

Levels of Women Work Participation and Unemployment: A Study of Government Initiatives in India

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Abstract:

A nation's level of economics activity is significantly influenced by the size of its workforce. Considering that women make up half of the nation's population, their involvement in economic activities is essential. Women's participation in the workforce not only influences economic development but it also has an impact on their lives in terms of opportunities and benefits. In this context, this paper aims to provide an overview of women's (age 15 and above) participation in workforce in India. This paper examines the trends and patterns of women unemployment and Women Worker Population Ratio from 2015-16 to 2023-24 in India. The main finding of this paper is that, WWPR is much lower than its male counterparts i.e., 76.3 percent for males and 40.3 percent for females in 2023-24. Additionally, this paper provides an in-depth evaluation of the significant initiatives, the government has implemented to reduce unemployment rates in India. In last, our paper raises the concern about women's falling workforce participation and makes policy recommendations for boosting productive employment and decreasing women unemployment. Secondary sources of data were used in this study, obtained from National Sample Survey Organization and annual Periodic Labour Force Survey for the year 2015-16 to 2023-24.

Keywords: *Women, Unemployment, Women Worker Population Ratio, Government Initiatives.*

I. Introduction:

India is renowned for having significant social, cultural and economic disparities because of its social structure built on male dominance. The World Economic Forum (WEF) has released its latest Global Gender Gap report (2023), in which India is rated 127th out of 146 countries. In India, women make up almost half of the population, hence their contribution to the country's economy is significant and productive (*Himanshi & Rajeshwari, 2021*).

Unemployment is the biggest issue faced by the local economy in India. The unemployment rate in India rose from 6.8 percent in January 2024 to 8 percent in February 2024 (*CMIE'S Consumer Pyramids Household Survey*). When gender-specific statistics are analyzed, the greater discrepancy is seen at the individual level, as the unemployment rate for men decreased from 4.4 percent to 3.2 percent in 2023-24, whereas it decreased from 3.3 percent to 3.2 percent for women during this period [*Periodic Labour Force Survey*].

(PLFS)]. According to an *International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2015)* analysis, if the proportion of female workers rises to match that of male workers, India's GDP may grow by 27 percent. Its particularly alarming to see that woman's wage employment participation has been significantly lower than men's i.e., 76.3 percent for males and 40.3 percent for females in 2023-24 (PLFS, 2023-24). Some researchers have brought up the fact that although women participate in a wide range of economic activities, the bulk of their efforts are not given the credit they deserve because of the widespread underreporting of women's work. Furthermore, women's contribution to the households are undervalued in economic survey and non-economic activities carried out within households are typically not documents. Undoubtedly, women's domestic contribution are vital, but we cannot empower our half of the population if they are not included in economic activities. So, there is an urgent need to understand the ways in which women's activities are changing, their low rate of workforce participation, their rising unemployment rate and the causes of high unemployment. In this context, this paper analyses the trends and patterns of women unemployment rate in India from 2015-16 to 2023-24 and reasons behind it. Regarding this unemployment situation, the administration has been concerned for a while. Numerous initiatives have been introduced by the Centre, State and Local governments to combat unemployment, such as the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Yojana, National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Deen Dayal Upadhaya Grameen Kaushal Yojana, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Pradhan

Mantri Mudra Yojana and others. In this regard, the current study assesses the effectiveness of government initiatives aimed at reducing women's unemployment in India.

Objectives of the Study: In this context, the present study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To analyses the trends and patterns of women unemployment and Women Worker Population Ratio in India from 2015-16 to 2023-24. Further this paper explores the causes of such trends.
- 2) To conduct an in-depth assessment of important initiatives implemented by the government for women unemployment and their performance.
- 3) To give suggestions to eliminating the problem of women unemployment.

Research Methodology: Data was acquired from secondary sources to meet the objectives of this study. Data was gathered from Journals, Newspapers, Research Papers, Articles and from numerous websites managed by the Centre and State governments including various round data of NSSO (National Sample Survey Organization), Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), International Monetary Fund (2015), World Economic Forum (WEF), International Labour Organization (ILO, 2014), Census of India (2011), Ministry of Labour and Employment, GOI, Labour Bureau Survey.

This research paper is organized into four sections. The present section (Section I) provides an overview of women unemployment including the objectives of the study, research methodology and literature reviews. Section II presents the trends and patterns of women

unemployment in India from 2015-16 to 2023-24 and reasons behind it. The detailed assessment of the significant initiatives taken by the government to reduce women unemployment is provided in section III. Conclusion and recommendations are provided in the final section (Section IV).

II. Trends and Patterns of Women Unemployment and Women Worker Population Ratio (WWPR) in India from 2015-16 to 2023-24.

Unemployment is the state in which a person who is looking for work, is not able to find it. The below table 1 showcases the conditions of unemployment for male and female in India from 2015-16 to 2023-24. The current situation depicts that total unemployment rate in India is 3.2 percent while for male it is 3.2 percent and for female it is also 3.2 percent. However, there was a hike in 2016-17, which shows that unemployment rate for women was 9.2 percent, while for men it was only 4.3 percent. After 2016-17, it can be seen that the unemployment rate of women is less

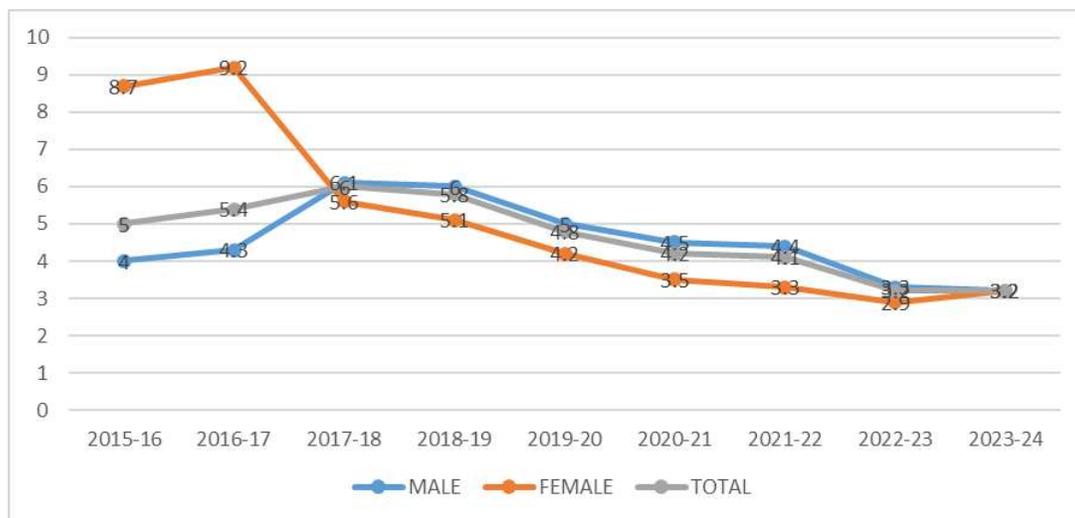
than the unemployment rate of men every year. On the other hand, it can also be seen that the unemployment rate for men is decreasing faster than that of women.

Table:1 Unemployment Rate (in percent) in usual status estimated from PLFS 2015-16 to 2023-24 for age group 15 years and above.

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
2015-16	4.0	8.7	5.0
2016-17	4.3	9.2	5.4
2017-18	6.1	5.6	6.0
2018-19	6.0	5.1	5.8
2019-20	5.0	4.2	4.8
2020-21	4.5	3.5	4.2
2021-22	4.4	3.3	4.1
2022-23	3.3	2.9	3.2
2023-24	3.2	3.2	3.2

Source: PLFS Various Round Report from 2015-16 to 2023-24.

Fig. 1: Unemployment Rate (in %) in usual status estimated from PLFS 2015-16 to 2023-24



Source: PLFS Various Round Report from 2015-16 to 2023-24.

In this research paper, an attempt has been made to determine the level of Worker Population Rate in India between 2015-16 to 2023-24.

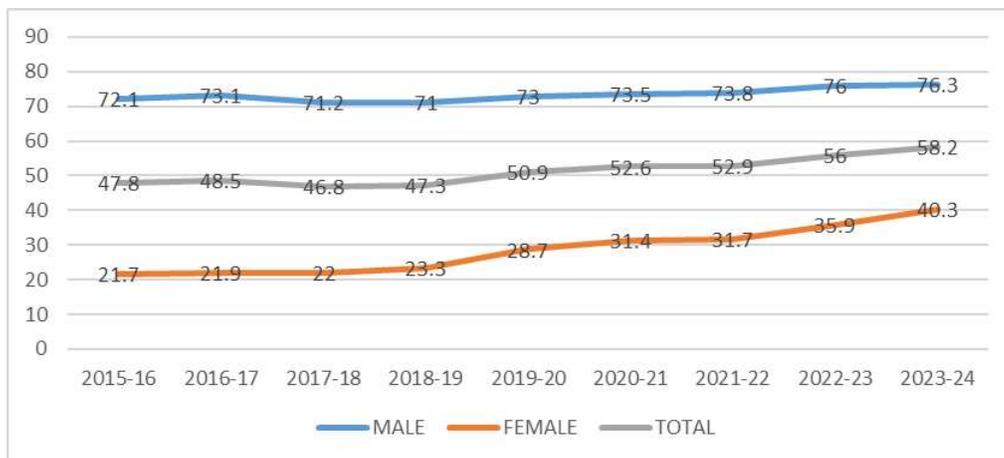
Table: 2 Worker Population Rate (in percent) in usual status for age group 15 and above from year 2015-16 to 2023-24.

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
2015-16	72.1	21.7	47.8
2016-17	73.1	21.9	48.5
2017-18	71.2	22.0	46.8
2018-19	71.0	23.3	47.3
2019-20	73.0	28.7	50.9
2020-21	73.5	31.4	52.6
2021-22	73.8	31.7	52.9
2022-23	76.0	35.9	56.0
2023-24	76.3	40.3	58.2

Source: PLFS Various Round Report from 2015-16 to 2023-24.

As table and figure 2 shows that, the total worker population rate in India is 58.2 percent in 2023-24, while for male it is 76.3 percent and for female it is only 40.3 percent which is half of its male counterparts. If we compare the male workforce data in the table provided, there has not been a noticeable shift in the workforce pattern throughout that time. In the total workforce, male participation is greater in every year data. In a similar vein, the percentage of women who work is lower overall, rising from 21.7 percent in 2015-16 to 40.3 percent in 2023-24. There is a significant imbalance in the workforce between men and women, with men having access to greater career options across a wider range of economic sectors. It is also noticed that on the one side unemployment rate among females is declining and another side worker population rate of female is persistently increasing. However, a little decline in unemployment is noticed in the most recent round of PLFS data but not satisfactory.

Fig. 2: Worker Population Rate (in percent) in usual status for age group 15 and above from year 2015-16 to 2023-24



Source: PLFS Various Round Report from 2015-16 to 2023-24.

In a nutshell, it is noticed that women's participation in economic activities is decreasing in India, which is concerning for both women's empowerment and nation's economy as a whole. I also attempted to elucidate the cause of the dropping Women's Worker Population Rate in this section.

Possible Reasons for Declining Women's Worker Participation Rate and Increasing Unemployment Rate.

◆ **Housework and Maternal Duties:** According to the research, Women Worker Population Rate is higher in India's poorer states than it is in the country's less impoverished areas. As the family's income rises, women choose to perform their housekeeping duties in a more specialist manner. The highest Women Worker Population Rate is for those households that are poorest and as the income increases, the likelihood of women working decreases (ILO, 2014).

◆ **Mobility/Freedom to Travel:** Social barriers like freedom to travel is another reason for increasing unemployment rate among women. Men travels much larger than women to go to work in most cities (Census of India,2011).

◆ **Wage Gap:** Studies from *India's Leading Diversity and Inclusion Firm Avtar Groups* shows that women are paid 34 percent less than men for performing the same job with the same qualification. Maternity leave and unable to work till late at night are the reasons behind wage gap. Women become demotivated to join the workforce, when wage gap widens.

◆ **Increasing Enrollment in Higher Education:** There is no denying that women in India are becoming more educated, especially those between the ages

of 15 and 29 years. For men, we see that as the level of education increase, a greater share of men joins the workforce but in case of women, we see the U-shaped relationship between education and Women Worker Population Rate in India as the level of education increases, Women Worker Population Rate decreases.

Apart from these reasons, increasing population, low job opportunities, mechanization in agriculture, lack of appropriate skills/skill mismatch and sluggish industrial sector progress are some other reasons behind declining Women Worker Population Rate.

III. Government Initiatives for Women Unemployment in India.

In India, policy concern for women has been an issue since independence. Since the 1950s, reducing unemployment has been a primary goal of five-year plans. Numerous strategies and initiatives have been introduced with the aim of eradicating or drastically decreasing the unemployment problem. The federal, state and local governments have collaborated on a number of programmes to combat unemployment. In this section, several programmes that were put in place with the intension of eradicating unemployment and generating jobs will be covered, along with their effectiveness. The following are a few noteworthy schemes:

◆ **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act:** Ensuring employment for everyone was the goal of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005. It was authorised on September 7. The purpose of this act is to increase rural people capacity to work in unskilled manual labour for the duration of

the fiscal year. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act replaced the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act as its new name in 2009.

Table: 3 Performanc of Mgnrega till December 2024

Characteristics	Performance (in Crore)
Active Workers	13.24
Assets Created	8.66
Persons Days Generated	187.73
DBT Transactions	30
Household Benefited	4.85
Individual Category works	2.01

Source: Ministry of Rural development, Govt. Of India.

Table 3 demonstrate the present performance of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. MGNREGA has benefited 4.85 crore households and provide employment to 13.24 crore workers.

◆ **National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM):**

The National Rural Livelihood Mission, an effort to fight poverty, was launched in June 2011 and is being carried out by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. Its three primary pillars are enhancing and expanding the poor’s current alternatives for subsistence, equipping them with employable skill

outside of the job market and promoting self-employment and entrepreneurship. After counselling, skill development would be given to BPL youth residing in rural areas. It is partially funded by World Bank. In 2015, the Government renamed the mission as the Deen Dayal Antayodaya Yojana.

Table:4 Scale Achieved by Nrlm During Current Fy 2024-25.

Characteristics	Scale Achieved (in no.)
Self-Help Groups	9,175,483
Household Mobilized	102,920,576
Village Organization	16804364
Amount Disbursed (in crore)	107863.23

Source: NRLM- Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The number of village organizations, amount disbursed, self-help groups and families mobilized by the National Rural Livelihood Mission by the current financial year 2024-25 is shown in table 4. From June 2011 to December 2024, 16804364 village organizations were promoted, 9,175,483 self-help groups were established and 102,920,576 families were mobilised under NRLM.

◆ **Deen Dayal Upadhaya Grameen Kaushal Yojana:**

DDU-GKY is a government supported scheme that was created and introduced in 2014. It is a component of the National Rural Livelihood Mission Programme. The majority of the target audience for this

programme is young people in rural areas, aged 15 to 35. It has two main objectives as increasing the diversification of rural disadvantaged families' income and increasing the career aspiration of rural youth. Mandatory coverage of socially disadvantage groups (SC/ST-50%, Minority-15%, Women-33%). This scheme is administered by the Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development. Training, uniform, course material, lodging and board in case of residual programmes and express reimbursement in non-residential programmes are all supplied at no cost to the candidates.

Table:5 Performance of Ddu-Gky Scheme (December 2024)

Year	No. of candidates trained	No. of candidates placed
2014-15	43,038	21,446
2015-16	2,79,509	1,30,958
2016-17	4,42,095	2,78,841
2017-18	5,73,622	3,54,628
2018-19	8,15,131	4,91,879
2019-20	10,62,308	6,42,093
2020-21	11,00,597	6,91,656
2021-22	11,97,603	7,37,268
2022-23	14,28,965	8,94,808
2023-24	16,28,206	10,51,114
2024-25 (Till Dec24)	16,88,971	10,96,729

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, DDU-GKY.

Table 5 shows the number of candidates who were trained and the number of applicants that were placed under DDU-GKY scheme. From 2014 to December 2024, 16,88,971 candidates were trained and 10,96,729 candidates were placed under this scheme. The Covid-19 pandemic has reduced the number of trained applicants throughout 2020-22. Apart from this, in Haryana, 46,506 candidates were trained and 36,418 candidates were placed under this scheme.

◆ **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana:** The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) was unveiled in 2015. The principal aim of this programme is to furnish a large number of youths with the tools required to develop professional skills that will facilitate their pursuit of better employment opportunities. This project provides average monthly financial incentives of Rs 8000 to persons undergoing skill certification. Through enhancing their ability training, it helps youths secure profitable jobs and become more productive.

Table:6 Pmkvy till December 2024

Characteristics	Scale Achieved (in no.)
Enrolled Candidates	2,877,785
Assessed candidates	1,186,396
Trained candidates	2,049,802
Certified candidates	1,005,792

Source: PMKVY Report 2024, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, GOI.

This table shows the number of enrolled applicants, assessed candidates, trained candidates and certified candidates attained by PMKVY till December 2024. From 2015 to December 2024, a total of 2,877,785 candidates have enrolled under PMKVY, 2,049,802 trained candidates and 1,005,792 certified candidates.

◆ **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana:** In developing countries like India, small businesses are crucial for generating employment opportunities and accelerating

GDP growth. The Modi Administration introduced the MUDRA yojana on April 8, 2015, with the aim of promoting self-employment across the nation. Small, non-farm, anti-corporate enterprises can apply for loans up to 10 lakh rupees from the Micro Unit Development and Refinance Agency or MUDRA. These funding options are provided by non-banking financial intuitions, commercial banks, small finance banks and regional rural banks.

Table:7 Achievement Under Pradhanmantri Mudra Yojana.

Year	No. of PMMY loans Sanctioned	Amount Sanctioned (in crore)	Amount Disbursement (in crore)
2015-16	34880924	137449.27	132954.73
2016-17	39701047	180528.54	175312.13
2017-18	48130593	253677.10	246437.40
2018-19	59870318	321722.79	311811.38
2019-20	62247606	337495.53	329715.03
2020-21	50735046	321759.25	311754.47
2021-22	53795526	339110.35	331402.20
2022-23	62310598	456537.98	450423.66
2023-24	66777013	541012.86	532358.35
2024-25 (Till Dec. 2024)	30782800	294956.66	287812.10

Source: MUDRA (2015-2024).

This table displays the achievements made under the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana in terms of the total amount approved, the total amount disbursed and the total number of PMMY loans approved from 2015 to December 2024. Since 2015, its loan sanctioned rate has been continuously growing until December 2024. Consequently, there are an increasing number of small business and job opportunities.

◆ **Aatmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana (ABRY):** ABRY was announced in 2020 as a part of Aatmanirbhar Bharat 3.0 package, with the goals of boosting the economy, increasing employment creation in the post-COVID recovery phase and providing incentives for the development of new jobs in addition to social security benefits and compensation for lost wages during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the Employees Provident Fund Organization (EPFO), this programme is

being implemented. The Government of India is crediting the employer's share (12% of wages) and employee's share (12% of wages) of the contribution payable under ABRY for a period of two years, or solely the employees share, based on the employment strength of the EPFO registered establishment.

Table:8 Scale Achieved by Abry till March 2024

Characteristics	ABRY
Amount Reimbursed	Rs.10188.50 Crore
Establishment Benefited	01,52,517
No. of Benefited/New Employees.	60.49 lakh

Source: ABRY- Ministry of Labour and Employment, GOI.

Table 8 shows the achievements made under the ABRY in term of the amount reimbursed, establishment benefited and number of beneficiaries/new employees from 2020 to March 2024. According to the preceding table, ABRY has benefited 60.49 lakh Employees or Candidates and amount of 10188.50 crore reimbursed till March 2024.

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (2015), Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (September, 2001), Aatmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana (October, 2020), Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Protshan Yojana (2016) and Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (2008) are some other important initiatives taken by the government to provide employment and self-employment opportunities.

This section lists the numerous government initiatives that are beneficial to the poor

people and women. The swot up comes to the conclusion that, while these programmes have significantly improved the lives of underprivileged people and women, but there is still more that can be done to alleviate the state of affairs such as unemployment in India. More policies are not required, instead better and more efficient policies are needed to address the needs of the women so they can survive and have a source of income.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

Economic empowerment is an essential pillar of independence in the modern world of globalisation and liberalisation. Being financially independent allows people to fully exercise their rights and participate in decisions both within and outside of their homes, which is crucial for leading a life of honour and dignity. Financial independence would come through engagement in paid work. Unfortunately, the present paper reveals that Women Worker Population Rate (WWPR) is much lower than its male counterparts i.e., 76.3 percent for males and 40.3 percent for females in 2023-24 in India. The study resulted in a few recommendations that, if implemented, will address the problem of women unemployment and provide answer to it. First and foremost, we urgently need to change our perception regarding women's work, household responsibilities, travel etc. Secondly, in order to raise the rate of female labour force participation, transport infrastructure needs to be improved. For women's safety while travelling, specific regulations should be established. Thirdly, jobs that are acceptable to Indian women must be created by the Indian economy. Furthermore, additional part time employment ought to be available to meet

the requirements of the community. Subsequently, there is great need to provide wage equality in the country, which will encourage a large number of women to enter the workforce. The easiest method to address this issue is to increase the amount of self-employment options. Reviving cottage and small-scale industry can help to alleviate rural women unemployment. Apart from this, educational system should be changed so that women's receive career and job-oriented instructions while they are in school/college. Women's employability must be enhanced through skill development and vocational education. The study also suggested that women must change their professional perceptions and take advantages of the training options available to them in order to attain the technical skills required for equal opportunity. All of them will not be effective unless population growth is controlled. Essentially, until the birth rate is brought down to an optimal level, the world will be ruled by hunger, suffering and unemployment. Consequently, it is essential to implement the significant measures mentioned above in order to provide employment opportunities for women.

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