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Through the Magnifying Glass: Women's Work and Labour force participation in urban Delhi

Ratna M. Sudarshan & Shrayana Bhattacharya

May 2008

Subregional Office for South Asia, New Delhi

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First published 2008

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Through the Magnifying Glass: Women's Work and Labour force participation in urban Delhi
Subregional Office New Delhi 2008

ISBN: 978-92-2-120898-3 (print)

ISBN: 978-92-2-120899-0 (web pdf)

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Executive Summary

This paper seeks to explore the nature of women's workforce participation in urban Delhi through a household survey carried out in Delhi during a three month period between September 2006 and November 2006. It also attempts to identify key factors influencing women's decision to work, the type of work they do, the constraints they face, and the perceived benefits and costs of engaging in paid work outside the home. In doing so, issues surrounding the methodology and underestimation of women's work are also tackled.

The survey estimates a greater female workforce participation rate than recorded in the NSS. This suggests that undercounting and perception bias can be overcome through intensive probing as was done here. A key finding is that most working women do not have access to paid leave or provident fund. This reflects the informality that surrounds women's work.

The key factors which appear to push up women's workforce participation rates include higher education, reduction in time spent on housework (domestic technology, water and electricity, child care arrangements), and safety in public spaces (transport, lighting). Results stress the role of variables beyond the labour market and work space in influencing women's access to work opportunities. The time spent on care work is high, and working women are not able to reduce their house responsibilities very much. The results confirm that the decision to work outside the home is usually a function of the preferences of the marital home.

The study suggests the need to understand the familial and household context within which labour market decisions are made. The role of family and kinship structures to determine women's work-life choices emerge as an important area for further study.

Foreword

This paper by Ratna Sudarshan and Shrayana Bhattacharya is an attempt to explore the level and nature of female workforce participation in urban Delhi and the factors that are critical in determining it. Since majority of Delhi's population is urban, therefore, a household survey was carried out in this city during a three month period to study the nature of female work participation in an urban context.

Findings of this paper suggest that the survey estimates a higher participation rate of women in the workforce as well as the labour force as compared to the NSS, mainly because of the inclusion of home based, piece rated work and intensive probing in the survey. Work participation is highest among women in the age group of 21-34 years; dropping to half in the 35-49 years age group. The work participation rate is highest among unmarried women in the working age group. This reflects, on one hand, higher propensity to work among the younger generation and, on the other hand, the fact that household work and reproductive workload reduces their work participation in later years. The paper reveals that education, household income, marital status, time needed for household work, safety in work places are some of the key factors that determine women's workforce participation rates. Household chores and safety and mobility concerns in work places as well as outside are cited as the most important factors that pose an impediment in women's work participation. However, there has been increasing recognition of their work and their earnings are perceived as a valuable contribution in the family in an increasing urbanizing and monetizing context. Therefore, there is a need to understand the context within which labour market decisions are being taken. The paper tries to identify factors beyond the labour market that are responsible in influencing women's engagement in workforce. The paper highlights the need to explore the role of the family and kinship structure to determine women's decision to work.

This paper is part of a series of studies that have been launched by the ILO, Delhi office, coordinated by Sukti Dasgupta, Employment and Labour Market Policy Specialist, to analyse and understand the current employment challenges in India.

Leyla Tegmo-Reddy
Director and ILO Representative in India
Sub Regional Office for South Asia, New Delhi
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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Dr Sukti Dasgupta of ILO, New Delhi, for her interest and inputs in this paper. We are grateful to Mr Suman Bery, director general, NCAER, for giving us access to a random sample for Delhi, which formed the basis for the ISST survey, and to Dr R.K. Shukla and his team at NCAER for assistance with the sampling design. Dr Uma Rani made valuable suggestions for the design of the questionnaire and we are grateful for her inputs. The survey has been coordinated by Shrayana Bhattacharya and we would like to thank the students of Delhi University and the volunteers from the ISST Community Centre who carried out the survey. At ISST, Vishal Goyal helped in analysing the data. The final responsibility for the findings and interpretation rests with the authors.

1. Introduction

Measuring women's paid workforce participation is complicated for reasons of both perception and method, as was demonstrated in the seminal time-use study of women's work conducted in the early 1980s by Devaki Jain and Malini Chand (Jain, 1985). It is further complicated by the overwhelming predominance of informal over formal workforce participation by women in South Asia (ILO, 2002). This paper seeks to throw some light on the nature of women's workforce participation in urban Delhi, and to identify what appear to be the key factors influencing women's decision to work, the type of work they do, the constraints they face, and the perceived benefits and costs of engaging in paid work outside the home.

In his essay on "The nationalist resolution of the women's question", Partha Chatterjee suggested that a spiritual and material dichotomy had become the basis for new norms and the determination of gender roles: "The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility of protecting and nurturing this quality" (Chatterjee, 1989: 243). It continues to be true that Indian women play a critical role in religious rituals, maintaining kinship ties, and celebrating festivals, apart from their reproductive roles and responsibilities. An implicit social contract continues to influence the allocation of household roles and responsibilities. According to Banerjee (Banerjee, 1998), women can be seen as a 'flexible resource' of the household, the implication being, not that they are confined to private spaces or to any rigid roles, but rather that they lack the autonomy to take decisions about work. However, women are active participants in the household and it is likely that the final labour market outcomes reflect mainly an internalization of prevalent social norms by both men and women.

Our survey of women in Delhi in 2006 confirms that the decision to work outside the home is usually a household decision, i.e., a large majority of working women did not work prior to marriage and a majority of unmarried working women stop working after marriage or the birth of a child. The discontinuity in the working life of women is linked to the priority that is given to the preferences of the marital home. Women's work after marriage need not be only for reasons of economic necessity - one third of working women said they worked for other reasons - and the work participation rates of women with a graduate degree or higher qualifications is much higher than for other groups. The environment of the marital household can be empowering as well, and what seems to emerge as a general finding is that the strongest influence on whether or not women work after marriage is not the individual attributes of the women, but the external environment and thinking of the marital household.

2. Background

2.1 Trends in work participation

Data from the NSSO (National Sample Survey Organization) suggests a decline in the overall female participation rates between 1983 and 2000 and a substantial decline in female subsidiary labour supply. Analysts have attributed the low levels of workforce participation and decline to a mix of positive factors such as increased participation in education; cultural-aspirational sanctions whereby increased prosperity and household income leads to withdrawal of female workers; and labour market issues

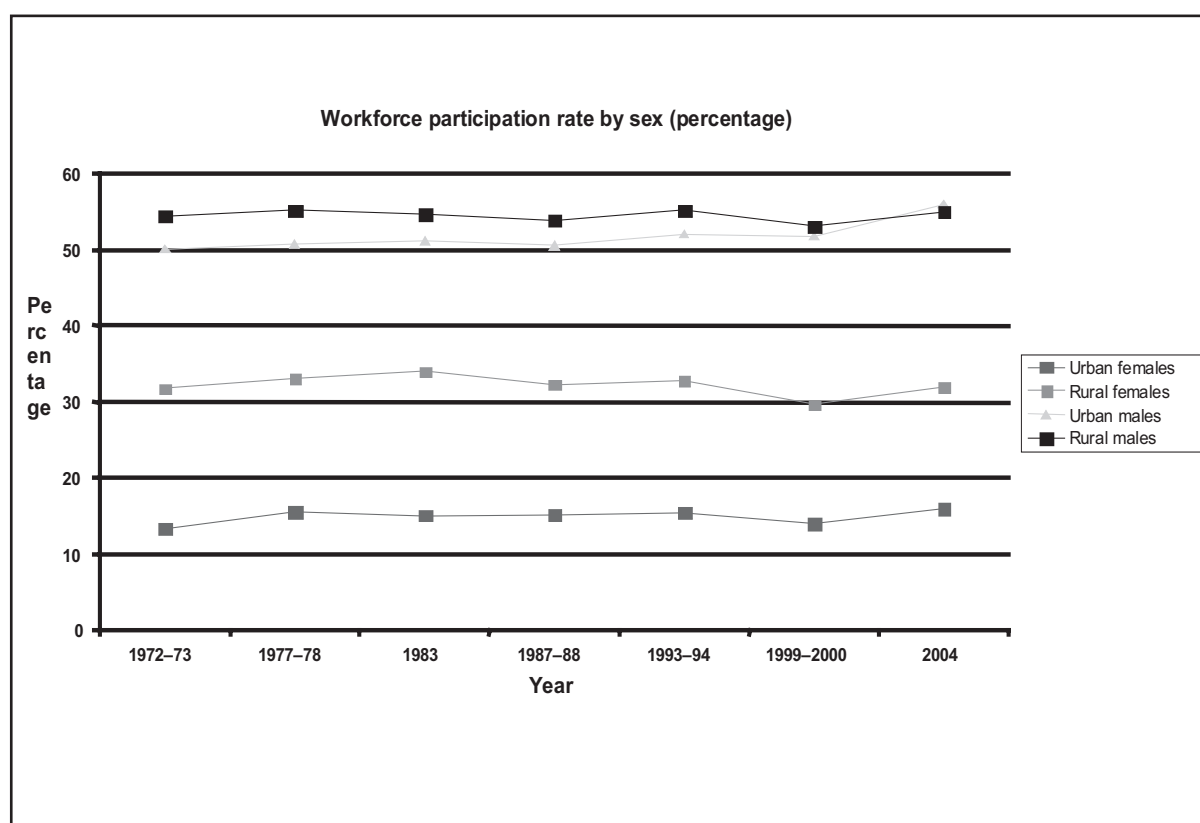
resulting in wage discrimination and barriers to entry into preferred jobs (Sundaram and Tendulkar, 2004; Das, 2006).

A decline in the number of the working poor has been noted in the country as a whole, from 114.8 million in 1993-94 to 102.3 million in 1999-2000, i.e., a decline of 12.6 million. The share of women workers in the working poor has also shrunk - from 37.4 per cent to 35.8 per cent - over the same period. The rural share has come down from 81.8 per cent to 80 per cent between 1994 and 2000. In terms of gender composition, the poverty prevalence rates among women workers are greater than those for male workers in both rural and urban areas (Sundaram and Tendulkar, 2004). Further, in both rural and urban India, on an average, workforce participation rates (WFPRs) of women from poor households are higher than those from households above the poverty line.

Such data has led to the presence of what was referred to as compelling need-based participation (Sundaram and Tendulkar, 2004) of women in the workforce, where it is poverty status that, *ceteris paribus*, drives women to greater workforce participation. In fact, this analysis further says that greater female WFPR from a particular household increases the probability of the household being below the poverty line. Hence, poverty assumes an important role in analysing women's WFPRs.

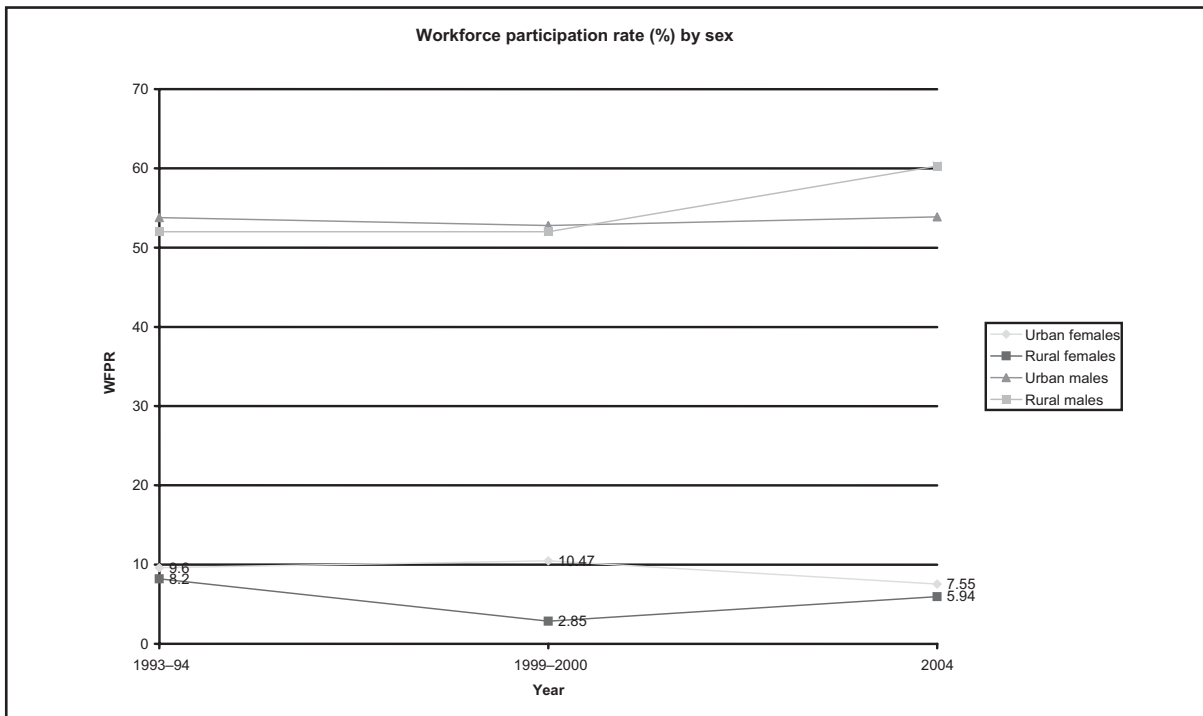
Diagrams 1 and 2 show the workforce participation rates of men and women all over India and in Delhi.

Diagram 1 Work participation rates: All India



Source: CSO 1998, NSSO 2005

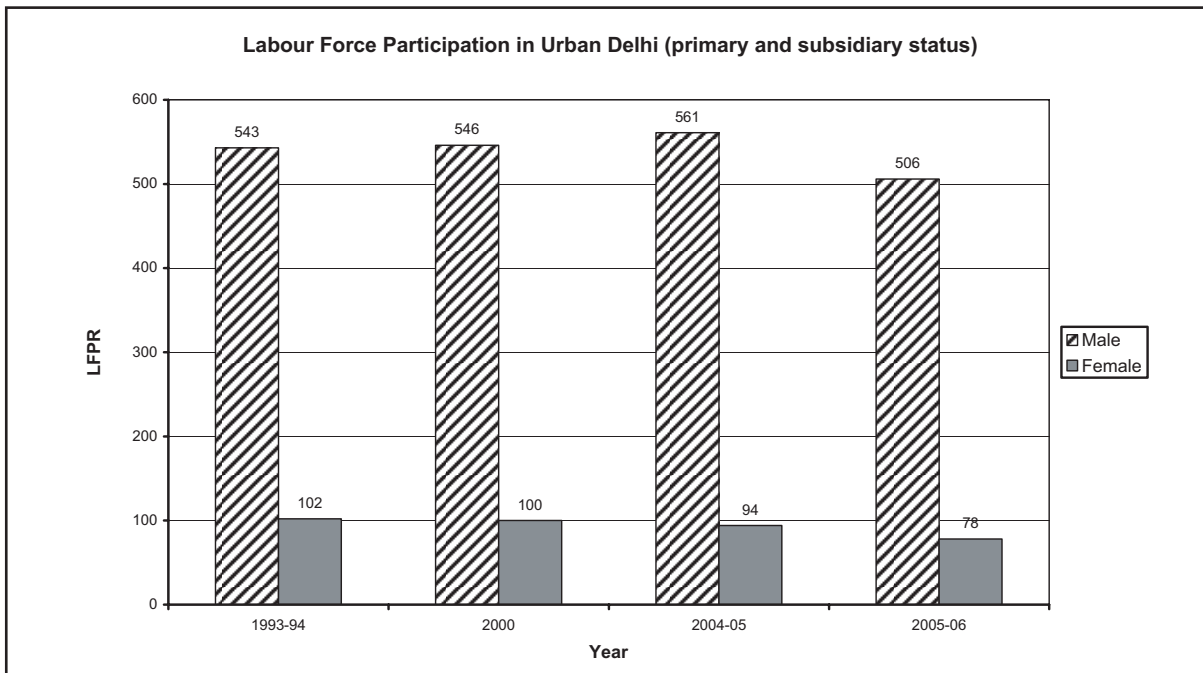
Diagram 2 Workforce participation rates: Delhi



Source: NSSO 2005

The data shows that the national urban female WFPR increased to an-all time high of 16 per cent in 2004, as a result of increased subsidiary status participation (an increase of 19 per cent) (NSSO, 2005).

Diagram 3: Labour force participation by sex in Urban Delhi (ps+ss)



Source: NSSO 2006

Data on LFPR in Delhi suggests that the state mirrors the national labour force gap. Diagram 3 shows the NSSO data on workers in different years. Comparing NSSO data from 1993-94 to 2005-06, we see that the proportion of female workers per 1,000 persons has continued to decrease. Urban female LFPR for the usual status has dropped from 102 per thousand women in 1993-94 to 78 in 2005-06 as per the NSS 62nd round.

Male labour force participation has increased steadily from 1993-94 to 2004-05. However, the recent round of data shows a sharp decline to 506 men participating in the labour force per thousand men in urban Delhi.

This data gives rise to a number of questions. For example, is there underestimation of women's work in large scale national surveys because of the nature of the participation, such as their concentration in informal or home based activity? Data reviewing the demand for women in the labour market has highlighted the growth in opportunities in smaller, informal trades and services (GOI, 2002). Evidence from a large number of micro studies further suggests that women workers continue to be partly netted in by labour force surveys because of the nature of the work that they perform, which is often home based, subcontracted, or through sources of self-employment. Women's work is also embedded in domestic activity, which creates perceptions that these activities are not to be reported as 'work'. Case studies confirm the presence of urban informal employment, which is insecure, home based, and contractual (ISST-HNSA, 2006).

In addition, there are likely impacts of supply side constraints, including women's reproductive roles, cultural sanctions, patriarchal hierarchies and aspiration related issues. It would be imperative to see if such demographic variables relating to household size and sex ratios play any role in determining female workforce participation. The roles played by the child-dependency ratio and the child-woman ratio need to be explored in the urban context, with the average household size being smaller and family structures changing towards becoming more nuclear. The average household size in Delhi has shrunk from 4.4 in 1999-2000 to 4.1 in 2004. The child-woman ratio in poor households is higher (relative to those in non-poor households) by about 28 percentage points. Any exploration of women's work has to factor in the time spent on care work and the interaction between productive and reproductive responsibilities.

Other population characteristics such as age and education structures also play a significant role. A large section of the labour force in the informal economy is possibly migrant in nature (GOI, 2002) and may be undercounted. Migration and women's work choices may be linked, as many sources of employment such as domestic work are based purely on a migrant stream of workers (Pathare, 2000).

On the demand side, increase in women's workforce participation is linked to expansion of opportunities. Over time, the behaviour of women's workforce participation is expected to reflect the impact of industrial growth: Goldin's analysis for the United States of America suggested a long run U-shaped pattern of female workforce participation over time. The thrust was on urbanization. The idea being, with accompanied demographic transition, women's participation in the labour force, which is high in rural areas, would dip initially during the transition and eventually rise in the complete urbanized context (Goldin, 1990).

Close to 94 per cent of Delhi's population resides in urban areas. The rural population as a percentage share of the total population has been decreasing for the past decades. Thus, the city serves as an excellent case study to probe the effects of urbanization, if any, on workforce participation.

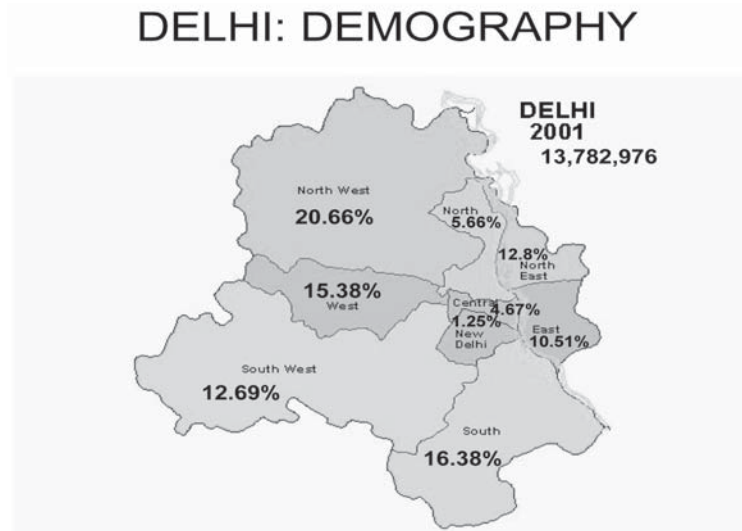
Another diagnosis offered for weak female workforce participation is the absence of preferred job opportunities due to gender biases (Das, 2006), suggesting that poor returns from the labour market,

in combination with the availability of another stable income stream through marital partners or other family members, causes women to avoid participating in the labour market.

It is the intention of this paper to attempt, through a field survey, to throw light on the level and nature of workforce participation of women in urban Delhi, and the likely role of the variables mentioned above in the observed outcomes.

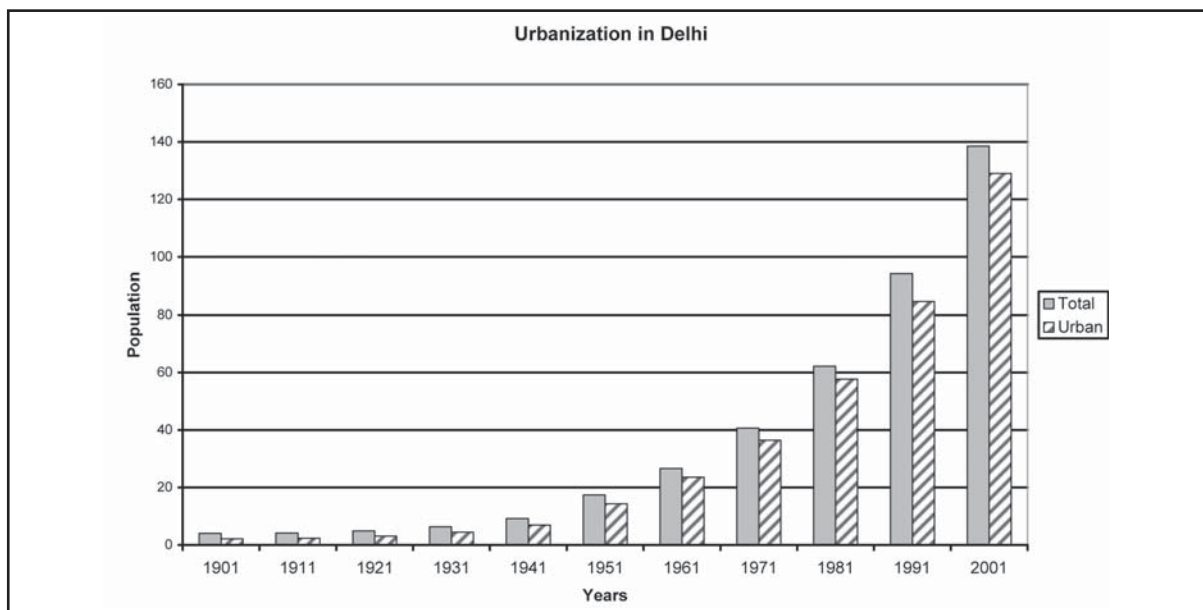
2.2 Context: The city of Delhi

Delhi is a highly urbanized city, with a population distributed across different zones as shown below in the map.



The increasing size of the population and its high degree of urbanization since the turn of the century is captured in Diagram 4.

Diagram 4: Urbanization in Delhi



Source: Delhi Economic Survey 2005

Note: population is in lakhs; 1 lakh = 0.1 million

While a majority of Delhi's population resides in established colonies and regularized localities, slum and JJ (*jhuggi-jhonpri*, or impermanent huts) clusters account for 33.8 per cent of the city's population. The distribution of population across different types of settlements is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 : Population by settlement type: Delhi 2000

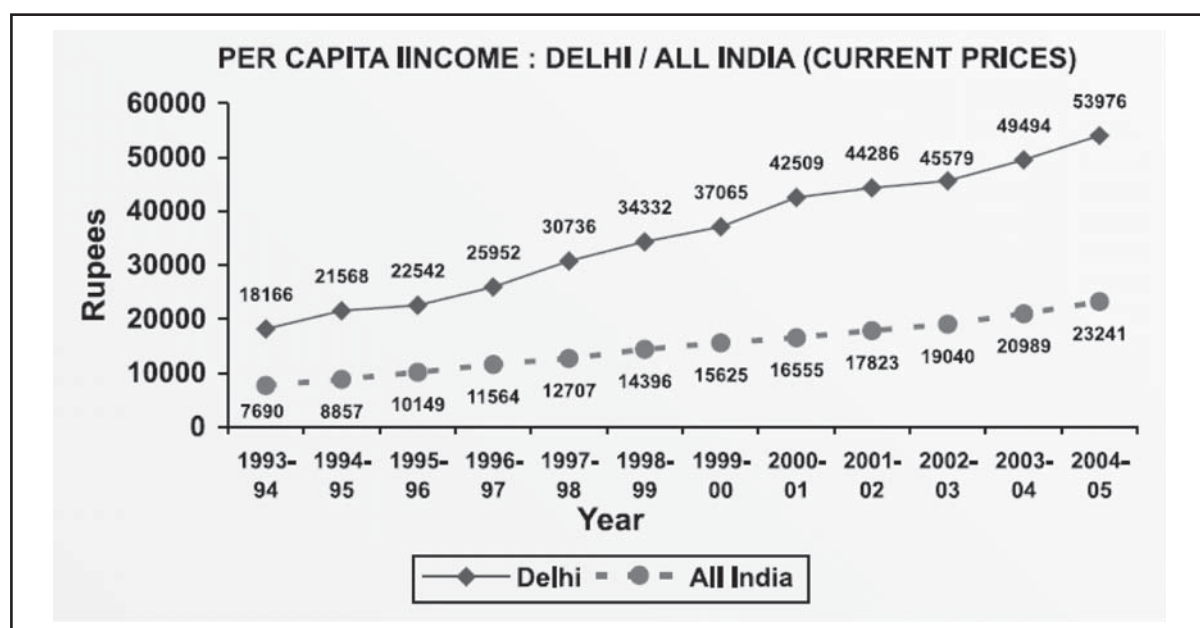
S. No.	Type of settlement	Estimated population in lakh in 2000	% of total estimated population
1	JJ clusters	20.72	14.80
2	Slum designated areas	26.64	19.10
3	Unauthorised colonies	7.40	5.30
4	JJ resettlement colonies	17.76	12.70
5	Rural villages	7.40	5.30
6	Regularised-unauthorised colonies	17.76	12.70
7	Urban villages	8.88	6.40
8	Planned colonies	33.08	23.70
	Total	139.64	100.00

Source: Delhi Economic Survey 2005

Note: 1 lakh = 0.1 million

The average level of income in Delhi is higher than in the rest of the country. As per government estimates, the annual per capita income in Delhi is Rs 53,976 in 2006. Per capita income in Delhi has been on a consistent rise and far higher than the national per capita income. Income in Delhi is ascertained to be 2.5 times that of the Indian average per capita income (Delhi Human Development Report, 2006). Diagram 5 shows the trends in income in Delhi and all over India between 1993-4 and 2004-5.

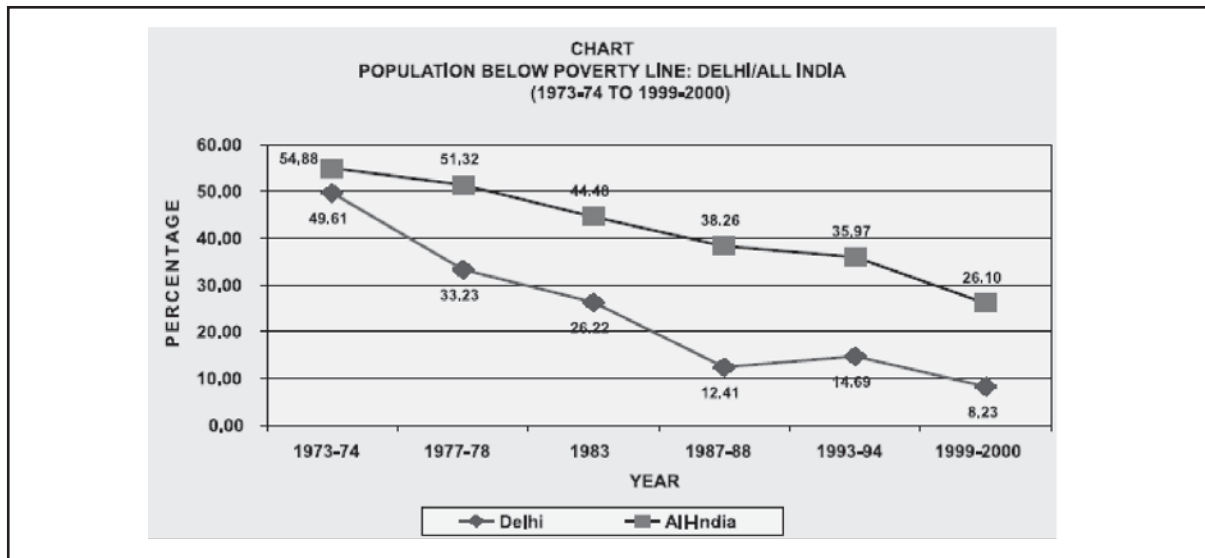
Diagram 5: Per Capita income in Delhi and All India (at current prices)



Source: Delhi Economic Survey 2005

As a result of high and rising levels of income, the poverty levels in Delhi are estimated as being below all-India numbers. The population below the poverty line has been decreasing consistently in Delhi. In monetary terms, the monthly per capita poverty line was demarcated at Rs 454.11 for urban areas in 1999-2000.¹ As of 2000, close to 8 per cent of Delhi's population lived below the poverty line. Diagram 6 shows the declining population below the poverty line, Delhi and all India, as per official data.

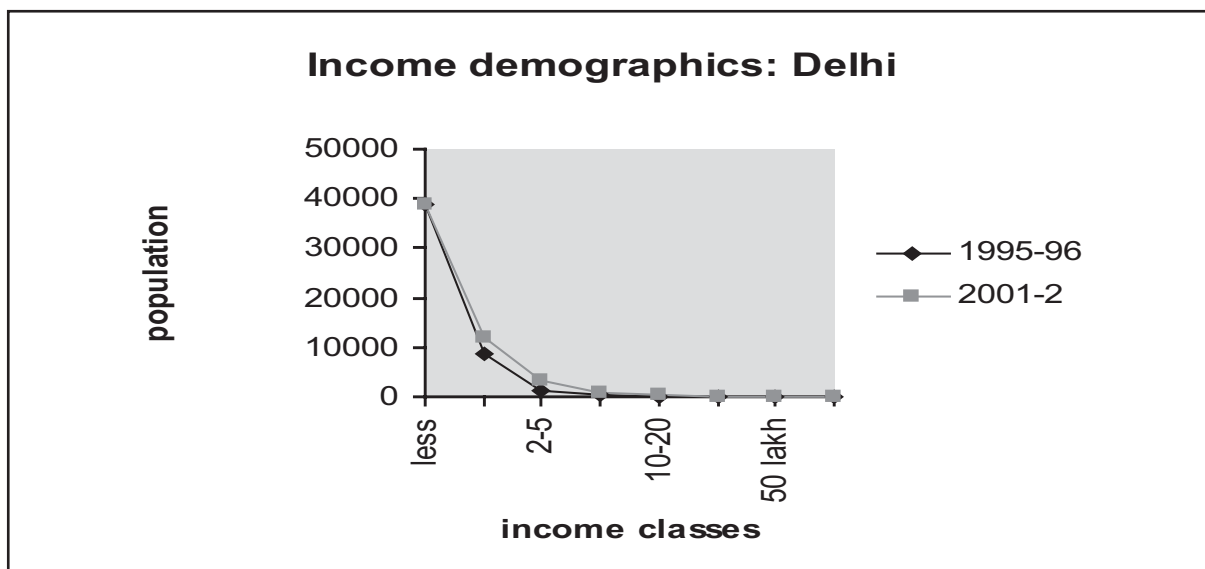
Diagram 6



Source: Delhi Economic Survey 2005

The data available from the NCAER shows the income distribution of Delhi's population and is depicted in Diagram 7.

Diagram 7 : Distribution of population by income in Delhi



Source: NCAER

¹ <http://delhiplanning.nic.in/Economic%20Survey/ES%202005-06/Chpt/21.pdf>

Thus, Delhi is witnessing increasing population, rising incomes, and rapid urbanization. It is against this backdrop that this study is placed.

3. Sample and methodology

A household survey was carried out in Delhi during a three month period between September 2006 and November 2006. The sample canvassed is a subset of a larger sample surveyed by the NCAER in 2005.

A multi-stage stratified sampling scheme was adopted at the NCAER to generate representative samples. Sample districts, villages, and households form the first, second, and third stages, respectively, for the selection of the rural sample, while cities/towns, urban blocks, and households are the three stages of selection for the urban sample. The sample size and its distribution were determined on the basis of the accuracy required and the resources available. Approximately, a sample of 63,000 households out of the preliminary listed sample of 440,000 households was spread over 1,976 villages (250 districts) and 2,255 urban wards (342 towns), covering 64 NSSO regions in 24 states and union territories. To increase accuracy and ensure adequate item response, the survey was conducted through face-to-face interviews of heads of households and members of households, using a questionnaire based approach. Non-response was reduced by conducting focus group discussions, proper training of interviewers, and supervision. Proper measures (such as good survey design, well-designed survey instruments, reliable sample frame, proper implementation of fieldwork, robust data cleaning and analysis) were undertaken to minimize sampling and non-sampling errors.

The detailed information collected by the NCAER included information on the demographic profile of households, household composition, components of household income, consumption expenditure, and relevant qualitative indicators related to the economic activities of households. An exclusive module containing aspects such as motivation for saving, reasons for saving, preferred modes of saving, investment, borrowing, household economic shocks, insurance, perception about well-being, etc., were canvassed to all sample households to measure the level of financial vulnerability. The preliminary results were validated with similar information available from other reliable sources (National Sample Survey, Census 2001, National Accounts Statistics, etc.).

Though the sample did not include slum households, in terms of income distribution, it is representative of the city of Delhi. A predominant section of the sample is drawn from the growing lower middle class of Delhi. Around 5 per cent of the sample consists of households that are below the poverty line.

The sampling methodology used implies that the survey results represent close to 15 million persons living in Delhi. The current population of Delhi is estimated to be close to 15.3 million people.² As per the 2001 data, 45 per cent of Delhi's urban population is female. The sample canvassed by ISST includes 48 per cent female and 52 per cent male share of the population. It draws from the entire geographical expanse of Delhi from the north-most location in Narela to the extreme south in Mahipalpur

² Chapter 3: Demographic profile (PDF). *Economic survey of Delhi, 2005-2006*, pp 17-31. Planning Department, Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi. Retrieved on 21 December 2006.

and Mehram Nagar. While concentrated in planned colonies and regularized areas, a few JJ resettlement colonies near Bawana have also been included.

A few areas in South and Southwest Delhi could not be covered in the ISST survey due to the restrictions imposed by residents for entry into colonies and apartment complex areas around the time period of the study. Investigators reported immense difficulty in tracing female respondents and canvassing questionnaires due to safety concerns women in Delhi face and urban work-life patterns. In certain settlement colonies, families had migrated due to the insecurity surrounding tenure and possibility of demolition. Other such areas reported problems in household identification as the pattern of addresses had undergone changes. Thus, from the target 600 households, 447 were canvassed across the 58 blocks listed for the sample.

Questionnaires were canvassed to female respondents from varying backgrounds to get an improved understanding of women's decision to join the workforce. Students from Delhi University and volunteers from the ISST community centre were trained for the purpose of the survey. Various concepts surrounding the informal economy and difficulties in measuring women's work were elaborated upon and, while the definition of work and activity status remain similar to the NSS design and usual status definition, more significance was placed on probing and acquiring a sharper insight into household work-life arrangements. Field investigators were asked to additionally note some comments based on respondents' reactions to questions and field observations during interviews.

Data has been obtained through the survey conducted by the ISST on a number of variables, including income and poverty status, migration status, education status, age, fertility and household size, and aspirations and cultural perceptions. The influence of each of these on women's decisions regarding work is discussed in the following sections.

4. Key findings: Women's workforce participation rates

4.1 Work participation rates

As per primary activity status, the survey reports 21 per cent female workforce participation. Female labour force participation is registered at 24 per cent. (See Table 2) These numbers are considerably higher than the NSSO estimates for Delhi. The main reason for the difference might be the extensive probing, use of female investigators, and the inclusion of all paid economic activities as 'work'.³ Another key cause could be the inclusion and extensive focus on home based, piece rate work and discussions with investigators on the varied forms of work in which women participate.

During the survey, investigators reported a few cases in which immense probing was required to discover the nature of women's work and earning status. The problems surrounding the perception of work appeared significant in areas where women did not consider their unpaid assistance in family run shops or businesses as work. In a few particular cases, women did not want to divulge the working details of other female members in the family, suggesting tensions regarding female activity status. Around 15 per cent of the respondents had withdrawn from the labour force.

³ Differences in WPR between national and micro surveys are common. For example, women's WPR in Punjab has been variously estimated at 4.4 per cent (1991 Census) and 28.8 per cent (NCAER, 1993). While NSS data on work participation is regarded as much more accurate than the Census, intensive probing as done here would no doubt increase the positive responses.

Table 2

Table 2.1 Female workforce and labour force participation (weighted)

Number of women in sample	7 232 287
Number of women aged 18-60	4 858 101
Number of women aged 18-60 (valid responses)	3 758 258
Number of working women aged 18-60	794 239
Total number of working women	880 924
Workforce participation	21%
Number of women looking for work/unemployed	105 710
Labour force participation	24%

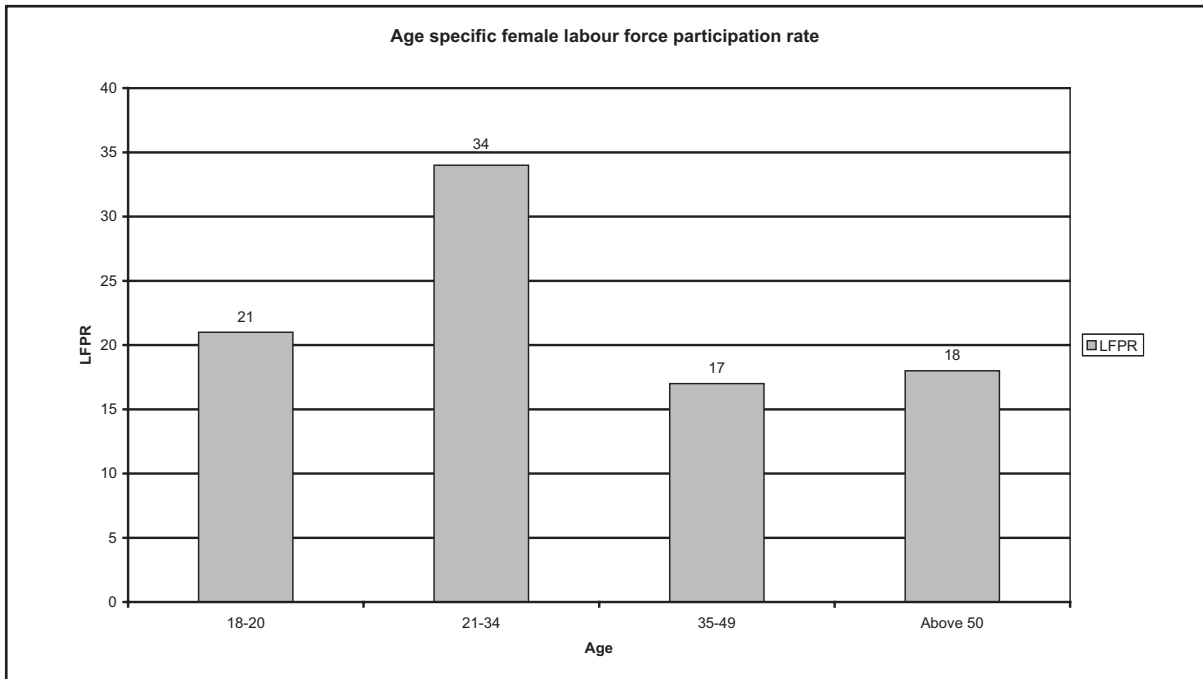
Table 2.2 Male workforce and labour force participation (weighted)

Number of men in sample	7 662 657
Number of men aged 18-60	4 900 094
Number of men aged 18-60 (valid responses)	4 049 631
Number of working men aged 18-60	3 399 137
Total number of working men	3 611 853
Workforce participation	84%
Number of men looking for work/unemployed	128 702
Labour force participation	87%

4.2 Age specific labour force participation rates for women

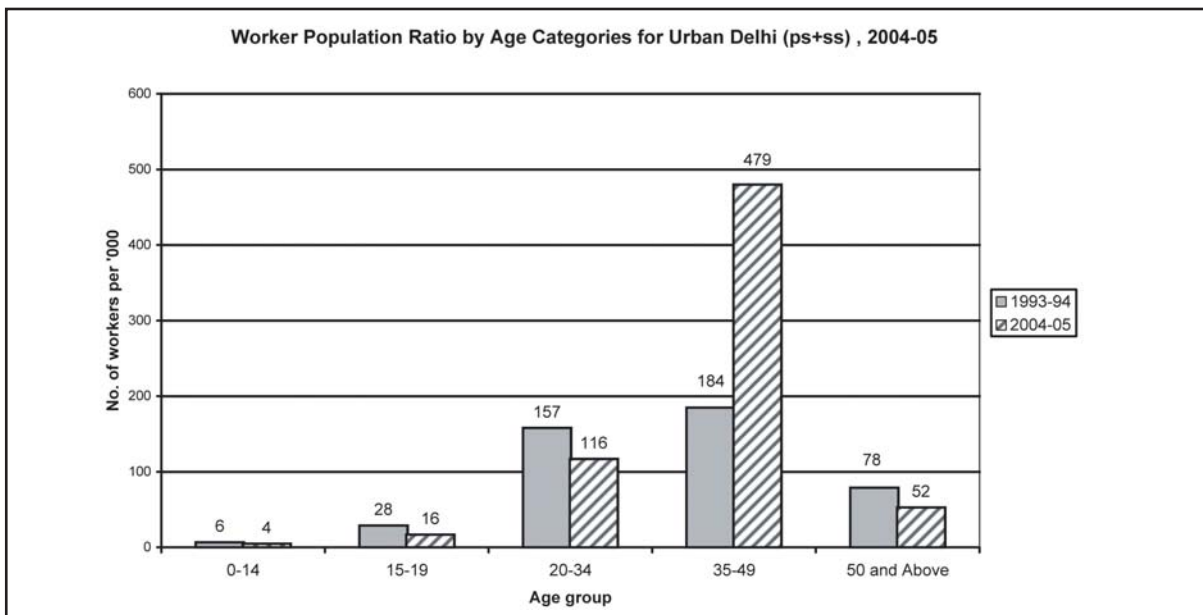
As per the survey, women in the age group of 21-34 years report close to 34 per cent labour force participation rates, which slide to 17 per cent in the 35-49 years' age group. Increasing reproductive workload could be a reason for lower participation in later years; alternatively, this may also indicate a higher propensity to work amongst the younger generation. Diagram 8 shows age specific labour force participation rates (LFPRs) as per the survey.

Diagram 8: Age specific female labour force participation rate



A comparison with the latest NSSO data (Diagram 9) for the urban female population in Delhi suggests a similar picture, with the greatest chunk of women who join the workforce being from the post-marital age group. However, the NSS data highlights women in the 35-49 years' age group as reporting the highest working population ratio in urban Delhi. This share has increased dramatically between 1993-94 and 2004-05. While 18.4% of women between the ages of 35 and 49 years were working in 1993-94, this share increased to 48% in 2004-05.

Diagram 9: Female Worker population ratio by age categories for Urban Delhi (ps+ss) 2004-05



Source: NSSO 2006

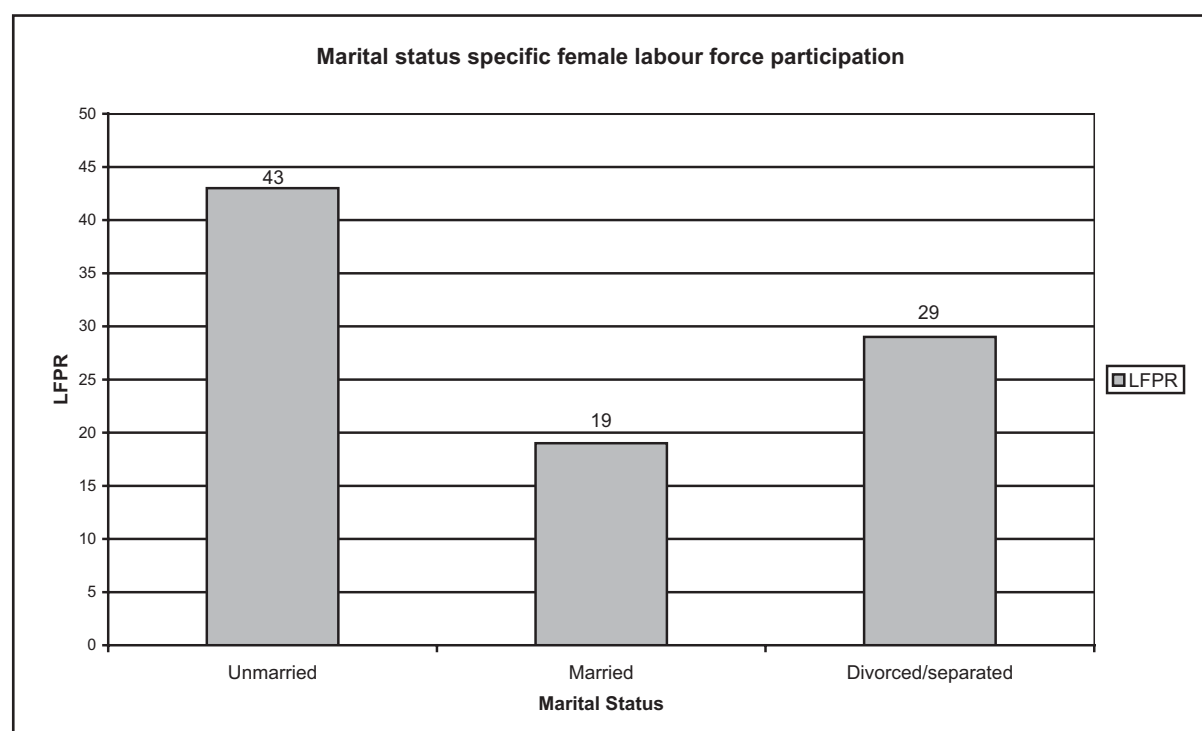
4.3 Workforce participation and marital status

Marital status has a strong connection with LFPR. The survey shows that unmarried women in the 18-60 years' age group report 43 per cent labour force participation rates. This is much higher than the national average, the Delhi average, and the urban area average. While it is difficult to assume that these women will stop working or withdraw from the workforce after marriage, the current segment of married non-working women report marginal work histories, with only 15 per cent reporting having engaged in work earlier. Table 3 and Diagram 10 show the difference in the LFPRs of married and unmarried women.

Table 3 : Marital status specific labour force participation rates

	Working/unemployed		Non-working	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Unmarried	242 077	43	315 820	57
Married	549 117	19	2 321 895	81
Divorced/separated	43 346	29	106 267	71
Total	834 540	23	2 743 982	77

Diagram 10: Marital status specific female labour force participation

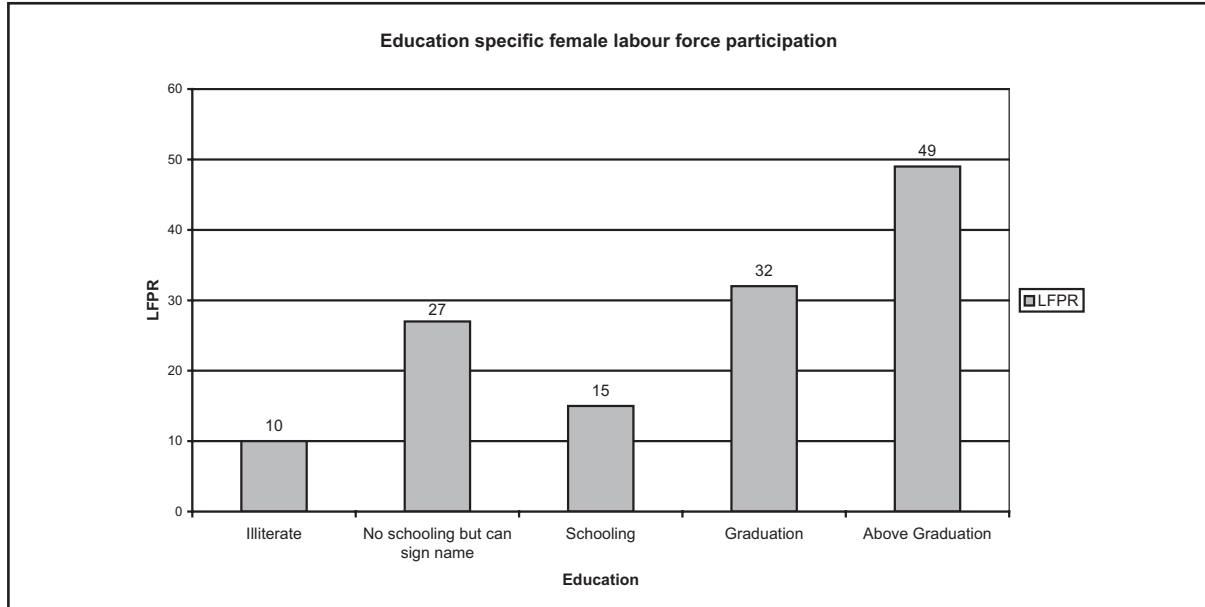


4.4 Education and workforce participation

Education emerges as a significant variable influencing women's labour force participation. As per the survey results, women's decision to work is mediated by the level at which their labour choice operates. Women with no schooling report higher labour force participation than women who have

completed schooling. Graduate women show 5 per cent higher labour force participation than the non-schooled group, among which the labour force participation rate is estimated to be close to 32 per cent. Close to half the women who are educated above graduation do join the workforce. This section reports a 49 per cent labour force participation rate. (See Diagram 11)

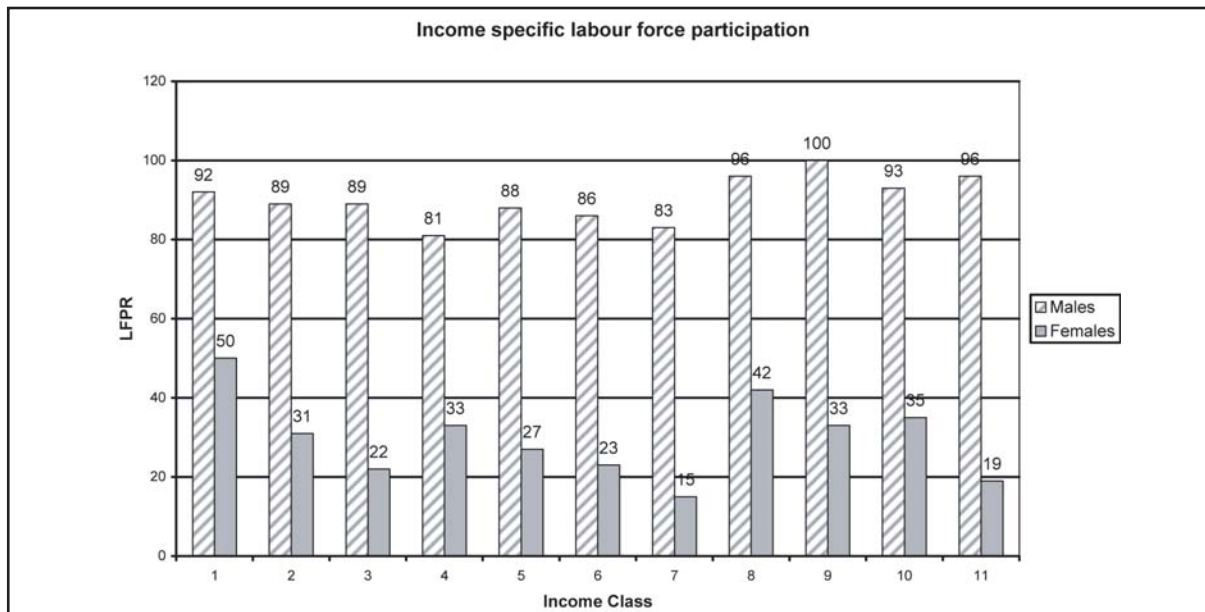
Diagram 11: Education specific female labour force participation



4.5 Household income and workforce participation

From the survey data, the effect of household income on women's workforce participation is not as clear as that of education. The highest participation levels are seen among the below poverty line (BPL) households, followed by the middle income range (annual household incomes of Rs 3.30-3.85 lakh), which reported 42 per cent working women. Diagram 12 shows how the LFP change with income.

Diagram 12: Income specific labour force participation



There is a strong relationship between income level and the education expenditure that a household can incur and this could explain the relatively higher LFPR among the upper income classes. Table 4 provides an explanation of the income class divisions used in the survey.

Table 4 : Income groups used in the survey

Income classes	Defined based on annual household income (Rs)
1.	Below BPL
2	Above BPL and less than 55,000
3	55,000-1.1 lakh
4	1.1 lakh-1.65 lakh
5	1.65 lakh -2.2 lakh
6	2.2 -2.75 lakh
7	2.75-3.3 lakh
8	3.3-3.85 lakh
9	3.85-4.4 lakh
10	4.4-4.95 lakh
11	4.95 lakh and above

Source: NCAER

Note: 1 lakh = 0.1million

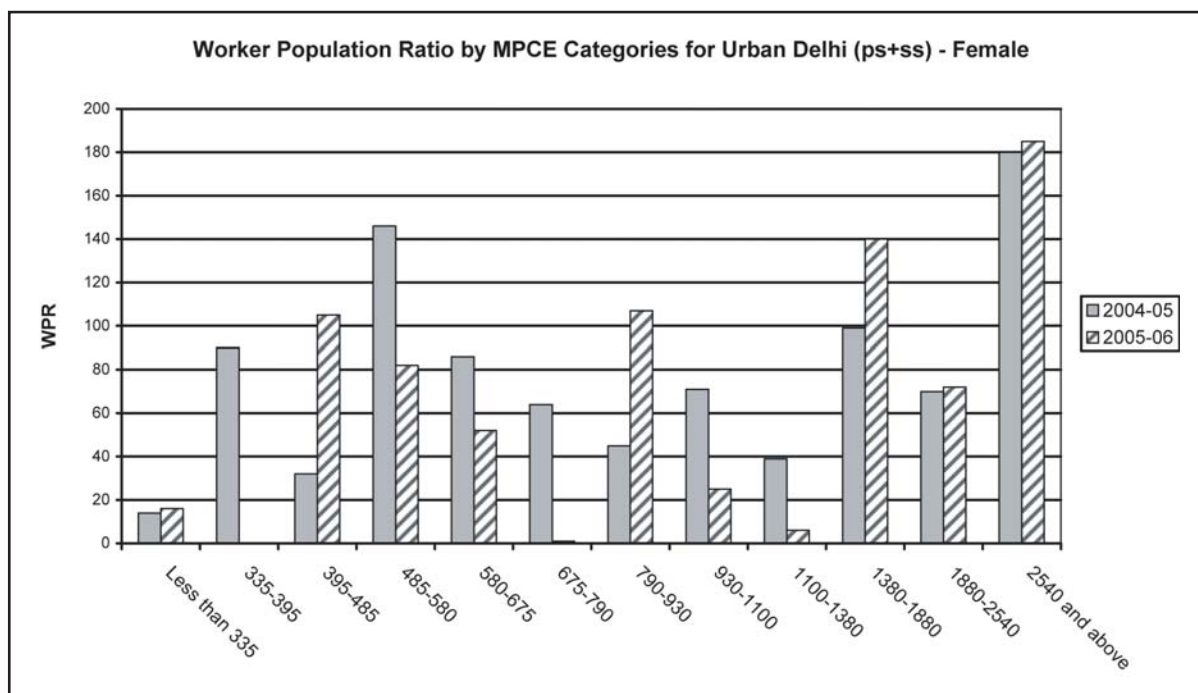
Data on poverty status was also available and it is interesting to note that the LFPR for men and women is significantly higher for BPL families than the average calculated for Delhi. As per the survey, around 50 per cent of women from these families are part of the workforce.

Labour force participation remains the same, with none registered as unemployed. The largest share, i.e., 50 per cent of women between the ages of 18 to 60 years, from below the poverty line households are housewives, while 35 per cent are engaged in regular salaried work; 15 per cent are involved in home based, piece rate work.

The LFPR for men from BPL families is 92 per cent, with 61 per cent of 18-60 year olds being engaged in regular or salaried work. Around 26 per cent are involved in casual labour, while 6 per cent are best described as 'stay at home fathers'. Thus, while male WFPRs are roughly similar across income ranges, female WFPRs are seen to marginally change within middle income ranges and to increase dramatically in poor households.

This is a contradictory picture to the one presented by the NSS. The female urban workforce participation is the highest in the upper most monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) class as per the 61st and 62nd round (Diagram 13)

Diagram 13: Number of persons employed per 1,000 persons (WFPR) according to usual status (ps+ss) in different MPCE classes - Female



Source: NSSO 2006

5. Activity status

Overall, as per activity status descriptions received through the survey, a far greater number of male members of households are engaged in paid work, while a majority of the women in the sample describe themselves as housewives. Table 5 summarizes the findings of the survey relating to the activity status of men and women.

Table 5 : Activity status of sample

Activity status	Men (%)	Women (%)
Self employed	28	4
Salaried	31	14
Home based workers	2	2
Casual labour	2	1
Unpaid family labour	0	1
Unemployed	3	2
Housewife/stay at home male	1	51
Student	25	22
Retired	6	1
Others	2	2
Total	100	100

The activity status reported is similar to the NSS data, which also highlights domestic duties as the most significant activity for women in urban Delhi (Table 6).

Table 6 : Broad Activity Status (ps+ss) for urban Delhi according to NSS

Activity Status	Men (%)	Women (%)
Self-employed	19.4	1.2
Regular Wage/Salaried	27.6	6.2
Casual Labour	2.4	0.1
Unemployed	1.2	0.3
Student	29.2	25.3
Domestic Duties	3.9	56.8
Others	16.3	10.1
Total	100	100

While the numbers of women and men who are currently students are similar, the numbers involved in household work are predominantly female.

It should be noted that 'salaried' does not imply working in formal or organized enterprises; rather, it implies a regular job with monthly payments and some degree of assurance regarding the continuation of work (for example, working as a shop assistant on a regular basis). Of the women who are working, only 28 per cent said they were entitled to provident fund cover and 38 per cent had access to paid leave. The implication is that even when they are reported as 'salaried', most women form part of the informal workforce without access to any assured social security. This is an elaboration of the results from the 2005 Delhi Economic Census,⁴ which throws light on the degree of informality in Delhi and its employment and entrepreneurial landscape. The data states that only 2.72 per cent of enterprises in urban Delhi have 10 or more workers.

6. To work or not to work: Contrasting working and non-working women

A glance at the work and life histories gathered through the survey data can enable us to further comprehend the context within which work-life choices are made by women in Delhi. The predominant role played by safety concerns and the environmental construct created by the household emerges from a comparison between working and non-working women, which is given below.

6.1 Demography and household size

Table 7 briefly compares working and non-working women.

Table 7 : Female demographics and household profile (18-60 years)

Details	Working	Non-working
Average age	36	39
Average household size	5	5
Marital status		
Unmarried (%)	18	13
Ever married (%)	82	87

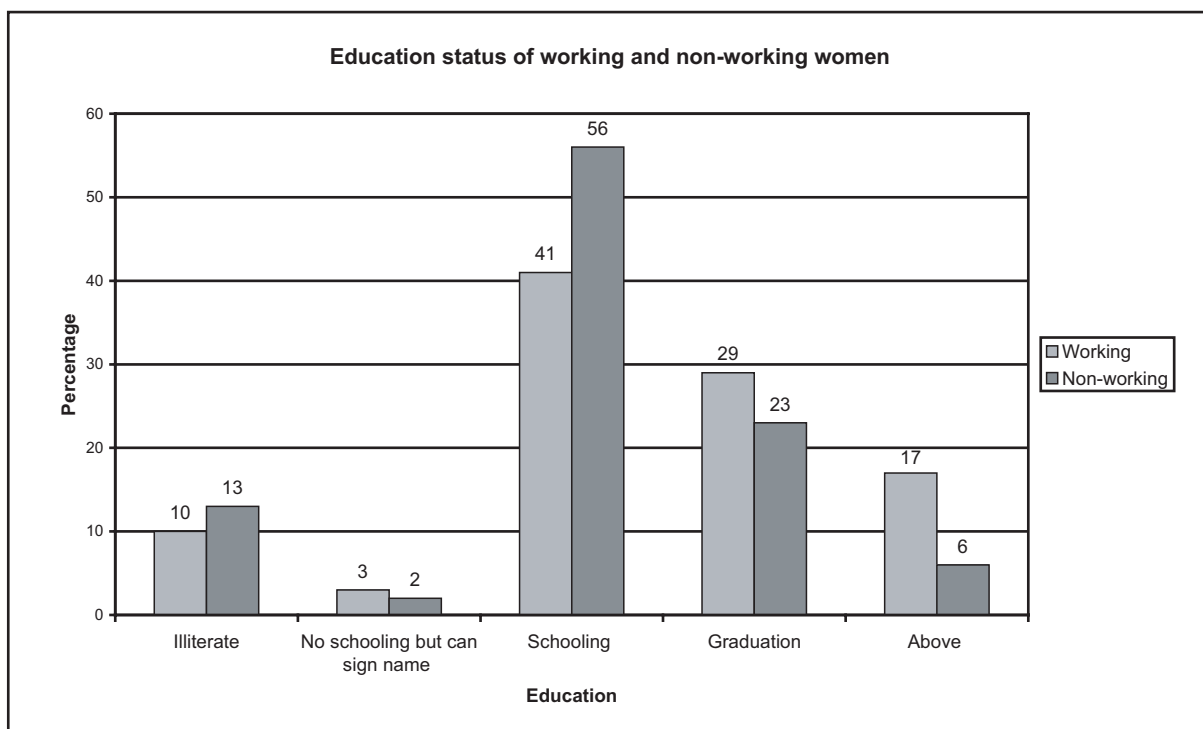
⁴ <http://des.delhigovt.nic.in/Ecensus/Report5ECProv.pdf>

In terms of demography, there are more similarities than contrasts between working and non-working women. This is true of household size and marital status as seen above. The average age of working women in the sample is 36, while the average age of non-working women is 39. The average age of non-working women, although marginally higher, does not suggest a generational shift in terms of working patterns. However, age specific workforce participation rates show that women from younger post-marital age groups⁵ possess a greater proclivity to join the workforce than their older counterparts.

Investigators also found greater willingness among younger female respondents to discuss working patterns and aspirations. To quote one non-working respondent who has a 22 year old daughter: "These days, girls work and we do not interfere. Times have changed and they had to. As long as she is happy and well."

The distribution of working and non-working women across various educational categories suggests that differences in working decisions and labour market gains become significant only for those who have pursued education above graduation. This finding strengthens the argument for greater stress on female access to higher education for genuine labour market returns to accrue within an urban context. Diagram 14 compares the educational profile of working and non-working women.

Diagram 14 - Education Status of Working and Non Working Women



An important finding while exploring linkages between education and entry into the labour force is the amelioration of anxiety and insecurity in dealing with the world of work and the 'outside' associated with lower levels of education. The following quote makes it clear: "Women who study more have seen the world. What have we seen - our home, parents, and school? Those women are better able to deal with working. I shall be unable to do so."

⁵ The mean age at marriage estimated for Delhi is 19.2 for women and 23 for men (Census 2001).

While similar proportions of women who are working and non-working are married and the average household size is the same, the role of the marital household is significant in terms of domestic democracy and household care arrangements. The next section elaborates on the roles played by reproductive workload and marriage.

6.2 Marriage and reproductive work burden

"When you marry, you can do anything your husband permits."⁶

A large section of women in both the working and non-working groups are married - 82 per cent of working women and 87 per cent of non-working women. Around 47 per cent of all respondents stated that they had quit work after marriage and childbirth.

Contrary to perception, marital status does not impose a direct bar on women's access to a working life. Rather, marital status and its associated reproductive roles mediate this access and the nature of work-life arrangements. Only 31 per cent of the working respondents had worked prior to marriage. This means that for a good 69 per cent of working women, the decision to work follows, and does not precede, marriage. Around 60 per cent of the working respondents had worked prior to childbirth, implying that as much as 40 per cent of working women decide to work only after getting married and having a child.

In the non-working respondent pool, 16 per cent had worked before marriage, and 11 per cent had worked prior to childbirth. From the segment that said they had worked prior to childbirth, 60 per cent stopped working after the birth of their child. Similarly, amongst the non-working respondents who worked prior to marriage, 57 per cent stopped work after marriage. These numbers suggest the role played by the care workload in determining the nature of the female labour market supply.

Around 53 per cent of the working respondents felt that working women should stop working when their children are young. This section supported the idea of women rejoining the workforce after their children reached a certain age. Some 54 per cent of the working respondent pool also felt that working interfered with duties such as child care.

Amidst the non-working women, only 20 per cent seek employment once again. The key decision to quit work appears to be voluntary, based on the current familial context. Some 68.5 per cent of our respondents who left working said they themselves took the decision to not work any more. Around 12 per cent of the respondents said their spouse had asked them to stop working. Most accounts of withdrawal stress the role played by household work. A common response in the survey was 'household work became too much' when investigators tried to explore the reasons for withdrawal.

Within the 15 per cent section of respondents who withdrew from the workforce, household workload is cited as the key reason by as many as 30 per cent. Household workload is related to marital status. The average hours of work for working and non-working women suggest the sheer difficulties they face in joining the labour force. Table 8 shows the average hours of work for working and non-working women.

⁶ Quote from Manju Kapur's novel, *'Home'*, 2006, Random House, p. 267.

Table 8 : Average hours of work

Working women Average hours spent on reproductive work/household duties: 5 hours Average hours spent on paid work: 6 hours Average hours spent on unpaid economic work: 4 hours (40 per cent of total working respondents said they spent time on unpaid economic work)
Non-working women Average hours spent on reproductive work/household duties: 7 hours

This table suggests a normal working day of 11-15 hours for women in the workforce. Such long hours of work and the reflected domestic responsibilities shouldered by women are a crucial variable influencing work-life choices. Thus, the higher workforce participation rate amongst unmarried women is indicative of women's reproductive work and its significance in determining female labour supply.

Within the realm of reproductive work, it is interesting to note that both reproductive and market oriented work form part of the domestic workload that women manage.

The concept of unpaid economic work needs elaboration at this point. This is defined as any engagement with an economic activity for which no payment is received. A significant section of women who cited being engaged in unpaid economic work were those who helped other family members in family run enterprises such as grocery shops or communication centres.

Some 56 per cent of our survey respondents stated that they helped their household members in economic activities. These ranged from cleaning the shop space to dealing with customers during the other member's absence. Kamini Devi, a housewife, said cleaning her husband's electronics shop was part and parcel of her domestic duties. In reply to the investigators' queries about her working patterns and engagement in unpaid economic work, she highlighted the significance of perceptions surrounding household roles in deciphering 'work': "You asked me what I did and I said I am a housewife. What work do I do other than taking care of the family? Now you ask me what work I do in a day and I tell you that I clean his shop... does that make much difference... I am at home and that's all I do."

Amongst non-working respondents, the fact that children and housework need more time was cited by a majority of 34 per cent as the key reason for stopping work. This was followed by illness, which was reported by 13 per cent of the section. Two causes tied as the third most cited for leaving work: migration and low earnings. It is interesting to note that within the group of women who withdrew from the workforce, none worked as casual labourers. The major sector from which withdrawal was observed is the regular salaried workforce. A further break-up of respondents who have withdrawn from the workforce will provide more insights.

6.3 Withdrawal

As per usual status, close to 15 per cent of the respondents reported withdrawal. This percentage is higher for married women. Some 23 per cent of this section withdrew from self-employment. One recurring instance of this was of women who conducted tuitions from their natal home deciding to stop after marriage. Other instances were of women who traded in goods such as clothing items, who felt no need to continue with the task of running a business. One of our respondents in such a situation

said: "The business was doing well and I managed on my own. It was small and had a few loyal customers, but once I moved, it was too difficult to continue with such work."

Around 47 per cent of such withdrawals took place from regular salaried work. A further 22 per cent withdrew from home based, piece rate work.

6.4 Labour mobility

Changing work-life patterns amongst the working section of the respondent pool were registered and explored during the survey. Labour market mobility was a key feature cited by the 59 women amongst the respondents who said that they had changed their working pattern in terms of occupation or place of work. Table 9 summarizes the reasons for a change in job.

Table 9 : Reasons for change of job

Causes for change	Percentage
Better opportunity was available	24
Children and housework needed more time	17
Very low earnings	17
Distance from work	14
Illness	7
Irregular wage payment	5
Children and housework needed less time	5
Migration	3
Lost previous job	3
Other	5

Amongst the respondent pool, close to 51 per cent of the working women interviewed said they had changed their work pattern in terms of their activity status or place of work in the past. It is interesting to note that the primary push for such change appears to be the perceived 'better opportunity' in the new workplace or status. During the survey, 24 per cent cite this as the key cause for change.

The accounts of some women stress the deconstruction of this term, not merely defining 'better opportunity' in terms of income and monetary benefit, but also in terms of flexibility to deal with household work and reproductive responsibilities. Some 22 per cent of this sample suggests that the nature of earnings, either in pure unit value and/or the frequency of payment, caused them to look for other forms of work. Finally, 17 per cent said that household work and child care caused them to adjust their work patterns to suit their domestic duties. Infrastructure, combined with such housework, can be seen as a key reason for 14 per cent of the women citing 'distance from residence to place of work' as a reason to change their work pattern.

6.5 Contribution

Amongst the 115 working respondents interviewed, 22 per cent stated that they are the primary earners for their households. In many cases, employment problems associated with the male members

of the family or retirement have created this situation. For the majority 78 per cent respondents who were working, the income earned from their work was not seen as accruing to their household's primary income. Table 10 summarizes this.

Table 10 : Contribution of women to household income

Significance	Percentage
My household cannot survive without my income	23
My household would manage with some difficulty if I did not work, but I work to be more comfortable	42
My household does not need me to work. I prefer to work for other reasons	35

6.6 Tensions and violence

Only 10 women amongst the respondent pool reported increase in household tensions after they started working. However, once asked about other known families, close to half the respondents said they had heard of conflict in other families due to women working.

Worrisome signs were reported by several female investigators during the survey. One investigator witnessed wife beating and another observed visible signs of physical abuse. The former case was that of a working woman and her unemployed husband. Issues relating to masculinity and women's work, though complex, have an integral role to play in the reporting and repercussions of women's work.

6.7 Obstacles to joining work

Around 68 per cent of non-working women had to consult somebody in their family before starting to work. Hence, they also cite familial objections as the key obstacle in joining the workforce. For working and non-working women, one of the key hurdles cited in joining the workforce is the pre-existing workload relating to household chores. In Delhi, with its high reporting of crime against women, it is not surprising to find that mobility and safety concerns are the second most frequently cited hurdle for working women. Table 11 shows the reasons given for not being able to work.

Table 11 : Reasons for not working

Responses	Working	Non-working
Information scarce/lack of job opportunities	27	17
Familial objection	9	25
Mobility and safety	27	13
Violence at home	3	3
Workload is too much	33	25

6.8 Perspectives on work

In terms of perception, neglecting children and conflict over domestic chores emerged as the two most negative aspects attributed to joining the workforce for both working and non-working women.

Economic security and greater experience and knowledge alongside strengthened personality were cited as the three most positive attributes of working by both working and non-working women. (Table 12, 13)

Table 12 : Positive changes with work

Positive changes	Working	Non-working
Stronger personality	22	20
More experience and knowledge	28	26
More economic security	31	34
Enlarged social network	15	12

Table 13 : Negative changes with work

Negative changes	Working	Non-working
Conflict over domestic chores	20	19
Children get neglected	29	36
Loss of family status	6	12
Conflict over earnings	4	6
Bad example for female relatives	2	3
Threat to joint family system	7	8

7. Concluding comments

The survey of women's work in Delhi throws light on several issues relating to work and well-being concerns.

As far as methodology is concerned, the fact that participation rates as recorded in this survey are substantially higher than those recorded by the NSSO, suggests that undercounting and perception bias can be overcome through intensive probing as was done here.

A majority of working women are part of regular salaried workers and thus their contributions are visible and perceived as contributions. Most women who work value this contribution to the household. 23 per cent said the household could not survive without their income and another 42 per cent said it would manage with some difficulty. This is an interesting pattern to follow in a context where women have historically not been viewed as economic actors within a household.

On the supply side, reproductive work and domestic roles prove to be significant variables in influencing female labour force participation. Working women spend five hours on an average per day on housework/child care in addition to six hours on paid work; where unpaid work is also being done, this adds on another four hours. Women who are not working spend an average of seven hours in housework and care work. The time spent on care work is high, and working women are not able to

reduce their home responsibilities very much. Maintaining work-life balance is a key issue in understanding the well-being implications of women's work. Long hours and the resultant strain cause deeper psychosocial tensions for women, which is an important dimension to explore further in terms of the repercussions of workforce participation.

In our sample, the age specific labourforce participation between 25 and 38 years is higher than at all other ages. This could be a cohort effect, indicating an upward shift in the LFPR. The LFPR for married women - 19 per cent - is substantially below that of unmarried women at 43 per cent. At the same time, 69 per cent of working women did not work prior to marriage, so implicitly, the consent and encouragement of the spouse appears to be critical in the decision to work. Further, the WFPR for those with no schooling, but who could sign their name, was much higher than for the illiterate. However, the LFPR falls with some schooling, presumably reflecting a 'sanskritization' effect. With education above graduation, there is a substantial increase.

The relation of income with LFPR is not clear. A tendency towards an initial fall in WFPR and then increase is just discernible. The highest LFPR for women is for those from households below the poverty line, followed by those in the income range of Rs 3.30-3.85 lakh per annum. This could possibly reflect the impact of both higher levels of education, higher aspirations, and the ability to make arrangements for housework/child care in the mother's absence.

A key finding is that most working women do not have access to paid leave or provident fund. This reflects the informal structures within which women work.

Looking at the perceptions as well as the data, it appears that women's work contributes to economic security, a stronger personality, and experience and knowledge. Very few women reported increased tensions within the household as a result of their working outside, although a much larger number stated that they were aware of such effects. But a high workload is experienced and this is a negative aspect. Apart from family objections and lack of information, mobility and safety concerns were cited by both working and non-working women as a barrier.

The fact that working and non-working women alike felt that children get neglected is more complex, suggesting the absence of acceptable alternatives for child care. Another clear way of improving the well-being of working women does emerge: safety in movement around the city and access to safe transport. Thus, the key factors that may push up women's workforce participation rates appear to be higher education, reduction in time spent on housework (domestic technology, water and electricity, child care arrangements), and safety in public spaces (transport, lighting).

In an increasingly urbanizing context where cash incomes are paramount, women's work may become an integral component of future household livelihood strategies. Further, the changing tone and tenor of youthful aspirations may create a greater willingness and desire on the part of the younger female generation to join the workforce. The survey stresses that issues relating to household care arrangements and public space, which are primarily dealing with the external environment beyond the work space and labour market, emerge as key variables in unravelling the complicated texture of Delhi's female labour force.

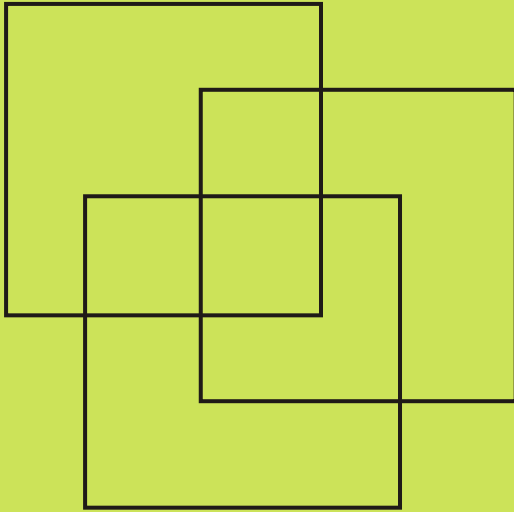
Women's role within the household in the context of rapid urbanization is changing. The study imposes the need to understand this changing context within which labour market decisions are made and explore the dominant role of family and kinship structures to determine women's work-life choices. While kinship studies were once described as a "nasty medicine: to be taken and endured in the hope that it will do some good",⁷ to understand the nature and nurture of the female labour force will require labour market analysis to infuse such sociological narratives.

⁷ P. Uberoi, 1993, *Family kinship and marriage in India*, Introduction, p. 1.

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