Surat is one of the largest urban centres in the western part of India, in the state of Gujarat. It has very well-established diamond and textile industries, which work mainly in an unorganised format. Though males constitute 57% and females constitute 43% of Surat’s population, female labour force participation is significantly low, at 15.3%. This substantially low FLFP provided an inclination to probe further to understand the labour market behaviour of highly educated women in Surat city.

Review of Literature

Many studies have been done to understand FLFP across the globe, in India, and specifically in Surat city. Eckstein & Lifshitz (2011) used a dynamic model to understand FLFP and found that education level leads to a 33% increase in female employment and a narrow wage gap leads to a 20% increase in female labour supply. About 40% of the female labour supply remains unexplained due to household characteristics, which can be examined empirically. The author also found that a decline in fertility and an increase in divorce rates account for a very small share of the increase in female employment rates. Elhorst, (2009) identified demand and supply of labour in the market and wage-setting factors as major determinants of regional unemployment based on data from the US, Canada, and Europe.

Many researchers have worked to understand the FLFP pattern in India. Borkar, (2016) identified social norms, level of education, gender discriminatory practices, and policy measures as factors causing low FLFP in India. A UNDP report by Menon, Tomy, & Kumar explored the effectiveness of government policies to improve FLFP. Researchers observed that different policy-based approaches to improving FLFP, such as educational scholarships, reservations, the creation of self-help groups, and capacity building through skill training programmes, have operational deficiencies such as low budgetary allocation to support services such as travel, lodging, and maternity benefits, etc. In addition to that, deep-rooted social norms have constrained the effective implementation of these policies. As explained by Chaudhary & Verick, (2014) major barriers for women to enter the labour market are lack of skill, limited mobility and safety issues, access to employment, choice of work,

working conditions, employment security, wage parity, discrimination, and balancing professional and personal duties. Researchers also recognised the underrepresentation of females working in unorganised sectors who are prone to work exploitation. Sudarshan & Bhattacharya, (2009) identified major factors that contribute positively to the FLFP in Delhi, such as higher education, a reduction in time spent in domestic work, and safety in public transport. As explained by Gandhi & Unni, (2001) high level of wage discrimination between men and women in the urban labour market is one of the leading reasons for low FLFP in urban centres in India. The author also emphasised encouraging women's education beyond the middle school level since each extra year of schooling raises women's wages by about 10%. Kumar & Kao, (2021) tried to understand FLFP through causal mechanisms and found that a husband's education and the number of children are important mediators for FLFP in India.

Studies conducted in Surat help to understand the local labour market and the trend of FLFP in the city. Desai, (2020) conducted a study to understand the condition of female workers in the unorganised sector of Surat city. As the author examined, more than 60% of Surat's population is migrant, and a very large proportion of them earn their livelihoods in the unorganised sector, and a very large proportion of women workers are engaged in home-based work. Though women working in unorganised sectors of Surat city face multiple issues such as exploitation, oppression, and sexploitation, they experience liberation from social constrictions in terms of individuality.

Though numerous studies are done to understand factors affecting FLFP at the global and national levels, the need for local studies is realized to understand the domestic labour market. In the case of Surat city, no study has been found that emphasizes the labour market behaviour of highly educated women in Surat city. Consequently, this study focuses on examining factors affecting the participation or non-participation of highly educated women in the labour force in Surat city.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study is designed to understand the FLFP of highly educated women in Surat City with reference to the following objectives:

- Examining socio-economic factors behind female participation/ non-participation in the labour force
- Examining academic factors behind female participation/ non-participation in the labour force
- Examining the infrastructural factors of Surat city behind female participation/ non-participation in the labour force

Data were collected based on factors listed in the objectives, such as socio-economic, academic, and infrastructural factors that may affect the FLFP of Surat city, with special reference to highly educated women. Data were collected from women based in Surat, having an age of 15 years or more and having studied till undergraduate level or more. Primary data were collected through a digital survey over the span of six months, and 796 responses were recorded. Data analysis was performed based on valid responses for each variable.

Table 1 represents demographic information about respondents, which can help to understand the data well. Based on the descriptive statistics presented in Table 1, we can observe that the average age of respondents is 27.23 years, with a relatively skewed distribution. The majority of the respondents (71.3%) hold master's degrees, and the most prominent stream of education is commerce (58.2%). The majority of the respondents (44.2%) are working, 34.6% are not working, and 19.4% are still studying. The majority of the respondents (50.8%) are working in the private sector, followed by self-

employed (18.3%) respondents. Based on social parameters, 55% of respondents are unmarried, and the majority of respondents (53%) are staying in nuclear families.

Table 1: Demographic Statistics

Variable	Summary	Variable	Summary
Age	27.23 (Mean)	Type of Work	
Level of Education		Government job	84 (17%)
Graduation	108 (14%)	Private job	251 (50.8%)
Masters	552 (71.3%)	Self employed	90 (18.3%)
More than Masters	114 (14.3%)	Other	69 (14%)
Stream of Education		Marital Status	
Science	160 (20.4%)	Married	339 (43.5%)
Commerce	456 (58.2%)	Unmarried	429 (55%)
Arts	138 (17.3%)	Separated	5 (0.6%)
Any other	30 (3.8%)	Other	7 (0.9%)
Current Working Status		Type of Family	
Studying	151 (19.4%)	Joint	366 (47.2%)
Not Working	270 (34.6%)	Nuclear	409 (53%)
Working	345 (44.2%)		
Other	14 (1.8%)		

To examine the effect of different socio-economic factors on the working status of women, a chi-square measure of association was used. Table 2 shows the relationship between the working status of women with various socio-economic variables.

From Table 2, it is evident that there is no significant association between the working status of women, that is, whether she is working or not, and their marital status. However, a significant association is found between the working status of women and family type, that is, whether she is staying in a joint or nuclear family. From Figure 2, we can observe that if women are staying in joint families, then that increases the possibility of unemployment by 10% compared to women staying in nuclear families. Not only that, a higher percentage of women from nuclear families are working compared to those from joint families.

Table 2: Association between working status of women with socio-economic parameters

Variable-1	Variable-2	Chi-Square Value	P-Value	Result
Working Status	Marital status	0.154	0.694 >0.05	No association
Working status	Family type	6.505	0.011 < 0.05	Association
Working status	Level of Education	13.219	0.01 <0.05	Association
Working status	Family income	8.457	0.015 <0.05	Association

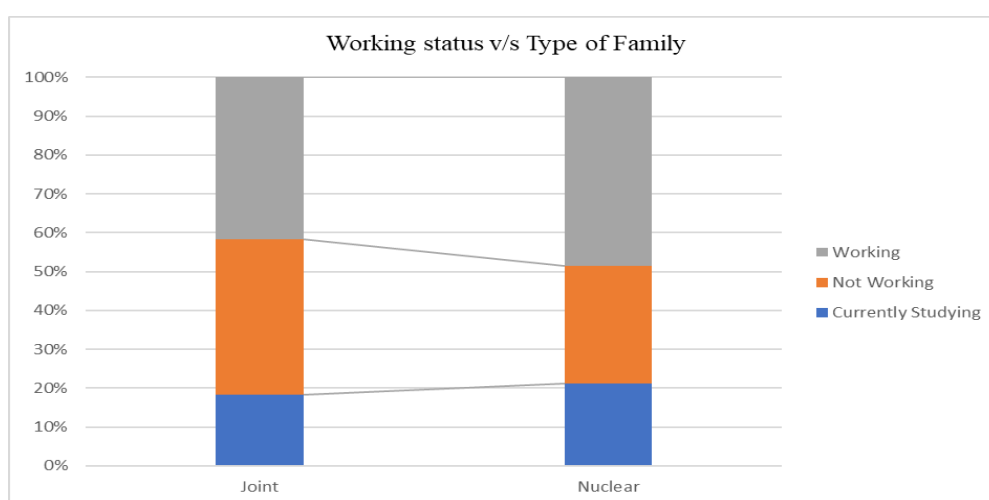


Figure 2: Percentage distribution of the working status of women vs. type of family

Table 3 shows that the majority of women aspire to work to gain financial independence (55%), followed by to keep themselves active (48.3%). 24.3% of women are working to run their families, and 18.5% are working to gain social status. The majority of the women (46%) who are working to run their families belong to the group of women whose monthly family income is less than 50,000.

Table -3: Multi-response frequency table listing reasons for women to be a part of the labour force

	Reasons of Working		
	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
To run family	120	16.7%	24.3%
To keep myself active	238	33.1%	48.3%
To gain social status	91	12.6%	18.5%
To have financial independence	271	37.6%	55.0%
Total	720	100.0%	146.0%

As shown in Table 2, there is a significant association between working status and level of education. Figure 3 indicates that the percentage of respondents who are not working is the highest (48.3%) for master degree holders. As shown in Table 4, the majority of women are not working due to kids and family responsibilities (39.9%), followed by many who are still searching for an appropriate job (27.7%), studies are going on (21%), there is no need to work (18.1%), and the workplace is far from home (5%).

Also, from Table 5, we can observe that 85.8% of respondents believe that their education has provided them with enough skills required in the job market, whereas 13.3% of respondents don't believe that education has equipped them with the required skills in the job market. Table 5 indicates improvements in the contemporary education system suggested by respondents. 63.2% of respondents recommended that the education system should be more practical-oriented; 46.4% suggested that there should be the possibility of earning while learning; 35.1% suggested that internships should be incorporated; and 3.9% recommended the inclusion of subjects related to finance management in the study course.

Table -4: Multi-response frequency table listing reasons for women not to be a part of the labour force

Reasons of Not working	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
	Family and kids' responsibility	95	
Working female is taboo in my community	9	3.3%	3.8%
I do not have any need to work	43	15.6%	18.1%
I am still searching for appropriate work	66	24.0%	27.7%
Studies going on	50	18.2%	21.0%
Workplace is far from my home	12	4.4%	5.0%
Total	275	100.0%	115.5%

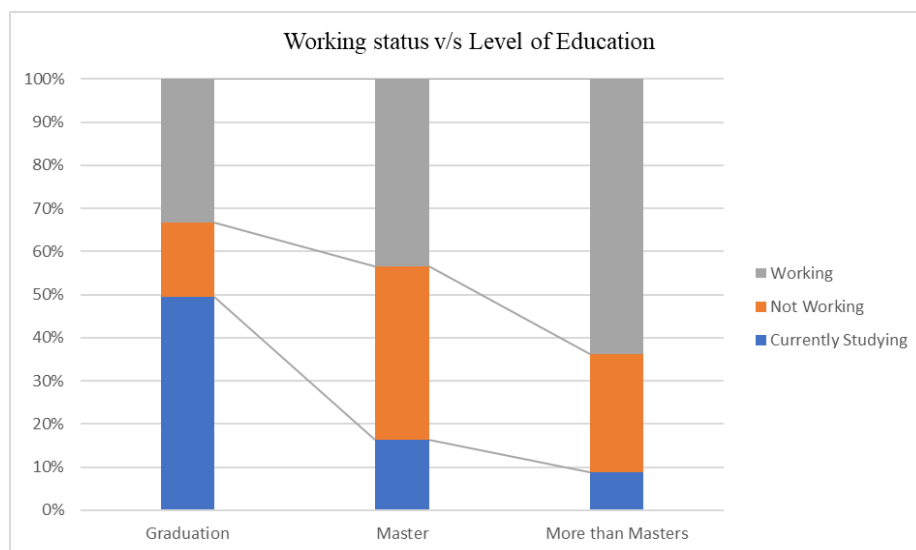


Figure 3: Percentage distribution of working status of women v/s level of education

Table 5: Multi response frequency table listing expectations form education system

	Expectation from Education Frequencies		Percent of Cases
	Responses		
	N	Percent	
Should be more practical oriented	373	42.5%	63.2%
Should incorporate internship	207	23.6%	35.1%
should have possibility of earning with learning	274	31.2%	46.4%
Education should include subjects relating to finance management	23	2.6%	3.9%
Total	877	100.0%	148.6%

Conclusion

FLFP for highly educated women in Surat city is studied in this paper with reference to socio-economic, academic, and infrastructural factors. It has been observed from the data that, though the marital status of women is not significantly related to their working status, the type of family and the monthly income of the family have a significant impact on the working status of women. Women from joint families with relatively low monthly income are more likely to be a part of the workforce compared to women staying in nuclear families with relatively moderate to high monthly income. Kids and family responsibility turn out to be one of the major barriers for women to be a part of the workforce, followed by not getting an appropriate job. With reference to academic factors, women holding master's degrees have the highest percentage of non-working respondents, followed by bachelor's degree holders. The majority of women holding master degrees are in search of appropriate jobs, indicating an expectation of a conducive working environment based on their academic credentials. The majority of the respondents who hold bachelor degrees are ready to work if they get a good financial return, which indicates the flexibility of this group in the working environment. A group of women with more than a master's degree has the highest percentage of working women, which indicates they are in a good position in the job market. Many recommendations for infrastructural factors have been observed in open-ended questions. Though the majority of the respondents feel their workplace is at a manageable distance from home, they recommended the facility of organisational transport for an easy commute, the availability of a daycare centre at the workplace, and the availability of a girl's common room at the workplace. Working environment and peer support are the prominent satisfying factors of their current job environment, while wages, increment policy, and flexible working hours are identified as the major factors that can be improved to increase FLFP in the domestic job market.

Acknowledgement

This work is funded by the research grant of Vanita Vishram, Surat, Gujarat, India.

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