

RURAL FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES IN PAKISTAN

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The aim of this study is to investigate the trend of rural females participation rates in Pakistan. We will also discuss in this paper the social status and problems which are being faced by the working females in our traditional society and then trace out the factors that are responsible for lower participation rates.

The data for this study are drawn from major surveys: Labour Forces Surveys (LFS), Population Census Organization (different issues), National Impact Surveys (NIS), Housing, Economic and Demographic Survey (HED), Pakistan Fertility Survey (PFS), and different issues from Planning and Development Division.

The Labour Force participation rate is defined as the ratio of population engaged in or seeking gainful employment to the working-age population.⁽¹⁾ There is a positive association between female productive work and the level of development achieved.⁽²⁾ Female participation rates are also important for a proper understanding of the productive and reproductive rates of the population. As more than 70% of rural population depends upon agriculture and rural women are nearly half of the total, their participation rates may be of critical important in determining the rates of saving, investment and productivity in agriculture.

But when referring to Pakistan women, it is generally assumed that one is talking about "non-

productive" section of the society. The traditional picture of women being that of the unproductive "mother and house wife, while the active participation of rural women in agriculture production is largely ignored. The low rate for women's participation in labour force in Pakistan which according to various national censuses and surveys ranges between 5-10 percent at once indicates that women in Pakistan are constrained to take up paid employment outside home.(3)

However, overall percentage of women as an economic force in Pakistan is much larger than that recorded in the figures in national censuses and statistics. The role of farmer of wage earning woman often goes unnoticed in the census (the 1981 population census, for instance, would have us believe that only 176 women in the whole of Pakistan are "agricultural and animal husbandary workers") the participation of women in many other sectors/industries is not even acknowledged.(4)

PAKISTANI FEMALE PARTICIPATION RATES

The female population of Pakistan, in accordance with the 1961 Census Report, was 47%, of these 43 million Pakistani women, 9% were employed in civilian labour. Out of this 9% women in paid employment, 82.96% were engaged in cultivation, 2.46% in other agriculture activities and 14.68% were recorded as working in non-agricultural activities. These figures admittedly did not reflect the higher participation of women during the peak period of seasonal activities.(5) The same report had categorized 48% of Pakistani women as house wives even though 80% of the population was living in rural areas where the house wife is invariably responsible, in addition to her home and children, for looking after the domestic animals, churning the milk for butter, grinding the

corn, and assisting in the vegetable and fruit gardens. She is also a weaver or a tailor. She does not receive any monetary reward in the form of wages. She is, nevertheless, an economically productive individual and not simply a house wife. With the development of technologies in the rural communities, a larger percentage of this unlisted labour could shift to wage-earning occupations.(6)

The general figure quoted of women participation in income generating activities is very low and according to the Ministry of Manpower Report, it is the lowest in the world.(7) What is being over looked in these reports, is women's participation in rural agriculture team. The category of unpaid family labour was included in 1961 census on the insistence of Labour Division. Yet the figures quoted of women participation did not exceed 15% for over fifteen years or older women. Based on the census data of 1951 and 1961. Dr. Been projected three characteristics of women participation in economic activity:

1. The proportion of women who are in the labour force is amongst the lowest in the world.
2. The majority of economically active female population is made-up of unpaid family labour to a much higher degree.
3. Pakistan has an extremely high dependency ratio per employed adult due to non-participation of women.(8)

These statistics were later challenged by Shah and Shah in Pakistan Economic Review, 1978 (9) on the basis of the labour force survey data. When Shah and Shah analyzed the relevant questions answered by the women themselves, they noted a variation of 19% to 33% in the category of over worked women aged 15-49 years.

Allowance for age and marital status did not resolve this discrepancy and they concluded that although labour force participation of women is low in Pakistan, it is not as low as reported to be, especially in census type surveys where enumerators are male.

A reference to population statistics for the last two decades, shows an almost stagnant demographic pattern. Whereas the female population of Pakistan in 1961 was 47%, in 1972 it was recorded as 46.7%.⁽¹⁰⁾ On 01.01.1979 worked out 46.77% ⁽¹¹⁾ and in 1981 it worked out to 47.39%.⁽¹²⁾

Female participation in civilian labour force was recorded as 2.02% in 1974-75 and 2.1% in 1981.⁽¹³⁾ As regards the data on female participation in the labour force, it is curious that from 9% participation of women in 1961 it should have fallen to 2.1% in 1981 which the Census Commission has termed as "negligible". Even when we take into account the reduction in the overall population following the 1971 breakup of the country, the percentages of female participation of 2.02 in 1974-75 and 2.4 in 1981 appear not to be commensurate with the visible and perceptible increase in the numbers of working women in our towns and villages over the past twenty years.

The inadequacy of statistics leads not only to distorted perceptions about women's role in society and consequently her position, but may also have (and probably has) adverse repercussions at policy-making level.

The Sixth Five Year Plan document has quoted the labour force participation rate for the year 1983 based on the Labour Force Survey 1978-79 and adjusted with census data of 1981 for sex ration. According to this docu-

ment the labour force participation rates are 27.64% for entire country out of which women's total participation is 3.34%. A further break-down shows 2.89% rate for rural women and 0.45% rate for urban women. However the plan document does not predict any substantial increase in women labour force participation during this plan period also.⁽¹⁴⁾ According to Economic Survey 1987-88 Active Labour Force is estimated at 29.6 million or 29.8% of the total population. From among those of the age 10 years and above, 44% are included in the labour force. Among the male population of the age 10 years and above, 73.4% are in the work force. The corresponding ratio for the female population is 11.9%.⁽¹⁵⁾

A number of studies done in Pakistan, have dealt with the issues relating to female Labour Force participation. See for example Abbasi (1982), Afzal (1986), Ahmed (1986), Farooq (1875), Irfan (1983), Sathar (1986) and Shah (1986).

More statistics are provided by M. Afzal and Zafar Moeen Nasir their article "Is Female Labour Force participation really low and declining in Pakistan? A look at alternative data sources".⁽¹⁶⁾ In this paper, an attempt is made to first examine the estimates of labour force participation and work participation rates as given by the census data for 1973 and 1981; and the corresponding rates for different years, given by the Labour Force Surveys, with special reference to the levels and trends of female activity rates.

The following table provides a comparative view of the labour force participation and work participation rates.

TABLE NO.1

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES AND WORK
PARTICIPATION RATES (IN PERCENTAGE) IN URBAN AND
RURAL AREAS OF PAKISTAN

Labour force participation rate
(Based on population aged 10 years and over)

SOURCES	URBAN		RURAL	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1971-72 LFS	69.8	3.9	81.6	9.5
1973 HED	70.6	8.8	80.4	9.3
1981	70.6	3.5	76.5	3.0
Pop:Census				
1978-79 LFS	70.3	5.3	80.1	14.3
1982-83 LFS	71.2	4.1	79.8	10.7
Work Participation Rate (Percentage Working/Employed among those 10 years & over)				
1968-69 NIS	-	9.0	-	22.3
1968-69 LFS	-	4.4	-	8.2
1971-72 LFS	67.3	3.7	80.3	9.3
1973 HED	61.3	3.2	74.0	4.8
1975 PES	-	15.6	-	18.1
1974-75 LFS	-	4.1	-	8.1
1981	60.1	3.2	74.8	22.8
Pop:Census				
1984-85 PCPS	-	7.9	-	24.6
1984-85 LFS	-	4.6	-	12.1

Source: Government of Pakistan (n.d), (1985) & various years.

The above table shows that (i) the female activity rates, on the whole, are rates; and (ii) the female rates, given in the 1981 census are lower by more than 50% for urban areas and more than 60% for rural areas in comparison with the levels reported in the 1973 HED. It looks obvious that the female activity rates reported at such low levels are unbelievable, especially for rural areas where the evidence of women's contribution in various types of productive activities is very strong. For rural areas, the rate derived from Labour Force Survey is almost double the rate, worked out from the 1973 HED Survey data while the Labour Force Surveys conducted on the same period, show increasing trends, especially for the rural areas.

Thus there seems to be not obvious time trend in participation rates of rural women, mainly because of the non-comparability of data from various sources due to the difference in the selection of respondents, populations and periods.

Another study shows (16) about the declining female participation rates through changes in role behaviours of Pakistani women (See in Table 2).

CHANGES IN ROLE THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

When women work they not only bring additional income home but are likely to gain an awareness of other aspects concerning themselves or society. In general the occupational role of women is particularly important mainly because it provides a potential alternative role to wife-motherhood role. The resources expansion that it provides to a working woman may be critical in many different ways, yet, in Pakistan the occupational role is not a primary role that women are expected to fulfil. The Table-II shows the changes in role behaviours of Adult Pakistani

women in rural and urban are as between 1961 to 1981.(18)

TABLE 2

SHOWING CHANGES IN ROLE BEHAVIOURS OF ADULT PAKISTANI WOMEN IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS

Occupatio Role	URBAN			RURAL		
	Earlier Year	Later Year	Change	Earlier Year	Later Year	Change
Age 10 & in the Labour Force	4.1 (1961)	3.3 (1981)	- 20	10.9 (1961)	3.5 (1981)	- 68
Employed as Unpaid Family workers	14 (1973)	5.9 (1981)	- 58	6.6 (1973)	38.2 (1981)	- 42
Workers in Professional occupation	30.1 (1973)	34.6 (1981)	+ 15	4.2 (1973)	8.3 (1981)	+ 98
Workers in Services Occupation	26.8 (1973)	17.0 (1981)	- 36	4.0 (1973)	4.4 (1981)	+ 10
Workers in Agricultural Occupation	6.9 (1973)	3.4 (1981)	- 51	78.9 (1973)	51.6 (1981)	- 35

In general, a numerically small, yet socially potent group of women is emerging. This consists of the highly educated, largely urban women generally in professional and technical occupations. As for percentage of the urban female labour force, this group is sizable with 35 of all urban working women in it, in 1981. Among the rural women over half are engaged in agricultural occupations. The group of professional women has expanded notably in rural areas from 4% to 8% of the female labour force. Yet, overall female work participation in the rural areas

has declined by 68% between 1961 and 1981. Some possible reasons for decline could be the mechanization of farming and a growing affluence of rural families compared to the past.

A further analysis of the changes in female role is possible by comparison with countries at roughly the same level of development and belonging to the same cultural region.⁽¹⁹⁾ We are taking India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Philippines and Malaysia. Here this is done in Table-3.

TABLE - 3

SHOWING COMPARISON OF ROLE BEHAVIOUR OF PAKISTAN WOMEN WITH SELECTED ASIAN & SOUTH EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

Occupation Role	Countries					
	Pakistan	India	Bangladesh	Sri Lanka	Philippines	Malaysia
10% in Labour Force in the Rural Areas	3.3 (1981)	16.0 (1981)	3.8 (1974)	19.9 (1971)	32.1 (1970)	34.8 (1970)
10% in Labour Force in Urban Areas	3.5 (1981)	7.3 (1981)	5.8 (1974)	11.1 (1971)	34.8 (1970)	23.7 (1970)
Unpaid family workers as a % of female Labour force	27.9 (1981)	3.6 (1981)	30.8 (1974)	11.2 (1971)	29.4 (1970)	37.7 (1970)
F/M ratio of Unpaid family workers (Male =1.0)	1.91 (1981)	1.29 (1971)	4.11 (1974)	3.11 (1971)	1.9 (1970)	3.4 (1970)
Workers in Professional occupations	17.2 (1981)	3.6 (1971)	2.9 (1974)	8.0 (1971)	17.2 (1977)	8.6 (1970)
Femase shares in labour force	3.7 (1981)	17.4 (1971)	4.2 (1974)	26.2 (1971)	31.5 (1977)	31.8 (1970)

Source: Population Census Organization. (20)

The occupational role seems to have become the least significant in Pakistan as compared to those in India and Bangladesh. Pakistani females make a negligible contribution to the overall economic activity in the country as compared to countries like Philippines, Malaysia, or even India as indicated by female share of the labour force shown in table.

MAIN CAUSES WHICH ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LOW PARTICIPATION RATES

1. There is clear indication that socio-economic status of the family has a negative impact on female work participation. Indicators such as husband's education and ownership of durable goods was a negative association with work participation.
2. Some possible reasons for the decline could be the mechanization of farming and a growing affluence of rural families compared to past.
3. The declining activity rate of rural females have been responsible for growing shortage of labour in Pakistan in the face of rising demand for agriculture labour (Chaudhry 1982). These scarcities, on the one hand, have resulted in rapid increase in rural wages and on the other, have induced rapid spurts in mechanization of various agricultural operations.
4. Female participation rates in Pakistan may also be low due to the large scale observance of the Islamic practice of Purdah (seclusion of women). This tends to restrict women's free movement

outside their immediate homestead, especially for productive work requiring them to face male strangers. This is a custom and tradition of Pakitan.

5. The level of education influences labour force participation rate in two major ways. The greater the educational attainment of a person, the greater the time she has spent in academic institutions and correspondingly her participation in productive activities. The falling participation rates of rural females are result of the growing emphasis on formal education in rural areas. An increase in school going children may cause a reduction in productive work of rural females also because women have to spend extra time preparing their children for school and doing many petty household chores which their children, had they not been enrolled, would have performed otherwise.

6. The participating females' rate also depend on the social and class status of the household concerned.⁽²¹⁾ For example, females of poor landless (Haris) household make every effort to earn wages with a view to raising the income, but females of land owing class, on the other hand, are worse in doing any physical work for others and even if they do some work for others they consider it beneath their dignity to receive any payment for their help.

The falling female participation rates may generally be associated with some loss of income to the family welfare and also imply high and rising dependency ratios

Grassroots of the population engaged in Agriculture. This trend in turn leads to a perpetuation of low saving and investment rates.

MAJOR PROBLEMS CONSTRAINING PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AS LABOUR FORCE

The problems constraining participation of women as wage employees may be broadly listed as follows:

1. Attitude to wages-earning employment and working women, whether by women themselves, by men or society at large.
2. Prejudices of employers in terms of women's employment.
3. Limited overall opportunities available for waged employment.
4. Lack of easily available information and guidance on career choices.
5. Inadequate education/training opportunities for women and attitudes to such education/training.
6. Inability to combine work with other household and child rearing responsibilities.
7. Lack of training opportunities for women whether for skill training or for different aspects of production, marketing and entrepreneur skill.
8. The women in both situations are full time workers.

9. Their labour goes entirely unrecognized.
10. They work in adverse conditions work environment is detrimental to health, nature of work is physically demanding and tedious.
11. They suffer from the dual burden of house work and the jobs they undertake.
12. They have no security of job being dependent entirely on the owner in one case and the middle person in the other.
13. Due to necessity women are forced to work and most of their earnings are spent on the household, the family or on doweries, very seldom do they spend for their own personal needs.
14. Female participation rates in Pakistan may also be low due to the large scale observance of the Islamic practice of Purdah (Seclusion of women). This tends to restrict women's free movement outside their immediate homestead, especially for productive work requiring them to face strangers.
15. Yet women's work remain unpaid in terms of wages and is taken for granted and unrecognized due to the social and economic dependence of the female on the male and her continuing subservient status.
16. The marketing of produce or service is done by the males and females are left behind with no cash in hand except what is given to them by their menfolk. Even in small towns women work behind the scene for production of the goods, but

their labour goes unnoticed and unreported.

FUTURE OF WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT PLANNING FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT IN PAKISTAN

In Pakistan conscious planning for the development and welfare of women is evolved gradually. The sixth plan laid special emphasis on women and provided for specially designed programmes in health, education, social welfare, population planning and employment, besides the integration of women's concern into all economic sectors. (See table IV).²⁰ The sixth plan laid special emphasis on encouraging female employment and on increasing female participation in the labour force.

SEVENTH PLAN POLICY AND PRIORITIES

In addition to the Sixth Plan goals of freeing women from the crippling handicaps of illiteracy, constant motherhood and poor health, the efforts will be made during Seventh Plan to integrate women more fully into the development process by suggested in the following sectorial targets. (I) Education (II) Health (III) Employment (IV) Cooperative (V) Non-government Organization (VI) Legal Aid Societies (VII) Women Development Workers (VIII) Women's Division Scheme.

An amount of Rs.1000 million has been tentatively allocated for these special programmes for women during 7th Five Year Plan. (See Table for details).

TABLE IV

SHOWING DEVELOPMENT PROJECT UNITS FUNDED
BY WOMEN'S DIVISION DURING 1979-87

Annexure-12.1

Project	Punjab	Sindh	NWFP & FATA	Balochi stan	AKJ & Federal	Total
AGRICULTURE LIVESTOCK AND COOPERATION						
Training in Agri- culture	4	8	125	-	-	137
Sericulture	4	8	55	1	-	68
Expansion of Co- operatives	2	-	1	-	-	3
Fruit, Vegetable Preservation	1	-	1	-	2	4
Dairy Develop- ment & Livestock	-	-	-	3	-	3
Poultry Breeding	1	5	-	14	145	165
Training in Fisheries	1	-	-	-	-	1
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT						
Community Halls/Centres	59	66	40	25	5	195
Integrated/ Sports Complexes	5	1	1	-	1	8
Parks for women Women's Rural/ City Libraries	- 2368	3 569	2 560	- 315	1 465	8 4277

						Grassroots
Training Institutes	1	1	1	1	1	5
EDUCATION						
Adult Education	4831	(614)*	912	40(18)*	-	5783
Computer aided Education Programmes	1	-	-	-	-	1
Polytechnics	7	4	1	1	1	14
Vocational Training Centres	6	13	5	-	3	27
Commercial Classes	10	11	6	4	-	31
HEALTH						
Mother Care/ Maternity Centres	2	4	1	1	-	8
Drug Addiction Treatment Centres	1	1	-	-	-	2
Training of Nurses & Paramedical Staff	22	4	-	1	9	36
Transport to Medical Institutes	2	4	-	1	-	7
Potable Water	-	-	1	1	-	2
Female Wards	1	11	-	5	1	18
Mobile Dispensaries	17	10	6	6	8	47
Service to Door Patients	-	2	-	-	2	4

						Grassroots
Mental Health	1	1	-	-	-	1
INDUSTRIES						
Carpet/Daries Centres	13	29	3	2	6	53
Readymade Garments/Hosiery	4	1	1	-	-	6
Craft Empories/ Training Centres	11	2	1	2	1	17
SOCIAL WELFARE						
Women Hostels	41	17	3	7	2	70
Day Care Centres	138	20	8	4	7	177
Legal Aid	30	3	-	1	-	34
Drug Falah/ Aman	2	-	-	1	-	2
Industrial Homes/ Multipurpose Centres	941	762	527	86	57	2373
Prisoners Welfare	24	14	38	1	-	77
Total	8550	1574	2299	522	7160	13661**

* Not included in total because Adult Education in Sindh and Balochistan is a component of multipurpose centres.

** The total figure includes the latest project units as well as those completed in the past.

TABLE V

SHOWING SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN
FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

FINANCIAL OUTLAYS:

(MILLION RUPEES)

6TH PLAN ALLOCATION	ADP ALLOCATION	6TH PLAN	7TH PLAN
	Special Programme 83-88	Estimated Expenditure	Percentage %
	SWAP		Allocation
			Percentage increase over 6th Plan
700	410.919	684.861	1000
	283.774		42
			97.84

PROGRAMME WISE DETAILS

SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN

a) Support to Line Departments for the Development of infrastructure and other Women Development Programmes.	410
b) (i) Grants to Women non-government Organizations (NGOS)	100
ii) NGO Council	10
c) (i) Assistance to Women Cooperative Societies	80
ii) Legal Aid Societies	100
d) Women Development Workers	300
Total	1000

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no consistent interpretation with regard to the appropriate roles of women on which the religious scholars, the policy makers or the ordinary citizens agree. The programme for increased literacy and education, improved health and life expectancy and lower infant mortality are all absolutely essential.

Women in general have equal potential and are fully occupied in mental and physical work, but the society has assigned to them low skilled and nonremunerative work and has denied to them facilities for still upgradation.

So micro studies are needed to capture the changing trends regarding the employment of women in various professions as these trends are suppressed by macro statistics.

In this connection our submissions which are based on our field research experience in some rural areas of Pakistan and more than half a dozen research studies dealing with women situation in Pakistan, are as follow:

1. There is a need to improve the coverage, flow analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data on women's employment. Existing gaps in information especially in the unorganised sector should be filled-up. All agencies taking up surveys and studies should be directed to collect data sex-wise whenever information relating to individuals is collected.
2. The Planning Commission should undertake continuous analysis of data relating to women,

with a view to monitoring the impact of various policies and programmes on women.

3. The literacy, health and general living and working conditions of Pakistani women demand immediate and concerted efforts.

4. Pre-requisite to development is the need to lighten the existing work load of rural women. This can be achieved by providing a more convenient and modern source of energy like biogas or solar heaters, clean drinking water, electricity and better health services through a planned programme of social welfare.

5. In view of the fact that the agriculture sector employs the largest number of rural women, it is necessary to ensure proper training facilities for them to improve their skills and demand a better wage as well as to improve their productive capacity. The existing agencies engaged in the training of farmers should be properly equipped to take care of the training needs of rural women in agricultural and allied sectors.

6. The training programmes for rural women may have to be provided by mobile training units sponsored by different agencies or other training institutes located nearby, after identifying suitable trades on the basis of local skills, viability, availability of market, plan investment etc.

7. Every sectorial plan should have a special component plan for women and for this purpose government should earmark a substantial share of their funds in certain ministries and departments.

8. In agriculture and allied occupations, part time work like dairy, poultry, social forestry, fruit and vegetables identified and preservation, forest produce gathering etc. should be identified and strengthened as women form major participants in such activities.

9. The specific needs and problems of self employed women will be identified and steps taken to extend appropriate support to self-employed women like street vendors, petty shopkeepers, weavers etc.

In the end, we must say that we feel quite appalled by the lack of progress that has been made in measurable aspects of women's life. Different areas still need to be explored. Different methods, different measurement techniques still need to be explored for the rural female participation rates in Pakistan.

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