

Original Research Article

Participation of Women in the workforce: A Comparative study between Central and Western Plains of West Bengal

Abstract:

The population of women contributes nearly half of the total count but it counts for only a quarter of total workforce participation in India. The participation of women in different workforces is not only limited to the financial need of the family but is also related to the social system, the education level of the women, and the availability of work opportunities for them. The present study aims to compare the sector-specific women's work participation level and associated social factors of the women workforce. Two regions out of five regions in West Bengal specified by NSSO were considered to be study regions. Incorporating the necessary variables, a structured interview schedule was prepared and data were collected from randomly selected 160 working women from two districts from two regions under study.

Most of the respondents of central regions were service holders. Education has a significant effect on income level in both the regions under study. Service holders were at significantly higher income levels than other occupational groups. The respondents from the central regions were more educated and empowered than the women of the western region. A large scale of variety in occupational involvement has been found in both regions in the present study. The income level is directly related to occupation and education. The educated women of both regions preferred service as their occupation and earn more than other categories. Specific policies or programmes that enhance institutional involvement of all occupational categories may cater to our developmental goal.

Keywords: Women, Workforce, Working women, Women empowerment

Introduction:

The workforce is referred to the total no of persons in a country or a particular area who are actively employed or available for work. According to the 2011 census, the total workforce participation in India is 47.41 crore out of which the female workforce participation rate is 25.51 percent. In West Bengal female workforce participation is 19.4 percent and 15.4 percent in rural and urban areas respectively. Nowadays women play an important role in the development of the country. As women are half of the total population so by neglecting the women workforce will hamper the development of the country.

In ancient India, the main responsibility of women was taking care of children, elderly family members, and household duties. From an early age, it was expected for women to spend all their time on household duties and after marriage, the main concern of women was to maintain household responsibilities and raise children (Kantor,2005). Women need to be knowledgeable to manage all these responsibly and properly. After independence, attention has been given to female education. It has increased from 18.7% in 1971 to 39.42% in 1991 and 65.46% in 2011 (Census of India, 1971,1991,2011). Women's workforce participation in non-agricultural sectors increased by 5 million from 2005 to 2012 (Mehrotra and Singh,2017). Education, directly and indirectly, enhances women's empowerment. In India, A large number of women participate in the workforce who are below the poverty level and either illiterate or have a low level of education. The relationship between education and work participation of women takes a U-shaped curve in developing countries like India. High work participation is found among illiterate or having low education level group and then it gradually drops and reaches the lowest in the secondary level. Then it rises again and becomes highest for those who are graduates or have a higher degree. (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2009)

The government of India has taken many measures to develop the condition of the women workforce. These also have a good impact on the socio-economic condition of West Bengal as well as in India. A large number of women are involved in agriculture or allied sectors and the rest are labour, casual labour, self-employed, and employed in government and private sectors. Women workforce participation has increased rapidly. In 1950 the rate of women workforce participation was 35 percent which increased to 60 percent in 2000 (Toossi, 2002).

The increasing family expenses and financial crisis made women come out of their household duties and engaged in various employments. But nowadays women are involving themselves not only to support the family economically but also to establish their financial security and identity. Financially independent women have the confidence to raise their voices in the community as well as in the family. (Bala, 2004)

Methodology:

The present study is based on a cross-sectional study design and primary data was collected from the women respondents. According to NSSO 68th round employment-unemployment survey, there are five regions of West Bengal. Out of these five, two regions were selected purposively for the study. The data was collected from two districts of West Bengal from two different regions. Hooghly district from central plains and West Midnapore district from Western plains. Two Blocks from each district were further randomly selected as the study area for the study. The data has been collected by using a pre-tested semi-structured interview schedule. Women aged above 18 years associated with any kind of economic activity are eligible as a sample. Data has been collected from willing and eligible respondents. 40

respondents from each Block and a total of 80 respondents from each district were randomly selected as samples, so the Total number of samples for the study is 160.

Result and Discussion:

Table1: Region wise occupation of the respondents

Occupation	Central	Western
Service	57.50	25
Business	15.00	23.75
Agriculture	1.25	26.25
Labour	21.25	17.5
Others	5.00	7.5

From the study, we found women respondents have engaged in various types of occupations.

In the central region, more than half of the respondents (57 percent) are service holders and only 1.25 percent of women are engaged in agriculture. But the picture is different in the Western region. Here the percentage of respondents engage in service, business and agriculture differ very little i.e. 25 percent, 23.75 percent and 26.25 percent respectively.

In a study by Bano and Chaudhry (2015), it was revealed that 38% of women have participated in various professions like vocational, technical, teaching and many others.

Table 2: Effect of education on total income

Education	Total income	
Region	Central Region	Western Region
Illiterate	5000	4750.00
Can read only	---	9500.00
Can read and write	---	7666.67
Primary	4050	7223.53
Secondary	5794.12	10294.12
Higher Secondary	9442.31	12004.55
Graduate and above	18604.84	15950.00
Test Statistics^{a,b}		
Chi-Square	26.801	17.681
df	4	6
Asymp. Sig.	0	.007

It was found from the study that education is significantly related to income level in both regions. In the central region, the respondents who are graduates or have higher education earn the most than those who are illiterate. But in the Western region, it was revealed that income level is more or less the same in higher and middle-educated respondents.

In the central region, most of the respondents are service holders so it can be said that the educated persons have engaged in service. As the central region is a peri-urban area the opportunity for various types of jobs is more than in other areas. In the western region, the

percentage of respondents engaged in service, business and agriculture is mostly equal. So, it can be stated that the middle and higher-educated respondents of this region are associated with various livelihoods along with services so the income level is more or less equal in the middle to the higher-educated group. One more reason may be the fewer job opportunity in the central region which leads to more diversified livelihood in the western region.

Occupation	Total_income	
	Central Region	Western Region
Service	15907.61	17635.00
Business	8666.67	8026.32
Agriculture	5000.00	8342.86
Labour	4952.94	7421.43
Others	5500.00	9500.00
Test Statistics^{a,b}		
Chi-Square	21.556	27.235
df	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000

In this study, it was found that occupation is significantly related to income level. The respondents who are service holders have a higher income level than those who work as labour.

Region	Education	Total income	Household income portion	Satisfaction on present working status	Women empowerment
Central	5.95	3.50	44.808622	.81	4.25
Western	5.00	3.54	87.686256	.86	3.58
Test Statistics^{ab}					
	Education	Total income	Household income portion	Satisfaction	Women empowerment
Mann-Whitney U	1902.500	2944.500	485.000	3040.000	1590.000
Wilcoxon W	5142.500	6184.500	3725.000	6280.000	4830.000
Z	-4.563	-.904	-9.334	-.855	-6.848
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.366	.000	.393	.000

From the above result, it is said that education, household income portion and women empowerment significantly differed in these two regions. In the central region education and women, empowerment is significantly higher than western region. According to *Kumari & Pandey(2012)*, in southern states of India women, workforce participation is comparatively high than northern part due to the high level of education and freedom of decision-making. Whereas it was found from the study of *Faridi, Chaudhry et al.(2009) in Pakistan women's education is not significantly related to workforce participation.*

In the western region of West Bengal, the contribution of women's income to total household income is significantly high than the central region. The respondents of this region contribute their earnings more to family expenditure than their purpose. As the respondents of the central region are more educated and can spend their earnings for their purpose, naturally they are more empowered than the respondents of the western region.

Table5: Working status of women

Variable	Central Region	Western Region
Working status accepted by family	96.3	100
working status questioned by family	8.8	15
questioned occupational status	10	6.2
Working location cause of concern	0	39
Restricted by anyone	2.5	5.1
Get respect from others	67.5	68.8
Job satisfaction	81.2	86.2
Thinking about quitting job	10	8.8
Spending money for own purpose	93.8	90
Spending money on family	88.8	90
Spending money for savings	76.2	11.2
Spending money for children	47.5	76.2
Spending money for child education	37.5	48.8
Spending money to support health issues	47.5	56.2
Spending money for household	95	87.5
Spending money to support elder treatment	22.5	21.2
Spending money for loan repayment	17.5	5
Spending money for other expenses	18.8	28.7
Taking care of children	58.8	92.5
Child care by husband	13.6	56.8
Child care by mother	9.1	14.1
Childcare by mother-in-law	45.5	59.5
Child care by others	56.8	70.3
Child care by maid	6.8	1.4
Household work done by husband	9	46.2
Household work by mother	31.6	6.2
household work done by mother-in-law	26.6	62.5
Household work done by others	40.5	68.8
Household work done by maid	5.1	1.2
household work done by self	100	100

Most of the women in both central and western regions stated that their working status has been accepted by their family members whereas only 8.8% of women in the central region and 15% of women in the western region faced the question about their working status. Only 39% of respondents in the western region admitted that their working location is a cause of concern to their family members. Very few respondents are restricted to do work outside the home but most of the women said that they get more respect from society. 81.2% of women in the central region and 86.2% of women in the western region are satisfied with their job profile whereas 10% and 8.8% of them from central and western regions respectively want to quit their jobs for various reasons. Most of the women spend their earnings on household expenses, for family and own purposes. In the case of savings, 76.2% of women in the central region save their earnings but only 11.2% of women in the western region do the same. In most cases in both regions, child care is primarily done by working mothers followed by their husbands. But sometimes it is the in-laws or mother who takes care of the children when their parents are absent.

According to Gibb et.al (2014) effects of parenthood on workforce participation were different for men and women. For men, parenthood was not related to decreasing workforce participation but sometimes it was associated with long working hours. But in the case of women parenthood was associated with decreasing workforce participation and fewer working hours. Working hour is a major cause of concern for working women (Buddhapriya, 2009). Whenever women need to balance family and workplace, non-job factors like family responsibility weigh more importantly for women (Joshi, 1990)

It can be said that higher education has a great impact on women workforce as well as their families. Educated women always try to be independent financially. Besides this, the family members also realize the importance of financial independence and become supportive, which only happens when they are also educated enough to realize that. Though it was found in the research of Galvankova (2013), Government invested a lot of money in women's education but still, only 44 percent of women participate in the workforce which is very low.

Another reason may be the increasing expenses of the family which are tough to bear for one earning member. So, both men and women of the family try to earn for better living. Women are an important part of the socio-economic development of any country as well as a family. They break their traditional role as housewives and participate in the workforce. It happens because of increasing economic pressure day by day and they also want to contribute to family income. (Tamkeen & Bose, 2019). Women empowerment leads the family to better living through better food, education, health care, and shelter. (Duflo 2003)

It was found from the study that the percentage of women who save their earnings was far more in the central region from the western plains. It may happen because the central plains are the peri-urban area so the facilities of financial institutions are more accessible than western region. Being a peri-urban area communication, development, and online facilities in

the areas of the central region are better than western region. As a result, the women of this area can reach financial institutions more easily even if they can do it from their homes through online mode. One major issue is the low education level of women in the western region. Some of them are unable to access the available alternative facilities related to financial institutions.

Maybe these are the reasons that women have no restrictions to attain workplaces outside the home and they are also very much satisfied to be independent financially and also share the household expenses.

Table 6: Women empowerment status

Question	Region	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Moderate	Agree	Strongly Agree
Intelligence of men and women are same	Central	0	0	1.2	3.8	95
	Western	0	1.2	12.5	15	71.2
Women and men should be paid equally for same work	Central	0	0	1.2	0	98.8
	Western	0	3.8	12.5	20	63.7
There is no specific job preference for men and women.	Central	2.5	1.2	5	25	66.2
	Western	10	5	15	51.2	18.8
Women should only take care of their family and household duties	Central	1.2	10	17.5	21.2	50
	Western	59.5	20.3	13.9	6.3	0
Men are the decision maker of the family	Central	0	11.2	12.5	20	56.2
	Western	53.8	26.2	13.8	5	1.2
The savings and expenditure of the family should be decided by men.	Central	0	11.2	20	16.2	52.5
	Western	28.7	55	6.2	10	0
Married people are happier than an unmarried one	Central	20	23.8	36.2	6.2	13.8
	Western	13	3.9	1.3	5.2	76.6
Women should obey the orders and decisions of their elderly parents.	Central	1.2	13.8	22.5	46.2	16.2
	Western	0	19	40.5	20.3	20.3
Women can act as their wish	Central	0	2.5	21.2	53.8	22.5
	Western	2.6	5.2	39	46.8	6.5
The group of women can prevent social obstacles.	Central	0	0	0	31.2	68.8
	Western	2.5	13.8	17.5	52.5	13.8
Working women having self-confident than non-workers	Central	0	0	0	27.5	72.5
	Western	0	8.9	24.1	43	24.1
Economic freedom is most important for women	Central	0	0	0	5	95
	Western	2.5	1.2	16.2	15	65

Most of the respondents of both regions strongly agree that women are as intelligent as men and should be paid equally for the same work. 50% of the women in the central region strongly agree that women should only take care of their family and household duties and 56.2 % of this region also strongly believe that men are the decision maker of the family but 59.5% and 53.8% of women of the western region strongly disagree these facts respectively. 52.5% of the women in the central region strongly believe that men should decide the savings and expenditure of the family but 55% of respondents in the western region disagree with this fact. Most of the respondents in the two regions believe that women can do as per their wishes and also, they can prevent social obstacles together. A large percentage of women in these two regions agree with the fact that working women are more confident and economic freedom is very important for any woman.

According to a study in a town in Pakistan, women contributed to family income for years. Previously they participated in agriculture but nowadays they have shifted to other professions like teaching, nursing, industry labour etc. These changes also have an impact on their family life. They have faced various problems in doing both jobs in outside and the household but they are satisfied because they have thought that there are more advantages than problems. (Mohyuddin & Hussain, 2014)

Generally, education and financial independence make a woman more empowered. From the study, it was found that the overall education level of the central region is higher than western region. But surprisingly it is found that the women of the western region are more empowered than the women of the central region. Maybe it happens because of the difference in culture and lifestyle of these two regions.

Conclusion:

A large-scale disparity in occupational involvement levels has been identified in the present research. Most of the women of the central regions are service holders and least participate in agricultural occupations whereas a bulky section of women in the western region is participating in the Agricultural sector. The income of women is directly related to their occupational level and education level. Educated women in both regions are preferred service as their occupation and earn more than other income categories. It is also stated that with a high level of income, service holders have become more empowered than other groups of respondents. The central region of West Bengal has greater involvement with urban and

peripheral regions and their high-level communication and exposure, impact not only occupational level but also income level and women empowerment status.

The major developmental goal is to prosper all occupational groups and provide institutional facilities for all. It has been observed that the development of education level is the major prospect to reach the developmental goal as a whole. Education not only enhances knowledge level but also increases institutional participation which can lead to more financial inclusion and empowerment level of people

A group-specific developmental programme should be introduced to cater to each cluster of women to bring them into the institutional periphery and create an environment for them to access all the developmental services so all the occupational groups can prosper with the national prosperity.

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