

WOMEN LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN NON-FARM ACTIVITIES IN KARNATAKA

Tanuja T.J

Research Scholar,
Dept. of Studies and Research in Economics, Tumkur University, Tumakuru

Pallavi Kusugal

Associate Professor,
Department of Economics, University College of Arts, Tumkur University, Tumakuru

ABSTRACT

The female labour force participation rate (LFPR) is a crucial indicator of women's economic empowerment and overall economic inclusiveness. This research paper presents econometric analysis highlighting a significant resurgence in female LFPR across Indian states, especially in rural areas, since 2017-18. There are three broad themes for the empirical analysis: (1) Recent trends in female LFPR, (2) The effects of marital status and parenthood on LFPR, and (3) LFPR variations with age and gender across all regions and states of India.

India has witnessed a substantial rise in female LFPR, particularly in rural areas, from 2017–18 to 2022–23. There have been numerous schemes of the Government, especially targeting rural women over the last ten years. These include Mudra loans, the “Drone Didi” scheme and SHGs mobilised under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana to name a few major initiatives for rural women. There are many other initiatives that have been aligned with the vision of women-led development across India. Our paper measures the final outcome of these initiatives as a cumulative and significant growth in female LFPR across India and in particular in rural areas. Rigorous research, however, is needed to evaluate these programs' impacts and to explore the persistent inter-state and rural-urban disparities in India's female LFPR.

Keywords : Rural Non-Farm; Participation; Rural Women

INTRODUCTION

The female labour force participation rate (LFPR) is essential to women's economic empowerment and is a common metric to gauge the inclusiveness of an overall economy. In his vision for Viksit Bharat in 2047, the Prime Minister has articulated that India's development would be a women-led development, where women would play an instrumental role in India's economic, social, political, and cultural sphere. In light of this, assessing recent trends in the female labour force participation rate across India becomes an imperative exercise to understand ‘how things stand’ on the ground today.

Our rigorous empirical exercise yields clear results which show that there is a major resurgence of female LFPR across all states of India in the last few years. This is particularly driven by significant improvements across rural areas of the country. This is a major developmental phenomenon that needs thorough measuring and documentation. From a policy perspective, it is critical to do this at disaggregated levels (states, regions and rural/urban areas), beyond the all-India changes.

Women's labour force participation (FLFP) in non-farm activities in Karnataka is characterized by a high concentration in informal services, with significant urban-rural disparities and growing participation in self-employment. While the state has a lower overall FLFP rate than the national

average, urban areas show a rising trend in regular salaried jobs, particularly in districts like Bengaluru, Udupi, and Dakshina Kannada.

Key Trends in Non-Farm Sector Participation

- **Urban Dominance:** Urban women in Karnataka are primarily employed in services, with 24% working as legislators, senior officials, and managers, and 16% in professional roles.
- **Rural Non-Farm Shifts:** While 77% of rural women are in agriculture, rural non-farm employment is growing through MGNREGA (2% of female casual labourers) and other informal sectors like petty trade.
- **Employment Type:** In urban areas, there is a rise in regularly salaried women, while rural areas show a high reliance on casual, low-productivity, and low-skill jobs.

District-Level Highlights (Selected Districts)

- **Udupi District:** Shows a significant shift from agriculture, with high growth in female employment in non-agricultural, household, and service occupations (e.g., Udupi taluk saw 74% growth in female employment). Karkala taluk has the highest work participation rate for women in the district.
- **Bengaluru:** Tops the state in absolute numbers of working women, with a high concentration in private sector services.
- **Dakshina Kannada:** Features high female employment in private sector jobs.
- **Ramanagara District:** Shows high involvement of women in dairy co-operative societies (non-farm allied activity).
- **Northern Districts (Belagavi, Bagalkote, Vijayapur):** While agriculture-dominated, Belagavi and Bagalkote show higher female participation due to better irrigation and, in Belagavi, a higher literacy rate.

Key Drivers and Barriers

- **Drivers:** The 'Shakti' scheme, which provides free transportation for women, has improved access to work in urban areas. The 'Koosina Mane' scheme aimed to improve rural women's participation by providing childcare.
- **Barriers:** High burdens of unpaid domestic care work, lack of safety, and a significant gender pay gap (34%–50% for casual workers in 2021-22) hinder higher participation rates.
- **Programs:** The 'Udyogini' scheme supports self-employment and micro-enterprises in the service and trade sectors.

KARNATAKA INDIAN WOMEN'S GREATER WORK PARTICIPATION

Karnataka have consistently shown higher women's LFPR than the all-India average. This trend is also borne out in the Census of India. To compare the Census of India to the NSSO we use a different statistic from LFPR called the WPR (Worker population ratio²). As can be seen, male WPRs are comparable over the two data sources, but women's WPR shows a 5-10 percentage point decline as per the NSSO but hardly any change in the Census for the corresponding years. These discrepancies between the Census and NSSO WPR figures have been observed in earlier years as well and economists find the Census unreliable for measurements of work (Himanshu 2011).

South Indian states show higher work participation among rural women as compared to north Indian states. The literature provides three main explanations for north-south divergences in gender equity, as reflected in work participation rates. First, endogamous marriages in south India are seen to contribute to women's greater autonomy, as opposed to exogamous marriages in the North (Dyson and Moore 1983). The current relevance of this explanation is debated and it is argued that economic factors such as higher wages may have a greater role in contributing to gender equity than cultural factors such as village endogamy or distance from the natal home, due to changing marriage and kinship norms (Rahman and Rao 2004). Second, labour intensive crops requiring female participation, be it paddy, or a range of horticultural crops, have been more prevalent in South India (Kapadia 1995; Mencher and Saradmoni 1982; Niyati 2020; Saradmoni 1991; Solomon and Rao 2018), and third, greater success of state welfare policies in the South create an enabling environment for women's work (Harriss, Jeyaranjan, and Nagaraj 2010).

RISE IN FEMALE LFPR AND AGRARIAN DISTRESS?

The spurt in women's work participation between 1999-2000 and 2004-05 has been attributed to the agrarian crisis that forced women, elderly and children into the workforce (Abraham 2009; Himanshu 2011). Distress induced employment is typically accompanied by higher unemployment rates as not all who seek work are able to acquire work. Agrarian distress has been documented in incidents of farmer suicides during a drought in 2003 in rural Karnataka (Vasavi 2009, 2014). With the Krishnarajasagar canal irrigation scheme going dry from 2000-2003, high yielding varieties of rice requiring intensive watering failed, raising farmers' debt and driving some to suicide (Epstein 2007).

THE GROWING GENDER GAP IN WORK PARTICIPATION

In southern Karnataka, historical accounts reveal that while women from small landowning peasant households were found working on their land during paddy transplanting and harvest and larger landowners cultivated their land with labourers in 1948 (Srinivas 1976), by the 1970s, women had begun to drop out of agriculture. By 2009, canal irrigation had resulted in round-the-year crop production, yet failed to absorb labouring manual workers, particularly women workers (Swaminathan and Das 2017). The advent of canal irrigation with subsequent shifts to commercial crops such as sugarcane and the growing employment of migrant workers for sugarcane harvesting contributed to women's underemployment (Iyer 2017). Longitudinal village studies in the canal and well irrigated region of Mandya district in the 1970s revealed that a shift in the aspirations of better off peasant women who had stopped working on agricultural land (Epstein, 1973), combined with men having achieved a higher status with government jobs, resulted in the shift from brideprice to demands for dowry (Srinivas 1984).

On the other hand in the dry regions, most agricultural operations continued to be handled by women, allowing men to commute and migrate for work in irrigated villages or in the city (Epstein 1973, 2007). This continues to be the case even now (Singh 2019), though differences by caste are visible, with women of dominant castes such as Reddy, Gowda and Kuruba reluctant to work as wage labour owing to a combination of status considerations as well as domestic and care work burdens (Hill 1982:114).

LACK OF DIVERSIFICATION IN KARNATAKA

A sharp reduction in female LFPR in Karnataka from 2009-10 is a consequence of the lack of sectoral shift outside agriculture in the state. This is evident in the Bangalore centric industrialization in Karnataka, the global financial crisis of 2008 had a devastating effect on industrial growth, with Karnataka's industrial growth rate falling from 10.35 % in the years leading up to 2008-09 to 3.14 %

in the following years, a figure below the national average of 6.7 % (Pani 2015). In pockets close to Bengaluru such as Magadi Taluk in Ramanagara district, young women started working in garment factories since the early 2000s (Purushothaman and Patil 2019:168), yet non-farm employment for women in construction, mining, and transport was much less than for men in 2009 (Swaminathan and Das 2017). Contrary to the earlier period in 2004-05 where agrarian distress resulted in increased women's employment, there was a decline in women's employment despite the drought in 2009-10. In the period from 2005-2012 over 1 million jobs were lost in Karnataka. This is in line with economic analyses that have shown that in the period from 2011-12 to 2017-18 job losses have impacted rural Indian women who are typically self-employed or wage labourers educated up to secondary level (Kannan and Raveendran 2019).

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have attempted to explain the temporal shifts in female LFPR observed in the NSSO by piecing together available evidence from village studies in Karnataka. Nonetheless, village studies are instructive in understanding changes in livelihoods more broadly and their effects on gender relations.

Women's participation in the economy results from a combination of factors that play out for the individual, as well as in relationship to other members in the household and community. These are further influenced by regional factors of a geographical nature, historical agrarian relations as well as state policies, including those related to social protection and welfare. A better understanding of the interlinked processes influencing shifts in women's work participation are essential to complement trends in secondary data, but more importantly to understand both progress in wellbeing and gender equality.

REFERENCES

1. Abraham, Rosa, Amit Basole, and Surbhi Kesar. 2021. "Down and Out? The Gendered Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on India's Labour Market." *Economia Politica* (February).
2. Banerjee, Debosree. 2016. *Inequality and Farmer's Suicides in India*.
3. Carswell, Grace and Geert De Neve. 2014a. "MGNREGA in Tamil Nadu: A Story of Success and Transformation?" *Journal of Agrarian Change* 14(4):564-85.
4. Deshpande, Ashwini. 2020. "Early Effects of Lockdown in India: Gender Gaps in Job Losses and Domestic Work." *Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 63(s1):87-90.
5. Epstein, T. Scarlett. 2007. *Back to the Village*. Bangalore.
6. Guérin, Isabelle. 2014. "Juggling with Debt, Social Ties, and Values: The Everyday Use of Microcredit in Rural South India." *Current Anthropology* 55(S9):S40--S50.
7. Harriss-White, Barbara. 2005. "Commercialisation, Commodification and Gender Relations in Post-Harvest Systems for Rice in South Asia." *Economic & Political Weekly* 40(25):2530-42.
8. Iyer, Soundarya. 2017. "Dynamics of Rural Transformation in Karnataka: A View from Three Villages." Manipal University.
9. Jeyaranjan, J. 2011. "Women and Pro-Poor Policies in Rural Tamil Nadu: An Examination of Practices and Responses." *Economic and Political Weekly* 46(43):64-74.
10. Kannan, K. P. and G. Raveendran. 2019. "From Jobless to Job-Loss Growth Gainers and Losers during 2012-18." *Economic and Political Weekly* 54(44):38-44.

11. Kapadia, Karin. 1995. *Siva and Her Sisters: Gender, Caste and Class in Rural South India*. Oxford: Westview Press.
12. Kesar, Surbhi, Rosa Abraham, Rahul Lahoti, Paaritosh Nath, and Amit Basole. 2021. "Pandemic, Informality, and Vulnerability: Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods in India." *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 42(1-2):145-64.
13. Lahoti, Rahul and Hema Swaminathan. 2016. "Economic Development and Women's Labor Force Participation in India." *Feminist Economics* 22(2):168-95.
14. Mencher, Joan P. and K. Saradamoni. 1982. "Muddy Feet, Dirty Hands: Rice Production and Female Agricultural Labour." *Economic & Political Weekly* 17(52):A149-67.
15. Narayanan, Sudha and Upasak Das. 2014. "Women Participation and Rationing in the Employment Guarantee Scheme." *Economic and Political Weekly* 49(46):46-53.
16. Niyati, S. 2020. "Women in the Rice Economy of India: Evidence from Village Studies." Pp. 109-33 in *Women and Work in Rural India*, edited by M. Swaminathan, S. Nagbhusan, and V. K. Ramachandran. New Delhi: Tulika Books.
17. Pani, Narendar. 2015. "Towards a Location-Sensitive Policy for Manufacturing in Karnataka." *Journal of Social and Economic Development*.
18. Rao, Nitya. 2018. "Fertility, Reproduction and Conjugal Loyalty: Renegotiating Gender Relations amongst Dalits in Rural Tamil Nadu." *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 19:1-19.
19. Saradamoni, K. 1991. *Filling the Rice Bowl: Women in Paddy Cultivation*. Hyderabad: Sangam Books.
20. Singh, Chandni. 2019. "Migration as a Driver of Changing Household Structures: Implications for Local Livelihoods and Adaptation." *Migration and Development* 8(3):301-19.
21. Vasavi, A. R. 2009. "Suicides and the Making of India's Agrarian Distress." *South African Review of Sociology* 40(1):124-38.