
Shahid Siddiqui*

Representation of Woman in National Labour Force

ABSTRACT

Women in Pakistan, like many other countries of the world, are discriminated against and poorly represented in different walks of life (Siddiqui, 2013). The economic exclusion is associated with social and cultural deprivations. In South Asian countries the economic dependence of women before and after their marital status generally leads to their social exploitation. Similarly, the socio-cultural norms in South Asian societies, at times, negatively impact the women representation in the national work force. Traditionally in the South Asian society the roles were clearly assigned on gender basis where the women were confined to their homes and men were dubbed as bread earners. This paper aims at critically analyzing the representation of women in National labour force largely based on the data given in Pakistan Labour Force and exploring the factors responsible for the relatively poor visibility of women in the labour force which ultimately leads to their social and cultural disempowerment. The paper then discusses ways to facilitate women for enhanced representation in the national labour force.

Keywords: women, labour force, gender gap, wage gap, Pakistan economy

* Professor and Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Media Studies, Art and Design, Lahore School of Economics (LSE), Lahore.

Introduction

Female participation in national labour force is considered important for national development. This participation varies from country to country. At global level the highest Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP) is 83% in Solomon Islands and the lowest FLFP is 6% in Yemen. This vast difference suggests that how gender representation varies from region to region and country to country. According to World Bank Open Data (2022) in South Asia, highest FLFP is in Nepal (79%) whereas the lowest is 15% in Afghanistan. In Pakistan the FLFP is 21%. The spread of FLFP in South Asian countries can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1
Female Labour Force Participation in %

Afghanistan	15
Bangladesh	35
Bhutan	52
India	19
Maldives	34
Nepal	79
Pakistan	21
Sri Lanka	31

Source: World Bank Open Data (2022)

Female Labour Force Participation in Pakistan

In Pakistan the percentage of women in the total population is about 50% but their visibility in the national labour force is far less. Before we laborate on the issue of relatively less visibility of women in the National labour force it is important to understand the term *labour force*. According to the World Bank, Meta Data Glossary (2022):

The labor force is the supply of labor available for producing goods and services in an economy. It includes people who are currently employed and people who are unemployed but seeking work as well as first-time job-seekers. Not everyone who works is included, however. Unpaid workers, family workers, and students are often omitted.

The current status of National labour force reflected in the table 2 suggests that the labour force in Pakistan increased from 68.75 million in 2018-19 to 71.76 million in 2020-21. This shows raise of 1.51 million per

annum. The volume of employed persons also increased (3.22 million) from 64.03 million in 2018-19 to 67.25 million in 2020-21. These figures suggest that 1.61 million people are added in labour force per annum. The volume of unemployed persons decreases by 0.20 million from 4.71 million in 2018-19 to 4.51 million in 2020-21.

Table 2
Labour Force in Million

Year	Labour Force	Employed	Unemployed
2018-19	68.75	64.04	4.71
2020-21	71.76	67.25	4.51

Source: Labour Force Survey 2020-2021 (GOP, 2022)

According to the Labour Survey of Pakistan 2020-2021 (GOP, 2022) the total Refined Activity Rate participation rate in Labour Force is 44.9%. The Male participation is 67.9% and Female participation is only 21.3%. It is important to note that in 2018-19 the female participation was 21.5% and in 2020-21 the participation, instead of going up, slightly dropped to 21.3%.

Labour Force Participation in Provinces

The difference in labour participation in terms of gender, across the provinces, can be observed in Table 3. According to the figures in 2020-2021 in KP total participation is 39.5%. The male participation is 63.2 % whereas the female participation is 15.8%. In Punjab total participation in Labour force is 47.4% and female participation is 26.3%. In Sindh total participation in Labour Force is 43.8%. The male participation is 70.2 % whereas the female participation is 15.2%. In Balochistan total participation is 40.4%. The male participation is 64.3% and the female participation is 11.9%.

Table 3
Refined Activity (Participation) Rates - Pakistan and Provinces (%)

Province/Area	2018-19			2020-21		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Pakistan	44.8	67.7	21.5	44.9	67.9	21.3
KP	38.5	63.0	15.3	39.5	63.2	15.8
Punjab	47.4	69.1	26.3	47.4	68.6	26.3
Sindh	43.3	68.5	15.0	43.8	70.2	15.2
Balochistan	40.8	62.8	12.8	40.4	64.3	11.9

Labour Force Participation and Job Sectors

There are three major sectors for employment including Industry, Agriculture, and Services. According to Pakistan Labour Force Survey (2022), in Industry, male employment ratio is 25.7% whereas female employment ratio is only 16.6%. In Service sector, male employment ratio is 44.4% and female ratio is 17.3%. Agriculture is the only sector where women employment 66.1% is higher than male employment (29.6%). As the figures reflected in Table 4 suggest majority of women work in agriculture where informal and mostly low paid jobs are available.

On the contrary, there is far less representation of women in the industry and trade.

Table 4
Selected key indicators of the labour market -Pakistan (%)

Indicators	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2017-18
Share of industry in total EMP									
Both sexes	21.4	20.6	21.0	21.4	21.8	22.8	22.9	23.2	24.0
Male	23.5	22.7	23.1	24.1	24.6	26.2	25.8	25.7	26.0
Female	12.6	12.2	12.7	11.6	11.5	11.3	13.1	14.6	16.6
Share of agriculture in total EMP									
Both sexes	42.0	42.8	43.3	43.4	43.5	42.2	42.2	41.0	37.4
Male	35.0	35.2	35.7	35.2	34.9	33.1	33.2	32.0	29.6
Female	71.4	73.8	72.7	73.9	74.2	74.9	72.9	71.8	66.1
Share of services in total EMP									
Both sexes	36.6	36.6	35.7	35.2	34.7	35.0	34.9	35.8	38.6
Male	41.5	42.2	41.2	40.7	40.5	40.7	41.0	42.3	44.4
Female	16.0	13.9	14.6	14.5	14.2	13.8	14.0	13.6	17.3

The Unemployment Scenario in Pakistan

A related aspect of labour force is the unemployment situation in the country. It is important to study the difference in unemployment rate on the bases of gender and geographical location. On the whole, comparing the figures of 2018-19 (6.9%) and 2020-21 (6.3%), we observe that there is a slight decrease in the unemployment rate. There is a significant difference in unemployment rate on the basis of gender. In 2018-19 as compared with 5.9% (male) unemployment rate the female unemployment rate was 10%. Similarly, in 2020-21 as the total unemployment rate was 6.3%, the male unemployment rate was 5.5% whereas the female unemployment rate was 8.9%. These figures suggest that the female unemployment was twice as compared to the male unemployment. Further analysis of female participation on the basis of geographical location (Table 5) suggests that out of 8.9% female unemployment rate 7.4% women were unemployed in rural areas and 16.4% in Urban areas. A deeper analysis suggests that since a large number of women are doing informal jobs, which are usually low paid, women, instead of men, take up these jobs in the absence of suitable alternative jobs.

Table 5
Unemployment Rates - By Area and Sex

Area/Sex	2018-19			2020-21		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Pakistan	6.9	5.9	10.0	6.3	5.5	8.9
Rural	6.4	5.5	8.5	5.8	5.1	7.4
Urban	7.9	6.5	17.1	7.3	6.0	16.4

Factors Restraining Female Participation in Labour Force

There are multiple restraining factors including educational, social, and cultural factors. Before analyzing the factors responsible for restraining women participation in labour force we need to realise that gender construction, in terms of roles, expectations and opportunities, takes place through social institutions including, family, educational institutions, and media. These social institutions help in perpetuating the gendered stereotypes constructed by patriarchal mindset. The reduced visibility of women in the labour force goes back to the restricted access to educational

institutions in the past. The female literacy rate has improved in the past years but this improvement is not reflected properly in the participation of women in the National Labour force.

Educational Gap on the Basis of Gender

Let us look at the difference in the literacy rates of male and female students in Pakistan as educational qualifications are an important factor in economic independence. As discussed in (Siddiqui, 2022), there is a wide difference between male and female literacy rates. At National level, the literacy rate (aged 15-24 years) is 72% (Male 79% and Female 64%). This disparity between male and female literacy rate at provincial level in Table 6.

Table 6
Gender-Wise Youth Literacy Rates (15–24 Years) (in %) at Provincial level

Province/ Gender	Male	Female	Total
Pakistan	79	64	72
Punjab	82	75	79
Sindh	73	55	64
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Excluding Merged Areas	88	56	72
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Including Merged Areas	88	50	69
Balochistan	60	32	47

Source: GoP (2019)

In adult literacy category too, we see disparity on the basis of gender (Siddiqui, 2022). The Adult National literacy rate (Age 15 year and older) is 56% (Male 69% and Female 45%). Gender based disparity in adult literacy persists in all the provinces. In Punjab the literacy rate is 61% (Male 70% and Female 53%), in Sindh 55% (Male 68% and Female 42%); Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Excluding Merged areas 52% (Male: 72% and Female: 34%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Including Merged areas 49% (Male 71% and Female 30%), and Balochistan 37% (Male 52% and Female 21%).

Table 7**Gender-wise Adult Literacy Rates in percentage (Age 15 Years and Older)**

Province/ Gender	Male%	Female%	Total%
Pakistan	69	45	56
Punjab	70	53	61
Sindh	68	42	55
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Excluding Merged Areas	72	34	52
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Including Merged Areas	71	30	49
Balochistan	52	21	37

Source: GoP (2019)

Similarly, the net enrollment ratio at Primary level (Class 1-5 & Age 6-10) at National level in 2018-19 is 66% (Male: 68% and Female: 63%). According to Siddiqui (2022), the difference between male and female NER is getting small which is a good sign. In case of provinces (Table 8) there is no difference between Male and Female NER in Punjab as in both the case the rate is 73% followed by Sindh 58% (Male: 64% and Female: 52%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, excluding merged areas 66% (Male: 72% and Female: 61%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including merged areas 64% (Male: 70% and Female: 57%) and Balochistan 40% (Male: 45% and Female: 35%).

Table 8**Gender-wise NER at Primary Level (Class 1–5 & Age 6–10)**

Province/ Gender	Male NER %	Female NER %	Total NER %
Pakistan	68	63	66
Punjab	73	73	73
Sindh	64	52	58
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Excluding Merged Areas	72	61	66
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Including Merged Areas	70	57	64
Balochistan	45	35	40

Source: GoP (2019)

As discussed by Siddiqui (2022) The National Enrollment rate (Class 6-8 & Age 11-13) in 2018-2019 is 38% (Male 40% and Female 36%). At provincial level Punjab the NER (Table 9) at middle level (Class 6-8 & Age 11-13) is 45% followed by Sindh 30% (Male 33% and Female 26%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Excluding Merged Areas 39% (Male 45% and Female 32%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Including Merged Areas 36% (Male 42% and Female 28%) and Balochistan 20% (Male 25% and Female 15%).

Table 9: NER at Middle Level (Class 6-8 & Age 11–13)

Province/ Gender	Male NER %	Female NER %	Total NER %
Pakistan	40	36	38
Punjab	44	45	45
Sindh	33	26	30
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Excluding Merged Areas	45	32	39
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Including Merged Areas	42	28	36
Balochistan	25	15	20

Source: GoP (2019)

The National Enrollment Rate at Matric level (Class 9-10 & Age 14-15) at National level in 2018-2019 is 27 % (Male 29% and Female 26%). At provincial level NER (Table 10) in Punjab is 33% (Male 33% and Female 33%) followed by Sindh 21% (Male 23% and Female 20%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, excluding merged Areas 25 % (Male 30% and Female 19%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including merged Areas 23 % (Male 30% and Female 16%) and Balochistan 12% (Male 15% and Female 9%). It is important to note that except the Province of Punjab, disparity between male and Female exists in NER.

Table 10: Gender-wise NER at Matric Level (Class 9-10 & Age 14-15)

Province/ Gender	Male	Female	Total
Pakistan	29	26	27
Punjab	33	33	33
Sindh	23	20	21
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Excluding Merged Areas	30	19	25
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Including Merged Areas	30	16	23
Balochistan	15	9	12

Source: GoP (2019)

As discussed above difference on gender basis is perpetuated at different educational levels. This educational difference at all levels handicaps females in terms of economic independence.

Limited Job Opportunities for Women

It is important to note that in Pakistan the girls are reluctant to opt for certain academic programmes and disciplines. For instance, relatively less girls opt for the disciplines of engineering and construction. Also girls are not encouraged to pursue their education as the desired educational institutions are sometimes situated in other cities. Similarly, many bright girls are not permitted by their parents to go to overseas universities as it is not considered safe by parents to send their daughters away without supervision. These factors affect their job prospects as well. As it comes to the job placement, women are handicapped as they have relatively limited job options. Most of them join jobs such as Teachers, nurses, secretaries, or librarians because of social reasons. Another reason of joining such professions is to the flexible timing which let them have time to take care of their family. Also in Pakistani society certain jobs are not considered 'appropriate' for women for social and religious reasons. For instance, women's visibility in Army, Air force, and Navy, engineering and construction field is relatively very low.

According to Naqvi and Shahnaz (2002), around 10% married women are not autonomous with regards to the decision of working, and often husbands or family patriarchs make this decision for them. Thus married women are less likely to work compared to divorced or widowed women.

Social Factors and Female Participation

In Pakistan a number of social factors tend to restrain women participation in the national labour force. A major factor is the common belief in the conservative stereotype that women are there to make home and men should go out to earn money. This dichotomy of roles is so entrenched in the society that in some families it is still not considered appropriate for women to do jobs. At times parents of girls give best possible education to their daughters and have no issues with their jobs but after marriage their in-laws do not permit them to take up jobs. At times they do not get permission from their families especially after their marriages. Mostly in Pakistan there is joint family system, and a wife has to consider the wishes of all family members of the husband. Thus a number of girls who manage to get good education fail to get permission by their parents or by their in-laws to do jobs. Consequently, in some cases, girls with good professional degrees, like MBBS, do not take up jobs or do medical practice.

Thus a good resource remains untapped in the process of national development. Early marriage is another major factor that restrains women to complete their education and take active part in labour force. In married life child rearing poses a genuine challenge for women's participation in active jobs. For working women, there is double pressure in Pakistan. On the one hand there are professional demands from office and on the other hand there are expectations at home. A woman after doing the day job when comes back home has to feed her husband and children and other family members of the family if living in a joint family. Thus there is hardly any quality time left for her own. Working women are overall more time-poor than non-working women, primarily because household maintenance and care work is not shared by spouse or male family members despite those women working a full-time job. Saqib & Arif (2021:39) study on time poverty refers to:

a vast difference between males and females in the incidence of poverty in all three categories of employment status: "employees", "self-employed" and "helpers".

They observe that on average, according to Time Use Survey in Pakistan, employed men spent 34 minutes per day on household and care work compared to 4 hours and 39 minutes spent by employed women. This clearly shows that the male employee just focusses on office work whereas female employee besides office have to give substantial amount of time to family. According to Time Use Survey in Pakistan unemployed women also spent many more hours on unpaid housework compared to unemployed men, resulting in an alarming fivefold time poverty in comparison. These findings of the survey also inform us about the potential reason for the less enrollment of girls as they could do unpaid home chores and could be more useful to the family as compared to getting enrolled in schools. This is also a reason for women for not taking up jobs as the work required in their homes has more benefit than the low paid jobs outside their home.

Women and the Challenges at Workplace

Another genuine constraint for women at some workplaces is the non-availability of day-care facility which restrains them to take up a job or to quit their jobs, as their priority is to take care of their children. At workplace there are at times instances of harassment which make it very difficult for women to work in such environment. In such cases some victims remain at the receiving end and do not share their predicament with anyone as they fear that disclosure may lead social stigma and disrepute. The only other option left for women victims is to quit the job. Saeed (2013) writes in detail her

own experiences of working in a UN organization in Pakistan in a setting where she was harassed on continuous basis by a senior colleague in the office.

As discussed earlier, majority of the women associated with agriculture are mostly situated in rural areas. The use of technology and machines have negative impact on the jobs of women living in rural areas. As a result of digitization's impact on women's workforce participation, more women than men stand to lose from automation (Malik 2019). Overcoming this layoff would require re-skilling and training which are not fully accessible to women across social classes. Increase in visibility of women in workforce is nominal and generally in the manufacturing profession where the jobs are usually contractual. (Kazi, et al. 1991). Thus there are more chances of exploitation of women in contractual jobs. According to the Labour Force Survey, women's percentage in the workforce has fallen from 2015 to 2018 (Malik 2019: 1). This corresponds to a similar decrease in women's workforce in India during the pandemic, most likely because these women had to shift to unpaid care work in the home during lockdown.

According to this report, "in the informal economy, 61.5% of women, while only 17.7% of men were involved in manufacturing" (Malik 2019: 1). The majority proportion of women is stuck in 'survival jobs', that are taken up due to economic crises at home but shorn of the dignity and quality that they deserve. She further observes that women "account for just 9% in the top 1% but almost 90% of wage earners in the bottom 1%" which suggests that majority of women are not in leadership positions.

Another serious issue is the underemployment. According to the Survey the overall underemployment rate for both male and female in Pakistan is 1.5%. The male underemployment rate for is 1.4% and female employment rate is 1.9%. These figures reflect that the women are .5% more underemployed. Similarly, there is gap between the wages of men and women. According to the Pakistan Labour Survey (GOP: 2022) there average monthly income for both the sexes is Rs. 24028. The average monthly male income is Rs.24643 whereas female average monthly income is Rs.20117.

Recommendations

If we look at the female participation in labour force since the inception of Pakistan in 1947, we see that in Pakistan long distance has been travelled in reducing the gender gap in terms of visibility in the national labour force. A more holistic approach is required to bring changes in social, cultural, and educational factors.

- a. In rural parts of Pakistan early marriages are common and there is a serious need to campaign against early marriages and implement the

existing laws to prevent early marriages of girls, allowing them to get higher education and ultimately become part of the national labour force.

- b. There is a need to encourage female education in general and in rural areas in particular, as appropriate educational attainment enhances the chances of economic independence and participation in the labor force. There are more efforts required to enhance opportunities for female education as research tells us that the number of years in school are positively related to economic outcome.
- c. Similarly, there is a need of advocacy for significance and need of jobs for girls. This requires the role of all social institutions to remove the cultural and social stigmas attached to the female participation in national labour force.
- d. There is a need to focus on the living conditions of women in general and specially women living in rural areas where women are victim of poor health conditions, early marriages, and large number of children.
- e. Security and safety of girls are important for their families. It becomes difficult for women to travel to a workplace which is located at a distance. At state level it is important that safe transport facilities should be provided to women to travel to and from their workplaces.
- f. Serious legislation and effective implementation policies are required to discourage sexual harassment at workplace,
- g. Human rights organizations should campaign for the removing the gender pay gap.
- h. The state needs to implement child labour laws properly as this could lead to more jobs for women who are refused jobs to employ small children for less wages.
- i. It is also important to recognize the work of a large number of women who are homebased workers.

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