

# Chapter 6

## Conclusions



## **6.1. Introduction**

The study on “women’s work in urban India: A case study of live-out domestic workers” was set out to explore the complexities involved in understanding the women’s work, their decision to participate in the labour market or remaining at home, the constraints they face while entering the world of work, their entry into stereotypical occupations, the discrimination at the workplace, the differential wages, more probability of ending up in the low-productive and low-paid informal activities, lack of skills and lower chances of upward mobility. The study sought to explain determinants of women’s labour force participation, the structure and nature of women’s work, their prominent representation in the informal sector, with a particular focus on urban areas, though regular references to men and rural areas were also made. In addition, the importance of domestic work sector for urban women was also researched in detail.

Women’s labour force participation is an important component for comprehensive, and inclusive growth. A large body of empirical literature has suggested that gender inequality can impede economic growth prospects of a nation. Therefore, bringing more women in to the labour force is very important, but also a challenging task. There is a growing consensus that removing obstacles for women to participate in paid market work, on the one hand, could result into greater economic gains, on the other hand, would contribute to women’s empowerment and the development of the society as a whole. Most scholars argue that though women work in large numbers, their work is not being adequately reported in national statistics. There remains severe measurement issues. Moreover, women are always faced with the double burden of unpaid care work and market work. Beyond participation, women are largely found in informal arrangements, with temporary or no written contracts, no social security and no fixed working hours. In this context, the study sought to look into the factors influencing women’s participation in the labour market, their nature of employment, their growing participation in the domestic work sector, the challenges facing women domestic workers in their day to day lives, the increasing demand for domestics, and the employer’s perspectives, etc.

## **6.2. Empirical findings**

### **6.2.1. Findings from secondary data analysis**

The level and nature of women's participation in the labour force is a dynamic phenomenon. There are a host of factors affecting women's participation, such as educational attainment, falling fertility rates, cultural and societal norms, which continually change over time. The global trends suggest that the women's labour force participation has been stable over the last two decades, at just about 50 per cent, and there are huge gender gaps in the participation rates of men and women. The gender disparity is highest in South Asian countries (mostly in all countries in the region, except Nepal), notably Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. In all these countries, historical gender roles, and gender-stereotypes continue to affect labour outcomes, even in the context of a rapidly changing society. The rate of women's labour force participation in South Asia was just 28.5 per cent in 2015, which was much lower than the global average of 50 per cent, and gender gaps remain high - of more than 50 percentage points in 2015. Besides measurement issues, these low rates are largely due to cultural attitudes and social norms, which work against women in the workplace. Most noteworthy is the declining engagement of women in the Indian labour force, which occurred despite robust economic growth in recent years.

In India, labour force participation of women remains low, and there is considerable variation between urban and rural areas. Besides, wide gender differences in participation rate also persist. The long-term trends suggest that women's labour force participation declined from approximately 45 per cent in 1993-94 to 33 per cent in 2011-12. In this regard, the women's labour force participation rate in rural areas is showing a continuous declining trend and a drastic fall (2 per cent) was observed during 2009-10 and 2011-12. However, there is a clear divergence in the urban areas. In India, the participation rate of rural women decreased from 39.9 per cent in 2009–10 to 37.8 per cent in 2011–12, while the rate for urban women increased from 21.0 per cent to 22.2 per cent over the same period. Age-cohort analysis revealed that relative to 1993-94, the labour force participation of rural women was lowest in 2011-12, regardless of age group, and it was lowest in 2009-10 for urban women. Furthermore, huge variations

can be seen in the levels and trends of women's labour force participation across states in India. The lowest female labour force participation has been reported in Bihar, where only 8.5 per cent of urban women participate in the labour market and rest remain out of the labour force. The state is followed by Jharkhand and Assam. In contrast, high urban female labour force participation is seen in states of Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. The states which reported low female labour force participation rates, also reported high out of the labour force rates.

As far as education is concerned, it was found that in case of India, the relationship between women's labour force participation and educational attainment corresponds to a *U-shaped* curve. Women with secondary education had the lowest participation rates, and this is true for both rural and urban areas, since 1993-94. In addition, it was observed that in comparison to urban areas, the participation of women is higher in rural areas across each income quintile. Analysis across social categories and religious composition reveals that ST, and SC women have the highest labour force participation rates, whereas Muslim women have the lowest, in rural as well as in urban areas.

Besides, it was discovered that participation rates also differ by marital status of a woman. Women without marital/familial support such as separated, divorced or widowed have higher participation rates in both rural and urban India (64 per cent in rural areas and 46 per cent in urban areas), compared to those who are currently married. In addition, married women's participation in urban areas is much lower at 20.4 per cent, in comparison to never married women in urban areas and women in rural areas. This analysis particularly reflects a grave situation for urban women. Currently married urban women do not only have lower employment rate, but their unemployment rate is also relatively low; they are just not present in the labour force. Majority of them are engaged in domestic duties. In fact there is a substantially high proportion of females reporting their activity status as attending to domestic duties. In 2011-12, 35.3 per cent of all rural females and 46.1 per cent of all urban females in India were attending to domestic duties. When considering only prime working age (15-59) women, this proportion reached to 51 per cent in rural females and 62 per cent in urban females. When asked about the main reason to be engaged with domestic duties, 65 per cent women in urban areas, and 60 per cent women in rural areas cited that there was no

other member to carry through the domestic/household duties, so they are the only one left to attend to domestic duties, and social norms play an important role in this context.

Beyond participation rates, India has experienced a weak structural transformation, and a large proportion of workforce is still dependent on the agricultural sector, with 48.9 per cent employment share in 2011-12, though its share in GVA has been showing a continuous declining trend (stood at 15.4 per cent in 2015-16, down from 18.4 per cent in 2011-12). The share of industry and services in output has increased sharply within the last 20 years but their share in employment still remained low, at 24.3 per cent and 26.7 per cent respectively in 2011-12.

The workforce increased by 60 million during the first half of the last decade (from 399 million in 1999-2000 to 459 million in 2004-5) but the second half of the decade (2004-5 to 2009-10) experienced only a marginal increase in workforce by 1.1 million. The problem of insufficient jobs during 2005 to 2010 was more pronounced for women, who experienced sharp decline in employment. While male employment increased by 22.5 million during 2004-5 to 2009-10, female employment declined by 21.4 million, resulting in net overall increase of only 1.1 million work opportunities during 2005-10. Of this decline of 21 million, 90 per cent was accounted for by withdrawal of around 20 million rural females from the workforce. Post 2010, there is a further decline in female employment by 2.7 million in rural areas. In urban areas, however, there is an increase of 4.5 million female workers. The decline in female employment in the second half of the decade is a reflection of their declining numbers in agriculture, unorganized sector and those engaged as self-employed.

As far as nature of employment of women is concerned, share of regular salaried employment in total female workforce increased only marginally since 1999-00, and stood at 8.7 per cent in 2004-05, on the other hand casual labour actually witnessed a drastic fall of 7 percentage points between 1999-00 and 2004-05. As far as distribution of workers by employment status is concerned, it is close to parity in urban areas in 2011-12, on the other hand, it is more skewed in rural areas. Rural women have been heavily represented in self-employed and casual labour category. A very high proportion of self-employed rural women are actually unpaid workers/contributing

family workers. It reached to all time high at 75 per cent in 2004-05 and afterwards reporting downward trend.

In urban areas female share in regular employment has been increasing. There are increasing opportunities in services sector among women. The sizable proportions and increases in regular salaried are largely accounted for by the rapidly expanding numbers of women in education/teaching and in the class of paid domestic workers. Great diversity can be noticed among urban women workers across different states. Delhi reported maximum percentage of women working as regular salaried (77 per cent), on the other hand Uttar Pradesh reported minimum, in 2011-12. On the other hand, the proportion of urban women workers as self-employed had been found to be maximum in Uttar Pradesh (67 per cent).

Furthermore, proportion of women workers engaged in the agricultural sector has come down significantly, from 1993-94 to 2011-12. The decline of more than 14 per cent was observed in case of women workers, in comparison to 2.4 per cent of male workers. On the other hand, the tertiary sector provided employment to 56 per cent of women workers in 2011-12. Also, women's share in manufacturing has been persistently rising and stood at 29 per cent in 2011-12 and is much higher in comparison to urban male.

Majority of urban women, i.e. 36 per cent were found to be engaged in 'community social and personal services' in 2011-12. And the sizable proportions and increases in regular salaried workers in this particular category are of course largely accounted for by the rapidly expanding numbers of women in education sector, as teaching professionals, and in the class of paid domestic workers. The phenomenal increase in the numbers and proportions of women in paid domestic work has been observed between 1999-00 and 2004-05, and it is ever growing sector for women in urban India. There are clear signs of gendered segregation of occupations in urban India.

Furthermore, there is clearly predominance of informal sector and informal employment in India. Of the total of 472.9 million workforce in 2011-12, only 17.3 percent were employed in formal sector and a whopping 83 per cent were employed in informal sector. But if we consider formal employment definition, i.e. those having social security benefits and regular contracts, then only 8 per cent of the total

employment was formal, and 92 per cent was informally employed in 2011-12. As far as gender dimension of informality are concerned, 98 per cent women in rural areas and 82 per cent women in urban areas were informally employed in 2011-12, whereas the proportions for men were 96 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively. Haryana reported the minimum share of informally employed among urban women (60 per cent) in 2011-12. On the other hand, Uttar Pradesh reported maximum share of informally employed urban women, and stood at 92 per cent.

#### **6.2.2. Findings from primary data analysis**

In the aforementioned setting, domestic work is one of the largest growing informal sector activity worldwide, and is emerging as an important source of work for urban women. Analysis of secondary data reveals, that the number of urban women domestic workers increased from 0.9 million in 1999-00 to 2.3 million in 2011-12, making the sector the most prominent female employment in urban areas. If only service sector was taken, then the share of domestic workers in total female employment in the services sector increased from 11.3 percent in 1999-00 to 19 per cent in 2011-12. Women are largely employed as housemaid/servants accounting for about 83 per cent of women in this category. Domestic workers are largely illiterate or having primary level of education, especially women domestic workers. In 2011-12, the proportion of illiterate domestic workers in urban areas was 41 per cent and 36 per cent were educated up to primary level.

The secondary data further shows that urban domestic workers are largely married women, and are found mainly in the age group of 21-40 years. A majority of domestic workers are Hindus (about 84 per cent). Social profile of domestic workers reveals that majority belong to ‘OBC’ in urban areas, and ‘SC’ in rural areas. Upward caste’s share was significantly high at 31 per cent in 2011-12. Given the low status attached to domestic work, the substantial shares of upward castes women do suggest an increasing pressure on women to take up employment and the lack of alternative employment opportunities, which drives them to domestic work. State-level picture reveals that West Bengal had the highest share of urban women domestic workers in 2011-12, followed by Maharashtra and Jharkhand. The lowest number of urban women domestic workers was reported in Bihar.

Since secondary data provides very little information on domestic work sector, primary survey was undertaken for both domestic workers, and also employers' of domestic workers, in order to understand, both the supply side and demand side factors responsible for the growth of this sector. The findings of the survey disclosed that 98 per cent of the surveyed domestic workers were not born in Delhi, and were essentially migrants, and majority reported to hail from Uttar Pradesh (41 per cent), and as a result their mother tongue was 'Hindi'. Most of domestic workers were found to be Hindu (79 per cent), and majority belonged to 'Scheduled Caste' (36 per cent). Casual labour (37 per cent) was reported to be the main source of livelihood for domestic workers' households. A significant 18 per cent said that domestic work is the major source of income for their households. In a total of 407 sample, majority were living in one room housing, and 25 per cent were found to be living in rented accommodation.

Demographic characteristics were analysed in detail. Average age of domestic workers was found to be 37 years in the surveyed locations. 77 per cent of domestic workers belonged to the age group of 30-44 years. 88 per cent reported to be married, and 63 per cent were 'illiterate', and only 22 per cent had primary education.

The importance of social networks emerged very significantly in the survey. Part-time domestic workers had a larger access to social networks, comprised of family, relatives, friends, and co-villagers. Social networks not only helped in setting in the city, but also came handy in securing employment. It emerged that 62 per cent had prior information about availability of domestic work in Delhi. In 76 per cent of the cases, family and relatives were the main information providers. 66 per cent reported to get work as domestic worker, within 30 days of arrival in the city.

Work profile of domestic workers was deeply studied. It was discovered, that 53 per cent gained entry into domestic work sector through another domestic workers in the neighbourhood. A significant 35 per cent domestic workers were serving to 4 employers, and majority were doing the task of cleaning, i.e. sweeping and mopping (81 per cent). 34 per cent reported to go for morning shift, and a whopping 52 per cent reported to go for both morning and evening shifts. 13.5 per cent cases were found who worked for only one employer and stayed in their homes whole day. In our sample of domestic workers, 71 per cent started for their work before 7 am, and 78 per cent had

their workplace within 1 kilometre radius, and 98 per cent walk to their workplaces. Majority preferred working within small distance, as they could not bear cost of travel, and there were other concerns such as looking after their young children.

Average houses served by domestic workers were found to be 4, and the mean monthly income was calculated to be Rs. 3,600. There was no concept of weekly-off for domestic workers. Two leaves per month was found out to be a norm, and that too one could not take on Sunday. But it was revealed during the survey, that even facility of paid leaves was not available with domestic workers. In some cases, domestic workers reported deduction of wages, on account of taking leaves, while sick.

Health statuses were also analysed, and it was revealed that 88 per cent of the domestic workers were keeping normal health, during survey. And 39 per cent reported to seek treatment in private hospitals, in case of any ailment.

In addition, it was attempted to find out if domestic workers get any cash benefits or kind benefits, given so low wages. 61 per cent reported that they get interest-free loans from their employers'. And majority were also getting kind benefits, such as gifts, old stuff, old clothes etc.

In addition of knowing the supply-side of domestic work, the demand-side was also explored in an elaborated manner. 100 employers were surveyed in the neighbourhood of the domestic workers' workplaces. The survey findings reveal that majority of the employers were upper caste Hindu. And 74 per cent had a nuclear family of 3-5. Majority respondents were living in two rooms set (53 per cent). In addition, 53 per cent reported to have presence of 1-2 young children of 0-14 years, and 25 per cent reported to have presence of one or two elderly members.

Reasons for hiring domestic workers were also explored. 78 per cent reported that hiring domestic worker is a 'need and lifestyle statement', other 11 per cent said, that domestic worker was hired because female member of the family is also working, and does not have time to do household chores. 84 per cent respondents had only one domestic worker, and they were mainly part-timers, i.e. they come and leave after finishing designated tasks. The most cited task was sweeping and mopping.

Channels of hiring were also investigated. 45 per cent said, it was mainly neighbours' domestic help, which helped in getting domestic. 25 per cent reported that domestic worker themselves approached. 52 per cent reported that they were satisfied with the services of their domestic worker.

### **6.3. Summing up**

Women's labour force participation and access to decent work are important and necessary components of an inclusive, and sustainable development process. Their decision to participate in the labour market is influenced by a different set of factors, in comparison to men's. There is a wider view that factors constraining women to actively participate in the labour market should be contained. There should be policy action in place, to encourage women and enable them to access work, which is decent and productive. Policy interventions should aimed at reducing external barriers, including access to quality education, and training programs, promoting childcare facilities to reduce time burden, investing in public transport and infrastructure, ensuring safety for women etc. Their participation in the informal sector is inevitable, but there should be means to ensure decent working conditions. Formalisation of informal sector should be taking place.

Policy makers should also pay special attention to the domestic service sector, as this remains one of the least protected sector, where domestic workers are not even identified as 'workers', as employer's house is not recognised as workplace. The biggest issues with domestic service sector is that it doesn't come under the purview of state policy, and domestic workers are not covered under any existing labour legislations. Their work is not valued as real work, and remains highly underpaid. Both domestic workers, and their employers' do not ascribe any importance to this work, and is considered menial. Domestic workers and even employers' are not aware of their rights and responsibilities. Domestic workers do not have any skills or training, and employers' are not interested in paying for their skill development. Though there have been many attempts to organise domestic workers and unionizing them, but very less is achieved so far. There is a draft National Policy for Domestic workers, which is not yet passed in union cabinet. There is also a draft bill, known as "Domestic workers

(Registration social security and welfare) Act, 2008, which is also pending for approval. Only 10 states and 1 union territory have included domestic workers in their minimum wage notifications, but in the absence of central legislation capable of reaching all domestic workers, none of these state level measures can really benefit the domestic workers. The situation is even worse in Delhi. Domestic workers are deprived of social security benefits, and they are not even covered under minimum wage notification in Delhi. And Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna (RSBY) is also not extended to domestic workers of Delhi.

The task force on domestic workers (2011), states the ultimate goal of the policy on domestic workers is to “Realise decent work for domestic workers through a rights based approach; thereby protecting domestic workers human rights and fundamental principles and rights at work on matters of minimum wage, hours of work, rest periods, social security, safe and healthy workplaces, protection from abuse, harassment and violence, access to skills development, grievance redressal, and creating public awareness on employers obligations under the law” (p. 5).

As has been clearly expressed in the Draft National Policy on Domestic Workers, domestic service sector should be regulated, and domestic workers must be given their dues. Domestic workers should be treated with dignity, and workers in this sector must be provided with basic rights at work. Their work related conditions should be clearly specified, which includes regulation of working hours and provision of minimum wages. And workers should have a right to organize and collective bargaining, and appropriate mechanisms for grievance redressal should be in place.