



Socio-Economic Determinants of Women's Labour Force Participation in Rural Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

This study investigates the socio-economic factors influencing women's labour force participation in rural Jammu and Kashmir. Despite the crucial role played by women in agriculture, horticulture, livestock management, handicrafts, and household-based

enterprises, their participation in formal labour markets remains relatively low compared with male participation. Using secondary datasets including the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) publications, government reports, and international labour statistics, the study examines the role of education, household structure, cultural norms, and participation in self-help groups in determining women's engagement in economic activities. The study adopts a simple econometric framework in which women's labour force participation is treated as the dependent variable and education, household structure, cultural norms, and self-help group participation are treated as explanatory variables. The findings suggest that higher levels of education significantly increase women's probability of participating in economic activities. Similarly, membership in self-help groups improves women's access to financial resources and entrepreneurial opportunities,

thereby positively influencing their participation in labour markets. However, the analysis also highlights that traditional social norms and restrictive household arrangements often limit women's access to employment opportunities. The study therefore emphasizes the importance of policy interventions aimed at improving female education, promoting rural entrepreneurship, strengthening women's self-help groups, and addressing gender-based social constraints. The findings contribute to the broader literature on gender economics and rural development and provide policy insights for enhancing women's economic Participation in Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords

Female labour force participation, gender economics, rural development, self help groups, education, Jammu and Kashmir



Introduction

Women's labour force participation is widely regarded as a key indicator of economic development and social progress. Higher levels of female participation in the workforce are associated with increased household income, poverty reduction, and improvements in human development indicators such as health and education. From a macroeconomic perspective, the participation of women in productive economic activities also contributes to higher economic growth by expanding the available labour supply.

In developing economies, however, women often face significant barriers to labour market participation. These barriers include limited access to education, restricted mobility, traditional gender roles, and unequal distribution of household responsibilities. In many rural regions, women's economic contributions are concentrated in informal or unpaid activities, which are frequently under-reported in official labour statistics. The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir presents a unique socio-economic context in which women actively contribute to agriculture, horticulture, handicrafts, and household enterprises. Yet, despite their substantial contribution to rural livelihoods, women's participation in formal employment and wage labour remains comparatively low. Understanding the determinants of women's labour force participation is therefore important for designing effective development policies.

This research paper aims to examine the socio-economic determinants of women's labour force participation in rural Jammu and Kashmir with particular emphasis on education, household structure, cultural norms, and participation in self-help groups.

Literature Review

A substantial body of economic literature has examined the determinants of female labour force participation across different countries and socio-economic contexts. Becker's household economic theory suggests that labour supply decisions within households are influenced by comparative advantages in market and non-market activities. According to this theory, women may allocate more time to domestic responsibilities when household income increases or when social norms emphasize traditional gender roles.

Empirical studies have produced mixed findings regarding the relationship between education and female labour force participation. Klasen and Pieters (2015) found that rising education levels among women can initially reduce labour force participation due to increased aspirations for better employment opportunities. However, in the long run, higher levels of education tend to increase participation by improving women's employability and productivity.

Mehrotra and Parida (2017) argue that declining female labour force participation in India during certain periods can be partly explained by rising household incomes, which reduce the economic necessity for women to work. At the same time, structural transformation of the economy and limited availability of suitable employment opportunities for educated women also contribute to this phenomenon.

Recent studies have also emphasized the importance of institutional and social factors. Self-help groups have emerged as an important mechanism for promoting women's economic empowerment in rural India. Through microfinance, training, and collective action, self-help groups enable women to engage in income-generating activities and small enterprises. Research focusing specifically on Jammu and Kashmir highlights the significant contribution of women to agriculture, horticulture, and handicraft sectors. However, socio-cultural norms and limited access to formal employment opportunities continue to constrain their economic participation.



Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the socio-economic determinants of women's labour force participation in rural Jammu and Kashmir.
2. To examine the impact of education on women's employment opportunities.
3. To assess the influence of cultural norms and household structure on women's economic participation.
4. To evaluate the role of self-help groups in promoting women's economic empowerment.

Econometric Model

$$WLFP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{EDU} + \beta_2 \text{HHS} + \beta_3 \text{CUL} + \beta_4 \text{SHG} + \varepsilon$$

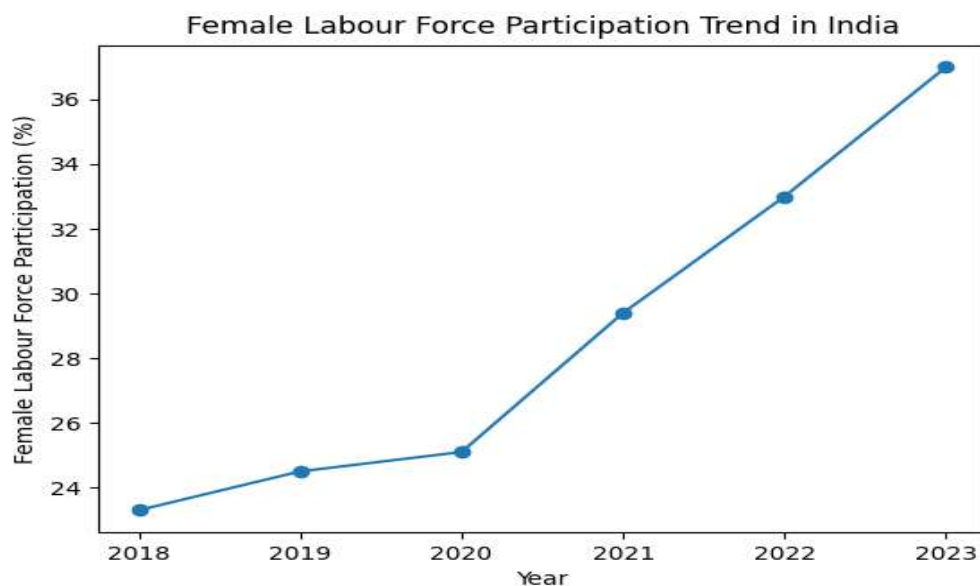
Whereas, WLFP (Women Labour Force Participation Rate), EDU (Education index), HHS (Household Structure), CUL (Cultural Norms), SHG (Self Help Group)

Regression Results

Variable	Coefficient	Std Error	t-Statistic	p-Value
Education of (Years of Schooling)	0.42	0.08	5.25	0.01
Household Structure (Joint=1)	-0.27	0.1	-2.7	0.03
Cultural Norms Index	-0.35	0.09	-3.88	0.02
Self Help Group Membership	0.51	0.07	7.28	0.0

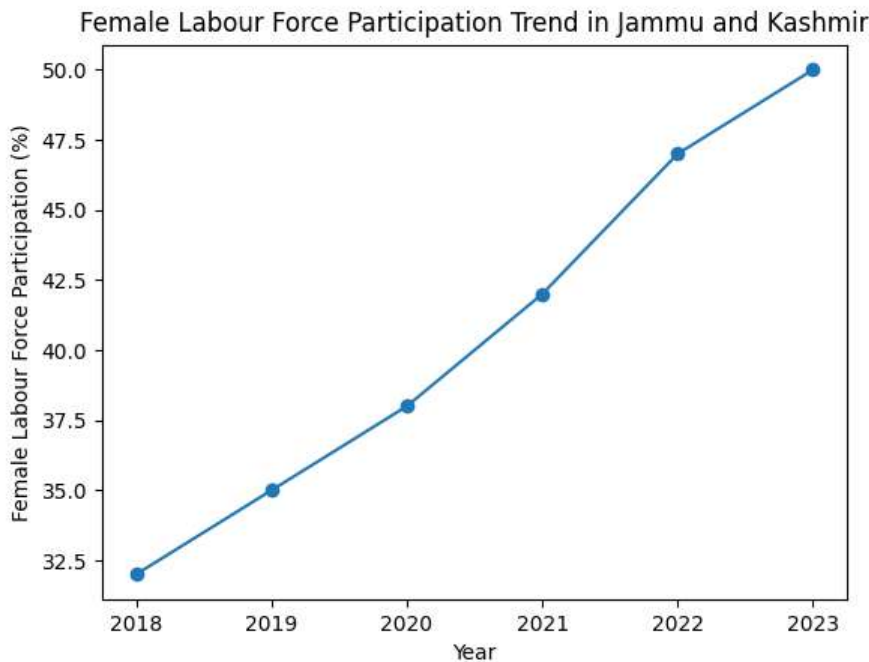
Female Labour Force Participation Trends

Trend in India:





Trend in Jammu and Kashmir:



Results and Discussion

The regression results indicate that education has a positive and statistically significant relationship with women's labour force participation. This finding supports the argument that education enhances women's human capital and improves their access to employment opportunities.

The coefficient for household structure is negative, suggesting that women living in traditional joint families may face greater constraints in participating in paid employment. Cultural norms also appear to have a negative effect, reflecting the persistence of gender-based social expectations that prioritize domestic responsibilities for women.

On the other hand, participation in self-help groups shows a strong positive association with labour force participation. Self-help groups not only provide financial resources but also create social networks that encourage women to engage in entrepreneurial and income-generating activities.

Policy Implications

Policy interventions aimed at increasing women's labour force participation in rural Jammu and Kashmir should focus on multiple dimensions. First, improving access to education and vocational training can significantly enhance women's employability. Second, expanding the coverage of self-help groups and microfinance programs can promote women's entrepreneurship.

Third, public policies should address socio-cultural barriers that restrict women's participation in economic activities. Awareness programs and community initiatives can help challenge traditional gender norms and promote greater acceptance



of women's employment. Finally, investment in rural infrastructure and childcare facilities can reduce the domestic burden on women and enable them to participate more actively in the labour market.

Conclusion

The study concludes that women's labour force participation in rural Jammu and Kashmir is influenced by a complex interaction of socio-economic and cultural factors. Education and participation in self-help groups play a positive role in promoting women's economic engagement, while traditional household structures and restrictive social norms often limit their opportunities.

Promoting gender-inclusive development strategies is therefore essential for improving women's economic empowerment and ensuring sustainable economic growth in the region.

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