

Unseen Potential: Skilled Women and Employment Limitations in India

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Abstract

Despite significant improvements in women's educational attainment in India, their participation in the workforce remains disproportionately low. This study investigates the gap between education and employment among skilled women and identifies key factors restricting their workforce participation. The research adopts a descriptive design and is based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire from 80–120 skilled women, supplemented by secondary data from reports and academic studies.

The findings reveal that although a majority of respondents are willing to work, their employment decisions are constrained by family responsibilities, lack of flexible work arrangements, safety concerns, and prevailing societal expectations. Additionally, moderate awareness and limited use of digital job portals further restrict employment opportunities. Organizational rigidities, including strict policies and employment bonds, also act as barriers.

The study concludes that enhancing flexible work opportunities, improving awareness of digital employment platforms, encouraging supportive family structures, and implementing policy-level interventions are essential to increase women's workforce participation and promote inclusive economic growth.

Keywords: Skilled women, workforce participation, employment barriers, gender inequality, India

1. Introduction

Women's participation in higher education in India has increased substantially over the past decade. However, this progress has not translated into equivalent participation in the workforce. According to global estimates, India continues to have a relatively low female labour force participation rate compared to other developing economies.

Skilled women face numerous barriers that hinder their entry into or continuation in employment. These include family responsibilities, inflexible work environments, safety concerns, and deeply rooted societal expectations. Such challenges contribute to the underutilization of human capital, ultimately affecting productivity and economic growth.

This study aims to explore the employment limitations faced by skilled women and analyse the factors influencing their participation in the workforce.

2. Literature Review

Previous research has consistently highlighted structural and social barriers to women's employment:

- International Labour Organization (2023) reports that unpaid care work and lack of flexible employment significantly affect women's labour force participation.

- McKinsey Global Institute (2018), in *The Power of Parity*, states that advancing gender equality could significantly boost global GDP, yet social barriers limit women's participation.
- Stephan Klasen and Janneke Pieters (2015) found that female labour participation in India declined despite economic growth due to social norms and lack of suitable employment opportunities.
- National Sample Survey Office reports indicate that women frequently exit the workforce after marriage or childbirth.
- Urvashi Chatterjee et al. (2018) emphasize safety concerns and mobility restrictions as major barriers, particularly in urban India.

The literature suggests that a combination of economic, social, and institutional factors contribute to the low workforce participation of skilled women.

3. Research Objectives

- To examine the willingness of skilled women to work under supportive working conditions.
- To analyse the awareness and usage of job portals among skilled women.
- To identify reasons for non-employment despite education and employable skills.
- To study the factors responsible for low workforce participation among skilled women.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive research design.

4.2 Data Collection

- Primary Data: Structured questionnaire (Google Forms)
- Secondary Data: Research papers, reports, journals

4.3 Sample Size and Population

80–120 skilled women (graduates/professionals)

4.4 Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling

4.5 Tools for Analysis

- Percentage analysis
- Bar graphs
- Pie charts

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data was analysed using percentage methods and graphical tools.

A significant proportion of respondents expressed willingness to work, particularly under flexible working conditions such as remote or hybrid models. Awareness and usage of job portals such as LinkedIn and Naukri.com were moderate.

Family responsibilities emerged as the most critical barrier to employment. Additionally, safety concerns and lack of flexible work arrangements were identified as major constraints. Organizational rigidity and employment bonds also discouraged participation.

6. Findings

- Majority of skilled women are willing to work under favourable conditions.
- Family responsibilities are the primary barrier.
- Job portal awareness is moderate.
- Rigid organizational policies discourage employment.
- Social expectations influence career decisions.

7. Discussion

The findings align with existing literature, confirming that women's employment is influenced by structural and socio-cultural factors. Flexible work arrangements and supportive environments are essential for improving participation.

8. Conclusion

Skilled women represent a significant yet underutilized workforce segment. Addressing employment barriers is essential for achieving gender equality and economic development.

9. Suggestions and Recommendations

- Provide flexible work arrangements (WFH, hybrid)
- Increase awareness of job platforms
- Promote women employment policies
- Avoid rigid employment bonds
- Encourage family support

10. Limitations of the Study

- Limited sample size
- Convenience sampling
- Possibility of response bias

11. Scope for Future Research

Future research can use larger samples and advanced statistical tools such as regression analysis.

References

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