



A Study on Female Workforce Participation in Assam

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Abstract:

Female workforce participation plays a significant role in a country reflecting the status of females. The workforce refers to those persons who are actually engaged in work, whereas the labour force includes those who are actually engaged in economic activity, as well as those who want to do work. The Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) is the proportion of women in the working-age population (age 15 years and above) who are either employed or actively seeking employment. It shows women's participation in the workforce and serves as a key indicator of gender inclusivity in economic activities. The study is an attempt to know the extent and pattern of male and female labour force participation in Assam, to study the level of female workforce participation in Assam in reference to the national average, and to know the causes of low female force participation in Assam. The study is descriptive in nature based on secondary data collected from Government publications, Socio-Economic Survey of Assam, Research articles, websites, etc.

Keywords: workforce, labour force, women participation, etc.

1. Introduction:

The labor force indicates the population of the age group sixteen and sixty who are employed or unemployed or seeking employment. It is nothing but the addition of employed and unemployed. It represents available labor in the economy. Labour force includes both males as well as females. Like males, females also actively participate in economic and non-economic activities. Economic activity may be classified as both organized and unorganized, which may be formal or informal sector. Participation of women in economic activities of formal sectors of industries, services, and agriculture can be measured. But women's participation in informal sectors like housework, training and education of children, activities in the agricultural sector, household services, etc. are still not measured. In the last few years, India has experienced a positive trend in

female workforce participation, with a significant increase in both the Worker Population Ratio(WPR) and Labour Force Participation Rate(LFPR). Female Labour Force Participation Rate(FLFPR) is the proportion of women in the working-age population(age 15 years and above) who are either employed or actively seeking employment. It shows women's participation in the workforce and serves as a key indicator of gender inclusivity in economic activities. The female labour force participation rate in India has risen from 24.5 percent in 2018-19 to 37 percent in 2022-23. States like Assam, Bihar, Haryana, and Delhi have FLFPR below 25 percent reflecting significant gaps in workforce participation. As per the World Bank, India's FLFPR stands at approximately 25-35 percent, lower than the global average of 50 percent. In Assam, there is a significant gap in the case of workforce participation, with males occupying 71.35 percent and females 28.64 percent.

Significance of enhancing female Labor Force Participation:

An increase in female labour force participation plays a significant role in the economy. It can be stated as below;

a. Economic growth:

An increase in female labour force participation increases the income of the female and helps accelerate the rate of growth of the economy.

b. Poverty Alleviation:

By increasing the income of the female, female labour force participation helps in alleviating poverty.

c. Sustainable Growth;

By reducing poverty, female labour force participation helps in attaining gender equality, reduces inequality, and thus helps in attaining sustainable growth.

d. Socio-economic upliftment:

Participation of women in labour force empowers them economically, enhances their self-confidence, helps them to take an active role in family decisions including family planning, improves the health of women, and reduces infant mortality rate and maternal mortality rates.

2. Objectives:

The study is based on objectives like

- a. To study the extent and pattern of male and female labour force participation in Assam
- b. To study the level of female workforce participation in Assam with respect to the national average
- c. To know the causes of low female force participation in Assam
- d. To study the measures taken by the Government of India to enhance female labour force participation

3. Methodology:

The study is descriptive in nature based on secondary data collected from Government publications, the Socio-Economic Survey of Assam, Research articles, websites, etc.

4. Discussion and Analysis:

4.1. Extent and Pattern of male and female labor force participation in Assam:

4.1.1 Female Labour Force Participation in Assam:

Assam being the second largest state in the North East in terms of both population and area has a population of 31, 205, 576 according to the population census 2011 with 15,939,443 males and 15,266,133 females with a female literacy rate of 66.27 percent and an overall literacy rate 73.18 percent. The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) refers to the percentage of persons in the labour force among the persons in the population. The Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) is the percentage of women ages 15 years and above who are either employed or actively seeking employment. It is the ratio of the number of women who are a part of the labour force to the number of women of working age (greater than 15 years of age).

Table-1: Female Labour Force Participation Rate(in percent)

In Usual Status (ps+ss) from 2021-22 to 2023-24,

(Age group 15 years and above)

(fig. in percentage)

Year	Rural		Urban		Total=Rural +Urban	
	Assam	India	Assam	India	Assam	India
2021-22	29.0	36.6	22.5	23.8	28.2	32.8
2022-23	19.80	41.5	29.0	25.4	20.3	37.0
2023-24	52.8	47.6	31.5	28.0	50.2	41.7

Source: Economic Survey Assam 2024-25

Table 1 reflects a good sign of the female labour force participation rate of both Assam and India. The figure reflects that the female labour force participation rate has increased in Assam from 29.0 percent in 2021-22 to 52.8 percent in 2023-24. In 2023-24 the state FLFPR(52.8 percent) exceeds the national FLFPR(47.6 percent). Similarly, urban FLFPR of Assam has also increased from 22.5 percent in 2021-22 to 31.5 percent in 2023-24. At the national level also urban FLFPR has increased from 23.8 percent in 2020-21 to 28.0 percent in 2023-24. In 2021-22 and 2023-24, rural female labour force participation rate of Assam exceeds the urban rate but in 2022-23, urban female labour force participation rate of Assam exceeds the rural rate. It is seen in the figure that the total (rural+urban) female labour force participation rate of Assam and India has increased from 2021-22 to 2023-24 with a slight decrease in 2022-23. In 2023-24 total (rural+urban) female labour force participation rate of Assam(50.2 percent) exceeds that of India(41.7 percent). But in 2021-22 and 2022-23 total (rural+urban) female labour force participation rate of India exceeds that of Assam.

4.1.2 Worker Population Ratio (WPR):

The worker population ratio, the major estimate of employed persons denotes the percentage of persons employed among persons in the population. It is expressed in percentages reflecting the ratio of total number of workers to the total population in a country. It represents the employment scenario of a country reflecting the proportion of people engaged in productive activities and lower WPR showing lower engagement of people. Higher WPR accelerates the growth rate of the economy and increases the rate of employment. Table 2 shows the WPR for both rural and urban areas of Assam from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

Table-2: Worker Population Ratio (rural+urban) in Assam in usual status (ps+ss) since 2021-22 to 2023-24

(Age group 15 years and above) (Fig. in percentage)

Year	Male	Female
2021-22	76.8	26.8
2022-23	88.9	19.6
2023-24	80.29	48.10

Source: Economic Survey Assam 2024-25

The data of Table 2 states that Assam is poorer in the case of the female worker population ratio. The male WPR of Assam was highest in 2022-23, 88.5 percent among the studied years while the female WPR was highest in 2023-24 i.e.48.10 percent. Though in the studied years female participation has increased but still the ratio is lower than the male WPR. It witnesses a very poor worker population ratio of women as compared to men.

Table 3 represents the female worker population ratio of Assam and India from 2021-21 to 2023-24.

Table 3: Female worker population ratio of Assam and India from 2021-22 to 2023-24 in usual status (ps+ss)

(Age group 15 years and above) (fig. in percentage)

Year	Female worker population ratio of Assam	Male worker population ratio of Assam	Female worker population ratio in India	Male worker population ratio of India
2021-22	26.8	76.8	31.7	73.4
2022-23	19.6	88.9	35.9	76.0
2023-24	48.10	80.29	40.3	76.3

Source: Economic Survey Assam 2024-25

Comparing the WPR of the state with the national level it is clear that, the female participation ratio of Assam is lower as compared to the national percentage in 2021-22 and 2022-23. But in 2023-24 the female WPR of Assam (48.10 percent) is greater than the national level(40.3 percent). It is also seen in the table that the difference between female WPR and male WPR of Assam is 50.0 percent in 2021-22 as compared to the national percentage of 41.7 percent. In 2022-23 the difference between female WPR and male WPR is 69.3 percent of Assam and 36.0 percent in the case of India. In 2023-24, the difference between female WPR and male WPR of Assam is 23.0 percent and for India, it is 36.0 percent.

Table 4 reflects the gender-wise worker population ratio both in rural and urban areas of Assam from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

Table 4: Worker Population Ratio (Rural+Urban) in Assam from 2021-22 to 2023-24 in usual status (ps+ss)

(Age group 15 years and above) (fig. in percentage)

Year	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	female
2021-22	77.6	27.9	70.1	18.1
2022-23	77.6	19.3	72.9	25.3
2023-24	80.80	50.90	75.40	27.80

Source: Economic Survey Assam 2024-25

It is seen in the table that there is a difference in female participation rate in the three years. In 2021-22 and 2023-24, the rural female WPR of Assam exceeds the urban female WPR. But in 2022-23, the urban female participation rate (25.3 percent) exceeds female rural WPR (19.3 percent).

4.2: Female workforce participation in Assam with respect to the national average:

Female Worker Population Ratio:

The female worker population ratio indicates the percentage of females employed among the female population. Table 5 shows the female worker ratio of Assam in rural and urban areas.

Table 5: Female worker population ratio of Assam in rural and urban areas in usual status (ps+ss)

(Age group 15 years and above) (Fig. in percentage)

Year	Rural female worker population ratio	Urban female worker population ratio
2021-22	27.9	18.1
2022-23	19.3	25.3
2023-24	50.90	27.80

Source: Economic Survey Assam 2024-25

Table 5 shows the differences of the female worker population ratio in Assam in both rural and urban areas. In rural areas, the female worker population ratio in Assam has increased from 27.9 percent in 2021-22 to 50.90 in 2023-24, but in 2022-23 it has decreased to 19.3 percent. In urban areas, female worker participation has increased from 18.1 percent in 2021-22 to 27.80 percent in 2023-24. It is observed that there is better participation of female workers in the studied years of urban areas. However, the rate of female worker participation is comparatively better in rural areas of Assam as compared to urban areas.

Table-6: Female worker population ratio both in rural and urban areas of Assam and India in usual status (ps+ss)

(Age group 15 years and above)

(Fig. in percentage)

Year	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Assam	India	Assam	India	Assam	India
2021-22	27.9	35.8	18.1	21.9	26.8	31.7
2022-23	19.3	40.7	25.3	23.5	19.6	35.9
2023-24	50.90	46.50	27.80	26.00	48.1	40.3

Source: Economic Survey Assam 2024-25

The data shows that India's female worker population ratio in rural areas has increased from 35.8 percent in 2021-22 to 40.7 percent in 2022-23. But as compared to the national level, the female worker population ratio of Assam has decreased from 27.9 percent in 2021-22 to 19.3 percent in 2022-23 which is very discouraging. But from 2022-23 to 2023-24 the female WPR of both Assam and India has increased. In the study period, female WPR in urban areas of both the state and the nation has increased. The data of Table 6 reflects that the female WPR for Assam is discouraging in 2021-22 and 2022-23, particularly in 2022-23(19.6 percent) it becomes negative but in 2023-24 it has increased to 48.1 percent. At the national level, female WPR is quite encouraging as it has increased from 31.7 percent in 2021-22 to 40.3 percent in 2023-24.

The increase in female WPR indicates that female participation in productive activity in Assam has increased, a good sign for the economy of the state. It will enhance the economic empowerment of women as well as uplift the socio-economic condition of the economy.

4.3: Causes of low female labour force participation in Assam:

1. Family barrier:

After marriage, most women have to remain busy with their household duties, caring for children, and family members which limits their workforce participation.

2. Influence of the informal sector:

Most of the working women are employed in the informal sector, which has no job security as well as the social benefit that hampers labour force participation.

3. Limited Job Opportunities:

Women have fewer job opportunities in manufacturing and service sectors which hamper female labour force participation.

4. Gender Pay gap:

Women earn significantly less than men contributing to low labour force participation.

5. Safety Concern:

Women do not want to work in high-risk professions and night shifts due to safety reasons. They also do not prefer to work for longer periods.

6. Educated Unemployment:

In spite of high education levels, women are not getting job opportunities due to a mismatch of education qualifications and job opportunities.

4.4: Steps Taken by the Government of India to Strengthen Female Labour Participation Rate in India:

1. Maternity Benefit(Amendment) Act 2017

The Government has passed the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017 which increased paid maternity leave to 26 weeks giving the mothers more time to take care of their children. It has also provided crèche facilities for large establishments.

2. Anganwadi Centres Under ICDS:

Integrated Child Development Services(ICDS), a centrally sponsored scheme was started in 1975 for holistic development of children and empowerment of mothers. The scheme is run through Anganwadi Centres and provides a safe environment to support women in returning to the workforce. It provides food, preschool education, and primary healthcare to children under 6 years of age and their mothers.

3. National Food Security Act(NFSA) 2013:

National Food Security Act(NFSA) 2013 provides maternity benefits of not less than Rs.6000 to pregnant women and lactating mothers to alleviate the pressure of early re-entry to work.

4. Stand Up India Scheme:

The Government of India has initiated the Stand Up India Scheme to promote entrepreneurship among women in manufacturing, services, trading, and agricultural-related sectors and provides bank loans from Rs. 10 lakh to Rs. 1 crore for women entrepreneurs.

5. Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013:

The Act protects women from sexual harassment in the workplace. The Act mandates that employers form Internal Committees (ICs) to handle complaints and provides a framework for investigation, redressal, and penalties.

6. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme(MGNREGS):

MGNREGS has been implemented since 2006, the scheme guarantees that one-half of the jobs under MGNREGS must be available to women and it aims to enhance livelihood security for rural women.

7. Factories Act,1948 (Night Shift Provision);

The Act restricted women from working in factories between 7 pm to 6 am. But this ban has been relaxed and now women are allowed to work during night shifts if certain conditions are met.

8. Mahila Shakti Kendra(MSK);

The Mahila Shakti Kendra was launched in November 2017, a centrally sponsored scheme, to empower rural women through skill development and employment opportunities. It focuses on uplifting and empowering women by providing resources and support for their development.

9. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh(RMK):

Rashtriya Mahila Kosh(National Credit Fund for Women) was established by the Government of India in 1993 to provide micro-credit for lower income group women so that they can start small businesses and become economically independent.

10. She-Box:

She-Box, an online platform has been created which provides access to every woman regardless of her work status, to register a complaint related to workplace sexual harassment.

11. Child Care Leave:

The Government has granted up to 730 days of childcare leave to female employees to take care of their minor children, attending their needs(illness and examination), and other care-related reasons.

5: Suggestions to improve Female Work participation in Assam:

1. Steps should be taken for the empowerment of women by increasing their education level and skill enhancement at all levels.
2. Some basic facilities like the provision of toilets, a safe work environment, provision of maternity support facilities should be given to the female workers.
3. There must be subsidized child care and crèche facilities near work areas to boost participation in women's workforce. Worksite crèches should be set up to help mothers and children.
4. The Government should invest in vocational and training institutions so that it increases the skills of women and helps them in getting job opportunities.
5. Steps should be taken by the government to strengthen the Self-Help Groups(SHG) so that the SHGs play an important role in the economic empowerment of women.
6. Attitudes and perceptions of people regarding female workers should be changed, and there should not be any discrimination against male and female workers.
7. People should be made aware of the effects of women's empowerment which helps in the socio-economic upliftment of people.
8. The government should take different policies to attract women to the work culture.

6. Conclusion:

For the development of an economy, and to increase the standard of living, both males and females should actively participate in the production process. Participation of females in the workforce increases the income of the family, which empowers the family to make sound economic decisions. As the female participation rate both in rural and urban areas is low in Assam as well as in India, special steps should be taken to increase the rate. Economic empowerment of women, safety and equal opportunities for women will lead to increased women participation in the workforce as well as women's development.

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