

Choice, Constraints, Cultural Norms: Understanding Factors Underlying Women's Labour Force Participation

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- ▶ Low levels: partly because women's work undervalued: both by the household and by the women themselves.
- ▶ Partly due to restricted definition of economic activity.
- ▶ This paper seeks to a) contribute to better measurement of women's economic activity by suggesting a few small changes in the existing NSS questionnaire ; b) understand factors that aid or impeded women's participation in the LF; c) quantify the (unmet) demand for work.

Headline News?

- ▶ Recent international spotlight on low and declining female LFPRs in India: IMF, Economist, NYT



“Patriarchal social mores supersede economic opportunity in a way more associated with Middle Eastern countries ... enduring stigma of women being seen as “having to toil.”

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- ▶ How important are cultural norms, typically seen as social conservatism (taboos on mobility; having to cover face; Islam)?
- ▶ “Who Pays for the Kids”: is it the burden of childcare? Or the marriage penalty?

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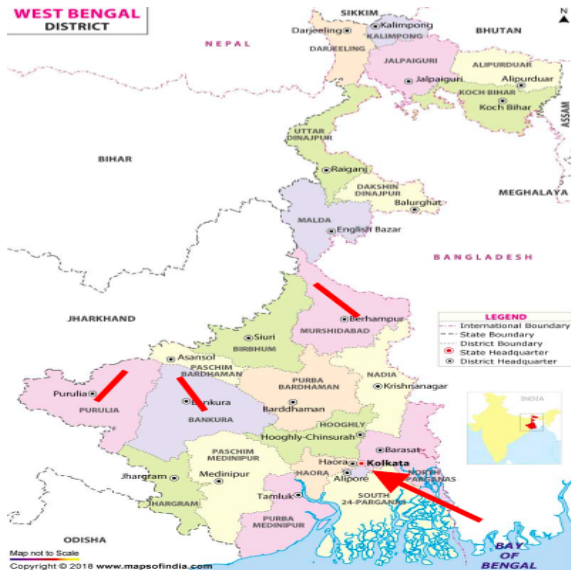
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- ▶ Murshidabad (highest proportion of Muslims); Howrah, North 24 Paraganas and South 24 Paraganas (in the top eight for Muslim share, as well as for per capita income); Bankura (one of the bottom three in per capita income); Purulia (one of the bottom three for income, as well as the one of the bottom two for Muslim share); Kolkata (richest district, fully urban).

Survey Areas



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- ▶ Close to 57% rural & 43% urban. By design, our sample has a greater proportion of urban women, compared, for instance with the 2011-12 NSS EUS, which is 27 percent urban.
- ▶ Roughly 9% from Bankura, 16% from Howrah, 16.7% from Kolkata, 15% from Murshidabad, 25% North 24-Parganas, 9.7% from Purulia & 7.5% from South 24-Parganas.

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- ▶ We classify women as "working" if they answered "yes" to this question.

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- ▶ Specifically: working on kitchen gardens/orchards, rearing poultry, husking paddy, making jaggery, weaving baskets/mats, making cowdung cakes for fuel, tailoring/weaving and tutoring.
- ▶ For each activity, a set of two questions: 1 whether they were involved in that activity; 2 if they did the activity not just for their home use, but for economic help or support in family's income generating work.

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- ▶ $EA + Working = \text{Extended Definition of LFPR}$

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- ▶ Our extended definition is not based on adding reproductive or care work to economic work, but is derived from including activities that fall within the conventional boundary, but women discount their contribution to these activities as part of routine housework, and are most likely unpaid.

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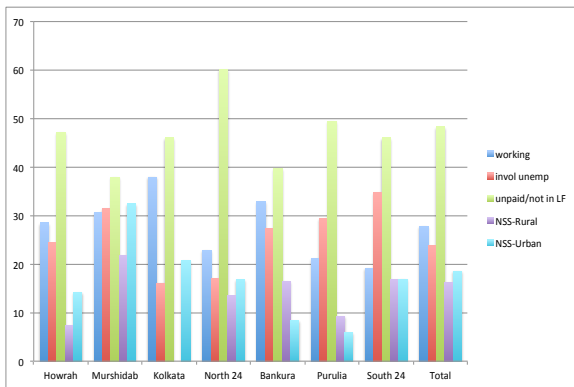
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- ▶ Note that the boundary between “OLF” and “EA, but involuntarily unemployed” is fuzzy.

Female LFPR Estimates

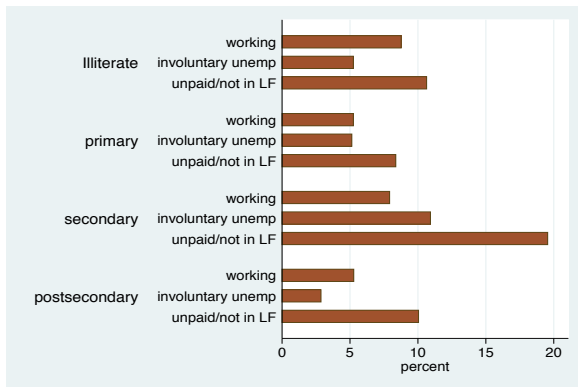
Survey: total for 7 districts (2017)
NSS EUS (2011-12): total for all state.



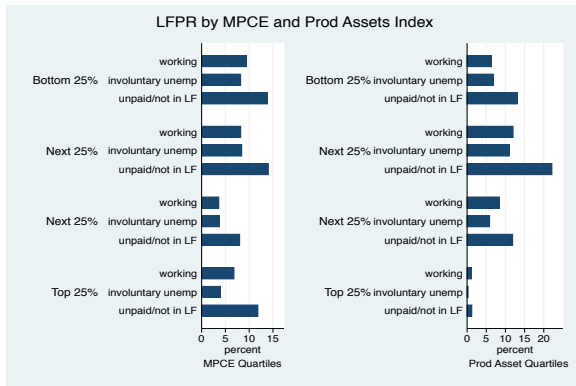
Descriptive Statistics for Women by LFPR

| | Working | Econ active | OLF | ALL |
|-----------|---------|-------------|---------|---------|
| age | 36.29 | 34.27 | 35.89 | 35.62 |
| SC | 0.27 | 0.25 | 0.27 | 0.26 |
| ST | 0.06 | 0.08 | 0.05 | 0.06 |
| OBC | 0.13 | 0.13 | 0.13 | 0.13 |
| Brahmin | 0.04 | 0.02 | 0.04 | 0.04 |
| UC | 0.49 | 0.51 | 0.49 | 0.49 |
| hindu | 0.69 | 0.65 | 0.67 | 0.67 |
| muslim | 0.29 | 0.31 | 0.31 | 0.31 |
| Rural | 0.52 | 0.67 | 0.55 | 0.57 |
| Urban | 0.48 | 0.33 | 0.45 | 0.43 |
| illit | 0.31 | 0.22 | 0.22 | 0.24 |
| primary | 0.18 | 0.21 | 0.17 | 0.18 |
| secondary | 0.28 | 0.45 | 0.40 | 0.38 |
| postsec | 0.19 | 0.12 | 0.20 | 0.18 |
| married | 0.84 | 0.94 | 0.92 | 0.90 |
| fhh | 11.28% | 4.57% | 4.45% | 6.34% |
| mpce | 9392.95 | 6757.11 | 8810.42 | 8474.53 |
| cattle | 0.12 | 0.19 | 0.17 | 0.16 |
| goat | 0.09 | 0.11 | 0.09 | 0.09 |
| chicken | 0.08 | 0.08 | 0.09 | 0.09 |
| coverhead | 0.58 | 0.70 | 0.59 | 0.61 |
| dom_tasks | 3.48 | 4.04 | 3.65 | 3.70 |
| childcare | 0.49 | 0.62 | 0.52 | 0.53 |
| eldercare | 0.69 | 0.66 | 0.73 | 0.71 |
| N | 1004 | 860 | 1740 | 3604 |

LFPR by Education



LFPR by MPCE and Prod Assets



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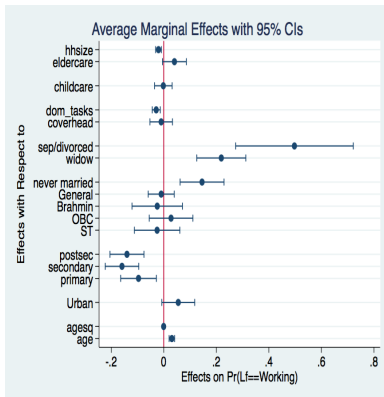
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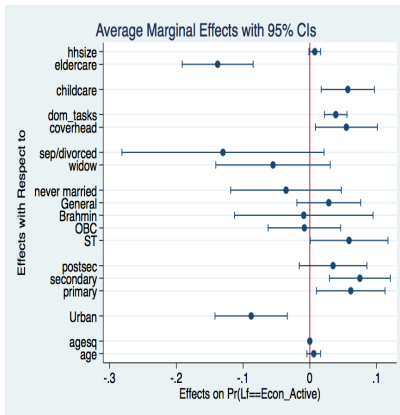
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- ▶ The second includes the effect of cultural norms: “coverhead”, = 1 if the woman covers her face sometimes or always. Standard errors are clustered at the village level.

Predicted Probability: Working



Predicted Probability: Economically Active



Domestic Chores Matter More

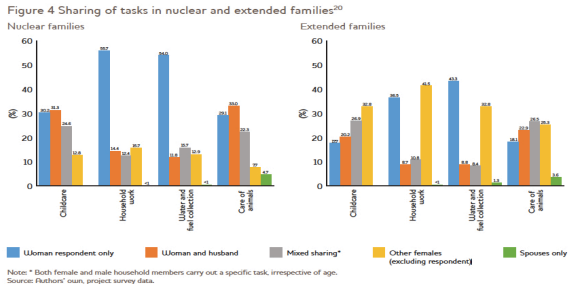
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- ▶ Chopra, D. (2017): India, Nepal, Rwanda, Tanzania Study



Domestic Chores and Lab Saving Devices

Who takes the main responsibility for domestic chores: cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, hh maintenance, collecting water

| | (1) |
|-------------|----------------------|
| | dom_tasks |
| N_labsaving | -0.419*** (-7.87) |
| _cons | 4.208*** (96.90) |
| <i>N</i> | 3604 |

t statistics in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

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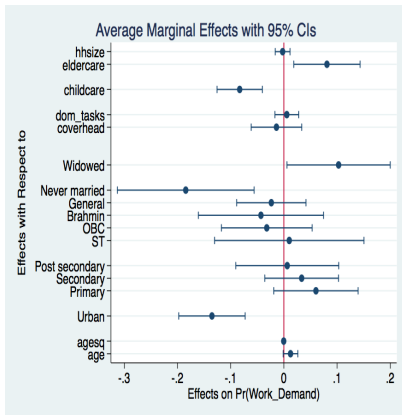
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- ▶ Perceptions about work: formal work is most desired and gives most satisfaction (work in progress)

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- ▶ Gupta (2017): effect of trade liberalisation in India (post-1991) on women's employment: establishments exposed to larger tariff reductions reduced their share of female workers.

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- ▶ However, even accounting for that, the majority are “not working”, but involved in expenditure saving activities.
- ▶ There is a demand for work, especially if it is compatible with domestic chores.
- ▶ International attention on visible markers (burqa) or religion (Islam). But the real “cultural” norm that should be discussed: sharing of domestic chores.