



Understanding the Determinants of Low Female Workforce Participation in Urban India: A Focus on Marital Status

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Abstract

The female participation of women in urban India continues to be low, though there has been a rise in rural participation. This study aims to find out the factors impacting the lack of female workforce participation in urban areas, with an emphasis on marital status. Using a survey, 114 responses were collected from women aged more than 24 years based in India and the data was analysed using visualizations. From the results, multiple factors were identified that influence female labour participation in urban areas. Firstly, mode of work affects female participation in the labour force. Most employed women currently work from offices; while married women prefer to continue in-office work, single women prefer hybrid options. Conversely, married unemployed women prefer work-from-home opportunities. Secondly, women in nuclear families are more likely to be part of the workforce than those in joint family systems. Thirdly, unemployed women tend to have more dependents, or more children, than employed women, suggesting that the burden of their responsibilities keeps them out of the workforce. Lastly, a huge proportion of married and employed women have taken career breaks, majorly due to pregnancy, followed by marriage, childcare, household demands, and further education. Several married and unemployed women were not working before marriage and would like to work in the future, but are unable to do so due to lack of break from professional life or burnout, increased household responsibilities, relocation post-marriage, and lack of family or spousal support for working. The single and employed women would wish to continue working if they got married in the future, but fear career disruption post marriage. Thus, it can be concluded that marital status, mode of work, type of family, household responsibilities, pregnancy, childcare, and family support have a key role in influencing a female's participation in the workforce.

Keywords: *Female; Urban Areas; LFPR; Marital Status; Family Structures; Responsibilities*

1. Introduction

1.1. General Background

The Labour Force Participation Rate of females refers to the percentage of women aged 15 years and above who are either employed or actively seeking employment. In India, specifically, female LFPR has been increasing significantly since 2017-2018, growing at a CAGR of 12.8% since then (KREA UNIVERSITY, 2024). On the contrary, the LFPR for men since 2017-18 to 2023-24 has remained somewhat stationary over the years, just slightly increased from 75.8% to 78.8% (Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) – Annual Report [July, 2023 – June, 2024], n.d.). The above-stated statistics hold true for both rural and urban regions in India. As depicted by the statistics, the female LFPR has grown significantly. There are a multitude of factors driving the female LFPR in India. Firstly, education has been the biggest contributing factor. According to data published by the government of India, there has been a relationship between education being established with Claudia Goldin's U-shaped hypothesis (Agarwal & Joshi, 2015). The hypothesis derives a relationship between education and the proliferation of white-collar jobs. As the market expands from farm activities to factory work and income rises, there is a downward trend in the "U". Despite that, when education levels rise, women start re-entering the labour force, depicted by the rising part of the U-shaped curve. At one end of the curve, a low level of education forces women into entering the workforce out of necessity, leading them to assume employment roles in the informal and low-wage sectors (*India's Workforce Transformation: A Rising Tide of Female Participation*, n.d.). At the other end, women with advanced degrees obtain higher-paying jobs and pursue professional careers. Thus, the female LFPR rises as the educational attainment advances. This depicts the paramount importance of higher-level education in empowering women to secure jobs that are meaningful, have better financial stability, and job satisfaction. The curve shows a dip in female labour force participation for women who are only educated up to secondary level, that is, mid-level education.

Secondly, urbanisation and the improvement of infrastructure play a key role in creating new jobs in the market, which creates more opportunities for females to enter the labour force. Additionally, as women move to towns and cities, the higher cost of living translates to them seeking jobs as a result. As development increases, a rise in the female LFPR is noticed at a 5 percent level, based on data for 2017-18 and 2019-20 (Lama, 2021). To support this increase in female LFPR, the government of India introduced the working women's hostel scheme, which provides safe accommodation to women who migrate to urban areas for work (Goel et al., 2023). Another important point to note is that Structural shifts in India's economy, including the growth of various sectors and increased formal employment opportunities, have created more jobs for women. Another study finds that these structural changes have led to a decline in the participation of women in agriculture, such that they have begun seeking jobs in manufacturing and service (Gallé et al., 2024).

Thirdly, there is a negative correlation between fertility and female LFPR, with declining fertility leading to increased women's participation in the labour force. According to a study by Tiwari et al., (2022), as the reproductive burden increases, the participation of women in the labour force declines, though these results may vary depending on the female's background. Women who come from well-educated backgrounds and non-poverty-stricken backgrounds are more likely to stop working than those who have to work out of necessity (Tiwari et al., 2022). This stems from the lack of maternity leave, as more than 84% of women in India in 2017-2018 were employed in the informal sector, with a lack of maternity leave provisions, and due to increased responsibilities (Tiwari & Goli, 2023). Furthermore, at the national level, there are several steps taken by the government to enhance the female LFPR: The Skill India Mission, Stand up India, Start up India, and Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY). In both urban and rural areas, these schemes provide access to skillful education, promote women's entrepreneurship, and enhance their access to finance. Other than that, they have also launched steps for Protected

Employment in Government Jobs, such as Child care leaves, special allowance to women with disabilities, special leave connected to inquiry of sexual harassment, and special maternity leave.

Regardless, it is important to note that the major drivers of this LFPR are actually the rural women. The female LFPR in India rose from 24.6% in 2017-18 to 47.6% in 2023-24. In rural areas, the Female LFPR increased from 24.6% in 2017-18 to 36.6% 2021-22, indicating an increase of 12 percentage points. In comparison, the female LFPR in urban areas has increased only 3.4 percentage points as it rose from 20.4% in 2017-18 to 23.8% in 2021-22 (Goel et al., 2023). The discrepancy in the increase of female LFPR rates between rural and urban areas is ironic considering that urban women have access to higher educational attainment, better infrastructure, and more job opportunities (GSDRC, 2016). Data sets suggest that females who live in rural areas are most likely to be in the labour force in comparison to those living in urban areas. The reason for this is that rural women undertake agricultural work, in addition to unpaid work. It is noteworthy that in rural areas, most women are self-employed or engaged in casual labour, while working women are in regular jobs (Civildaily, 2023).

The Ministry of Labour's analysis of PLFS data states that the participation of women in the labour force in urban areas was significantly lower than in rural areas (Goel et al., 2023). The reason for this is that though cities appear to offer women greater opportunities in procuring jobs, women don't take up these opportunities. Klasen (2017) have coined this as the "Indian paradox", as despite rising education levels and incomes in urban India, female LFPR did not increase. There are a myriad of reasons affecting this. Firstly, the prevailing gender norms, taboos, and stereotypes existing around female workforce participation act as a persistent barrier for urban women. Cultural pressures for women to give higher priority to family duties, marriage responsibilities, and pressure from in-laws lower female participation, as depicted by government data (Klasen, 2017). This viewpoint also impacts companies, which are reluctant to hire women, presuming they will not be able to contribute for an extended duration. Secondly, women exit the workforce when they are not compelled to work. As male household earnings increase, women and their families experience a diminished necessity to engage in employment (Klasen, 2017). Thirdly, the structural transformations inside the nation emphasize the creation of more capital-intensive employment opportunities, which frequently exclude women, as these positions may not align with their capabilities (Chakravorti, 2024). In essence, the dominant gender stigmas, the belief that males must earn more than women, and India's emphasis on capital-intensive job growth are excluding women from the urban labor force.

1.2. Literature Review

The trends in female LFPR in India have been explored extensively in the literature. A recent study by Dev and Sahay (2025) aims to unlock the potential of women's workforce participation in India, seeking to quantify the impact of formalizing part-time employment and ensuring gender equality in unpaid care work on the labour market and the macroeconomy. The study analyzes the PLFS data and employs a job search model for individual decision-making, derived from the McCall-Mortenson job search framework. The study concludes that the formalisation of part-time work with flexible hours, combined with investment in care infrastructure alongside changes in social attitudes, can enhance the female LFPR in India. Initiating gender equality in the market, by ensuring that women do not face the burden of home production, unpaid care work, and face equality in the workforce, can also drive the female LFPR in India further. Assuming equality of sharing of care work between males and females, the study's model predicts that the female LFPR could increase by six percentage points. The authors further suggest policy interventions for implementing part-time work as formal and the introduction of equal paid parental leave policies, tax incentives for shared caregiving, and public investment in childcare to equalise care work. The author also emphasises the importance of flexible workplace policies, including remote work options, as extremely helpful in enabling women to align their professional and caregiving responsibilities.

Another study by Rathi et al., (2025) aims to create a roadmap that empowers women-led MSMEs through ICT, Financial Access, and Skill development, in hopes of creating a self-reliant India by shaping self-reliant women. The study used a descriptive approach, utilises secondary data, the liberal feminist theory and resource-based theory to analyse role of ICT, skill development, and access to finance leading sustainable development of women-led MSMEs in India. The study explores the importance of entrepreneurship as a driver for women's social and economic empowerment in India, understanding the systematic barriers like resource inequities and persistent gender biases that limit the growth of the same. To overcome these barriers and for women to thrive within competitive markets, the study suggests enhancing financial literacy, ensuring that women have adequate resources, and fostering female skill development. It also calls to address the digital divide and socio-cultural constraints, as well as to begin collaborations between government and private stakeholders to increase the impact. Moreover, the research urges policymakers to design inclusive policies that cater to diverse groups of women, including widows, elderly women, differently abled women, and rural women.

A research in the same realm by Gupta & Lal, (2025) evaluated the dual roles of working women in Lucknow. The study was conducted in the Indian state of Lucknow, surveying respondents from degree colleges and employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. Using four case studies to present its findings, the study assessed the persisting issue of discrimination and disparity amongst women in India. It further underscores that simply educating women as a form of empowerment is not sufficient, as even after attaining high levels of education and higher posts, their obligations and responsibilities towards their family and children remain the same. This is due to the society's mentality. Though the growth of working women in higher education is increasing, these women are unable to reach high positions within the institution due to the lack of availability of time for personal development or research writing alongside familial responsibilities. While some women can maintain a balance between both professional and home life, many are unable to do so, and thus, institutions should provide measures and policies that promote a healthy work-life balance and facilitate female growth in higher-level positions.

To analyze the changing patterns of female Labour force participation and employment in India, a study was conducted by Rustagi (2013). The study analyses the data of LFPR in India from 1993-94 to 2011-12 using descriptive statistics and tabulations based on gender, sector, marital status, type of work, and region. The study notes that, firstly, the gender stereotypes are gradually breaking as reflected in women's LFPR, with women moving towards regular working jobs from unpaid family jobs like agriculture. Rural women are also moving from agriculture to construction and services and being employed in informal jobs. For urban women, education plays a key role in shift from casual and self-employment work to regular jobs, which pertain to education, healthcare, public administration and social work. The involvement of women in private sector jobs remains high for those who are medium-high educated. Those with lower levels of literacy find themselves employed in the informal services. Secondly, the effect of household income on the female LFPR is more among the lower quintiles as compared to the top quintiles, with the respond differing depending on the woman's employment in regular or informal work. Thirdly, women's entrepreneurship and own-account work is gradually increasing. The study calls for the reallocation of jobs in a more gender-inclusive manner if there is difficulty in the creation of adequate jobs. The study also notes the challenge of creating female-oriented jobs in the market and recognises education as a key factor for driving female employment and labour force participation.

From a different lens, a study by Klasen and Pieters (2015), as part of the World Bank Group, aims to explain the stagnation of the female labour force participation rate amongst women in urban areas of India over the past 25 years, which is ironic as the country overall witnessed a high GDP, earnings growth, fertility decline, an increase in female education, and returns to education. The study utilises individual-level cross-section data spanning from 1987-2011 to account for the various factors that affect female LFPR, finding a strong U-shaped correlation between female LFPR and education in India, with

women with low education only working out of necessity. Women with higher education are apparently less constricted by familial constrictions in comparison. The study points that a rise in education and incomes of males, and a decline in female LFPR has been noticed. Structural changes in the economy further account for this decline, in particular in the primary and manufacturing sectors. Though the manufacturing sector saw a decline in gender stigmas post-2009, and began drawing in more women. Most of the female employment generation has, nonetheless, occurred in the construction and low-skilled services, while the white collar services and manufacturing sector have not been able to keep up. The study also underscores that the female labour force participation in India is contingent on the decisions of their families, policies that promote female employment, and the barriers to migrating for employment, rather than on their personal opinions.

A study by Nayak & Natarajan, (n.d.) provides an analysis of the participation of women in the workforce across Indian states, looking at the relationship between the per capita income of a state and female LFPR and taking into account the differences in female LFPR in different states within India. Using the regression analysis, it was found that women in most northern states of India are typically involved in agricultural activities. They are typically engaged in unpaid informal work, which makes it harder for them to find short or long-term employment opportunities and to formally enter the workforce. Due to a lack of opportunities, many women also migrate out of state to look for work, taking into account that this is also owed to family or marriage. These states also have high levels of gender discrimination, which prohibits female participation in the labour force, a notable exception to this trend being Himachal Pradesh. The study points out that the southern states of India have a relatively high female LFPR, which is about 10.67 percentage points higher than eastern states. States like Kerala, despite having high female literacy rates, exhibit low LFPR due to educated unemployment. Tamil Nadu has the second-highest LFPR in South India, with the women there having jobs largely similar to those of the men. Overall, the western states and southern states have a higher LFPR than the northern and eastern states, with the southern region observing the highest and the eastern region observing the lowest. The high LFPR in the South and West can be attributed to participation in the MGNREGA programme and high literacy levels. Furthermore, there is a negative relationship between per capita income and female LFPR, which supports the household income hypothesis.

To study the participation of females in the labour force in India in light of the variation in wages between men and women, a study was undertaken by Narmada (2023). The data used for the study is depicted through tables for rural and urban females. The comparison of the data is done for 2017-18 and 2021-22. The paper addresses the fact that women are a huge proportion of the labour market and calls out the need for policymakers to design strategies that diversify the employment opportunities in urban areas. This can be done through skilling and vocational training programs. As it is impossible to entirely break the familial constrictions, responsibilities, and gender stereotypes that exist in India, one reasonable solution can be to increase female participation in the labour force through part-time jobs. Moreover, working online, that is, “work from home” trends have emerged post-COVID-19 pandemic, involving a significant number of people. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to introduce policies that cater to this and on hybrid approaches, providing workers with an option to choose the place from which they would like to work. This will be especially beneficial for women who are obliged to fulfil their familial responsibilities and home-care alongside professional responsibilities.

Specifically, for ASEAN countries, the given study analyzes the nuanced relationship between female LFPR and GDP, fertility, and female education (Mahbuba & Setyowati, 2023). The study employs quantitative research methods and uses the World Bank’s published secondary data, which is analysed using CEM, FEM, and REM regression techniques. The study finds that many women who have a desire to increase their household income, owing to a large number of dependents and family consumption, join the labour force. The women whose husbands do not have jobs are even more likely to do so. The study notes that fertility rates have a negative influence on the female LFPR. Higher fertility rates lead to low

LFPR. The study also finds that even if the female education levels are high, it does not necessarily mean that they would choose to participate in the LFPR; it varies due to several factors. The study points out a positive correlation between the GRDP and female LFPR.

Using the standard model of Labour Supply (Cahuc and Zylerberg 2004), Liu et al. (2020) aims to study the participation female immigrants participation in the labour force to a country whose LFPR is lower than their source countries, taking a case study of Japan. The research analysed individual data from the whole sample of the 2010 population census in Japan. The study finds that female immigrants are less likely to be a part of the LFPR due to Japan's long persistent gender roles, lack of public child care, long working hours for men, high social emphasis on females doing house work, workplace discrimination etc. This trend persists even if the women originate from a high LFPR country or have been settled in the country for a long period of time. Another reason for this low LFPR is the husband's culture, including the country's average attitudes towards female LFPR as well as the female LFPR in the husband's source countries. The size of these forces is, nonetheless, lower than the impact of the LFPR in the female's source country. The study suggests that the originating country of the female plays a huge and persistent role in determining the female LFPR.

A subsequent research is launched by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India. Using the data derived from the employment statistics from April 2023, the study noted that the female LFPR in India has increased over the years (Goel et al., 2023). One of the key driving factors for this is the steps taken by the government of India for boosting employment and empowerment of women through laws, policies and schemes. The data also finds that the women in rural areas who work in agriculture are more likely to be a part of the LFPR than the women who live in urban areas. A large proportion of these rural women are also self-employed or engage in casual labour. In comparison, women in urban areas find themselves employed in regular wage and salaried jobs.

Another study, issued by world bank gender portal, states that while in 5 of the 7 region, more than half of all women participate in the labour market, in South Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa - only a quarter or less do (World bank, n.d.). In high income level countries, an increase in the LFPR has been observed. Whereas, the gender gap is largest in lower middle-income countries. India is the most populous country in this group, yet the gender gap here is 57%. The study indicates that structural transformation, declining fertility, and increasing female education in many parts of the world has not resulted in significant increases in women's participation as was theorized. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated these gender gaps in employment, Economies with high rates of vulnerable employment are low income contexts with large agricultural sector.

A report by the Asian Development Bank assessed the trend of changing Female LFPR from 2017-2018 to 2021-2022 (Fernandez et al., 2023). It also analyses the heterogeneity across demography and industries in India in lieu to the female LFPR. The study points out that India has the lowest female LFPR across all G20 economies because of the segregation of occupation on the basis of gender and limited growth in demand for labor in sectors dominated by women. Though, it is notable that this LFPR is improving, owing to location and industry- specific factors. In the rural economy more women are participating in agriculture. However, this proportion declines when the population gets richer. Thus, a shift is noticed from participation in agriculture to manufacturing and services sector. Still, the participation here consistently declines with a noticeable increase in the service sector. To reduce wage inequality, services perform better in comparison to manufacturing and agriculture. The study also notices a U-shaped relationship between education and female LFPR in both rural and urban areas in India. Moreover, married women have a higher LFPR than unmarried women. Lastly, only a small proportion of women in India receive any social security benefits.

In the same domain, a study conducted by Fatima & Sultana (2009) aims to establish a relationship between the female LFPR in the country of Pakistan and the level of economic development. The study makes use of a literature survey, which uses a mathematical base model. The study finds a U-shaped relationship between the level of development within the country and the female LFPR. It also finds that high rates of economic development encourage female participation in the labour force as it leads to increased work opportunities for females. It also notes the impact of educational attainment on this curve. This U-shaped curve can also be attributed to the share of employment in different sectors. The study also notes that wages and marital status have a negative impact on the overall LFPR. A policy implication states that if the country works towards lowering unemployment rates, more discouraged labours will draw towards the market.

Finally, a study by Ravi et al. (2024) analyses the female Labour Force Participation Rate from 2017-18 to 2022-23 using the Periodic Labour Force Survey. The study provides an empirical analysis on the inter-state variations which reflect upon the female LFPR. This includes economic, political and cultural diversity. For instance, in Bihar, Punjab and Haryana, there have been consistently low rates of female LFPR. Even though Haryana and Punjab are among the richest states in India and Bihar is the poorest. In comparison, northeastern and southern states have reported higher levels of female LFPR. Although the rural female LFPR declined between 2004-05 to 2017-18, significant increase in the female LFPR has been noticed particularly in rural areas. One of the major reasons for this is the better measurement of unpaid work. There has been a more dramatic increase in female LFPR in rural areas than urban areas. The reason for this is household responsibilities, and the fact that married women are less likely to take part in the female LFPR in urban areas. This is net of the inter-state differences. For instance, in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, the LFPR does not vary due to the marital status. The study also finds that female LFPR, specifically for women aged 20-35, is lower in households that have children lower than the age of 14 years of age. This trend is more prominent in urban areas than rural areas. The availability of household care further impacts this. The study also accounts for age as a key factor in the decline, as female LFPR begins to decline much earlier than male LFPR due to this. This result is consistent across different states and rural and urban areas.

1.3. Research Gaps and Significance of the Study

The current literature on the female LFPR lacks the study of the impact of the gig economy on the female LFPR that as India's gig platforms usually cite low female interest. One reason for this is that they typically lack women-specific policies and safety provisions. Present data sets rely overly on macro-level data and averages. Much of the literature relies on quantitative surveys, which take place on a large scale, such as PLFS and NSS. There is a lack of primary data studies, exhibiting a need for a study that explored the ground level factors affecting women in participating in the labour force. Moreover, Limited studies actually survey the opinions of the women and try to understand how the patriarchal norms actually affect women's decisions to join the labour force, and rely more on assumptions for this. Research shows that even slight changes in the survey questionnaires can reveal the actual situation of female employment in economic activities, and that the current work being done by a large proportion of women may be unaccounted for (Deshpande, 2024).

The existing literature also lacks ethnographic and qualitative insight, especially of the work of women in urban areas. Many studies look at the measurable outcomes of the decline or increase in the LFPR but fail to account for the personal opinions/preferences of the women. Furthermore, there is a lot of data collected on the female labour force participation in rural areas. However, there is a lack of studies in the realm of urban areas, particularly. Not many studies have touched up the effect of marital status as a major factor influencing female LFPR. Studies find that even if relevant data to female LFPR in urban areas is available, there aren't enough micro-level studies that analyse the constraints and factors affecting female LFPR in urban areas, in comparison to rural areas (Lama, n.d.; Ravi et al., 2024). Moreover, the

absence of longitudinal data in India makes it difficult to analyse for life cycle related patterns, like marriage, children, etc. , of the entry and exit of females in the labour force. Many Indian women move in and out of the labor force, exhibiting low attachment to their jobs. These findings were only derived after looking at longitudinal data for CPHS and CMIE (Deshpande & Singh, 2021).

Without female participation in the labour force, the growth of our country is stagnating (Fernandez et al., 2023). Increasing female LFPR would result in a boost in India's economy. A report by ILO states that the per capita income of India could increase by 20 per cent by 2030 if efforts were made to halve the existing gaps in female participation (Kapsos et al., 2014). As a part of Viksit Bharat, the 2047 vision by the government of India to make India a completely developed nation by its 100th independence anniversary, aims to reach a 70% female economic engagement target by 2047 (Ibef, 2025). Driving female LFPR in India would serve as a key instrument for ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth (Sharma, 2025). A study quotes that India's GDP would have been higher by USD 1.3 trillion in 2022, a progressive step towards becoming a developed economy by 2047, if women had equal economic opportunities within the country (MVIRDC World Trade Center Mumbai & Kalantri, 2025). Specifically, in urban areas, motivating women to enter the workforce would lead to productive employment as well as social change, such that women would be encouraged to pursue education and participate in economic activities. Nonetheless, the female LFPR in urban areas continues to remain low due to stigmas surrounding leaving work after marriage, the gender wage gap, and social stereotypes. Thus, reducing such inequalities is crucial in order to boost female participation. Hence, it is important to identify the factors in-depth that affect female LFPR in urban areas. Therefore, this study aims to understand the factors impacting the lack of female workforce participation in urban areas, with an emphasis on married women.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of the study is to analyse the factors affecting female LFPR in urban areas. To assess the same following objectives were explored:

- To analyse the impact of marital status on female participation in the workforce
- To assess the role of the mode of work in female LFPR
- To evaluate the role of family setup and household responsibilities in influencing the female LFPR
- To assess the societal pressures on women to participate in the workforce
- To identify the reasons for career breaks and disruption for married and single women

2.2. Data Collection Tool

A survey was used to collect the primary data in the study. The survey has three filter questions: gender, age group, and marital status. Only females within the age group of more than 24 years were allowed to proceed further. Among them, singles or married individuals were allowed to proceed with further questions. The respondents were further segregated hereon by choosing whether they were single and employed, married and employed, or married and unemployed. For all groups, section one includes the demographics of the individuals (age, education, employment status, and personal and household income). Questions in Section 2 depend on the type of respondents.

For married and employed women, the second section focuses on educational pursuits, current and preferred modes of work, family structure, number of children and dependents, childcare arrangements, and household support. It also explores their perceptions of work-life balance, career breaks, and disruptions.

For married and unemployed women, the second section examines educational pursuits, preferred modes of work, family structure, number of children and dependents, childcare arrangements, household support, and feelings of being overburdened by domestic responsibilities. It further investigates their prior employment status, willingness to work in the future, and openness to remote work opportunities.

For single and employed women, the second section considers educational pursuits, preferred modes of work, family structure, number of dependents, and family support for employment. It also addresses their intention to continue working after marriage, concerns about career disruption, and the extent of their contribution to household income.

2.3. Data Collection Procedure

The data for the study were collected through the medium of a survey. The survey questionnaire was converted into a Google Form. This form was floated amongst known networks, friends, families, and immediate circles. The major states where this survey was circulated include Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, and Delhi.

2.4. Sampling and Sample Characteristics

The survey used in this study employs convenient and targeted sampling. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which the responses are collected from respondents who are easily accessible or known to the sampler, instead of using random sampling methods (Golzar et al., 2022). The survey used in the study was floated among friends, family, connections, and within circles of known people. Targeted sampling, or purposive or judgment sampling, refers to a non-probability tactical method of collecting responses from people who fit within the criteria of the study. For this study, after enough responses had been collected for a particular group of people, the next group of people was targeted (Taherdoost, 2016). This was done to avoid bias and ensure that a benchmark number of responses is hit for each respondent group. The target audience for the survey was females above the age of 24 in Northern India (majorly within the states of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, and Delhi). This age was chosen because this is the average age when women in India start working. Among those, the different groups targeted were “women who are single and currently employed”, “women who are married and currently employed”, and “women who are married and currently not employed”.

The total number of respondents was 184, out of which 114 were taken as part of the sample population after applying the filters on age, gender and marital status. The respondents with age less than 24, males, divorced, single, and widowed women were filtered out. From these responses, it can be inferred that most participants (48) are married and currently employed. Among this group, 12.50% of the women are between the age group of 25-30, 35.42% between the age group 31-35, 16.67% between 36-40 age group, 25% between 41-45 age group and 10.42% are above the age of 45. In terms of educational qualification, 12 have completed their Bachelor’s or equivalent, 26 have completed their Master’s or equivalent, 6 have a professional degree, and 4 have a degree higher than a master’s degree. Among these individuals, 37 are working full-time, 2 are working part-time, and 9 women are self-employed. Lastly, 2.1% of these working women have an annual income of more than 50 lakhs, 8.3% have between 40-50 lakhs, 4.2% between 30-40 lakhs, 12.5% between 20-30 lakhs, 29.2% between 10-20 lakhs, 20.8% between 5-10 lakhs, and 22.9% of them earn below 5 lakhs.

Subsequently, 34 responses constituted the married and unemployed women. Among this group, 5.88% of the women are between the age group of 25-30, 14.71% between the age group 31-35, 26.47% between 36-40 age group, 32.35% between 41-45 age group and 20.59% are above the age of 45. In terms of educational qualification, 14 have completed their Bachelor's or equivalent, 16 have completed their Master's or equivalent, 2 have a professional degree, and 2 have a diploma or equivalent within this group.

The rest of the respondents (32) are single and employed. Among this group, 21.88% of the women are below the age of 25, 65.63% are between the age group of 25-30, 9.38% between the age group of 31-35, and 3.13% between 41-45 age group. Out of these responses, 30 of them are working full-time, 1 of them is working part-time, and 1 is self-employed. Lastly, none of these women have an income above 40 lakhs, 3.1% lie between 30-40 lakhs, 9.4% between 20-30 lakhs, 21.9% between 10-20 lakhs, 43.8% between 5-10 lakhs, and 21.9% of them earn below 5 lakhs.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

The responses for the survey were taken in a completely ethical manner. Furthermore, the informed consent of all participants was taken. Before filling out the Google form, the participants were informed that the survey is completely anonymous. They were also informed that all data derived from the survey's responses is confidential and would be used solely for the purpose of individual research. The personal details of the surveyor, such as name, grade, class, and school, were also specified. The respondents were also informed about the aim of the study and that the purpose of the survey is to collect responses for data analysis in line with that aim.

2.6. Data Analysis Method

The data was analyzed primarily through visualization techniques. Various chart types, such as pie charts, line charts, and clustered column charts, were employed to represent the findings effectively. Pie charts were used to illustrate proportional distributions and simplify complex data into easily interpretable segments. Moreover, line charts helped depict trends and changes over time, providing a clear view of patterns and relationships within the data. Clustered column charts were utilized to compare multiple categories side by side, enabling straightforward visual comparisons across groups.

3. Results and Discussion

The given section presents the findings from the data collected using the survey. The following factors, including mode of work, family setup, household income, number of dependants and children, childcare management, career breaks and disruption, family and societal pressures, aim to analyse whether or not they have an impact on the decision of women to take part in the labour force. It further explores factors that constrain their participation, without their own willingness.

(i) Mode of Work

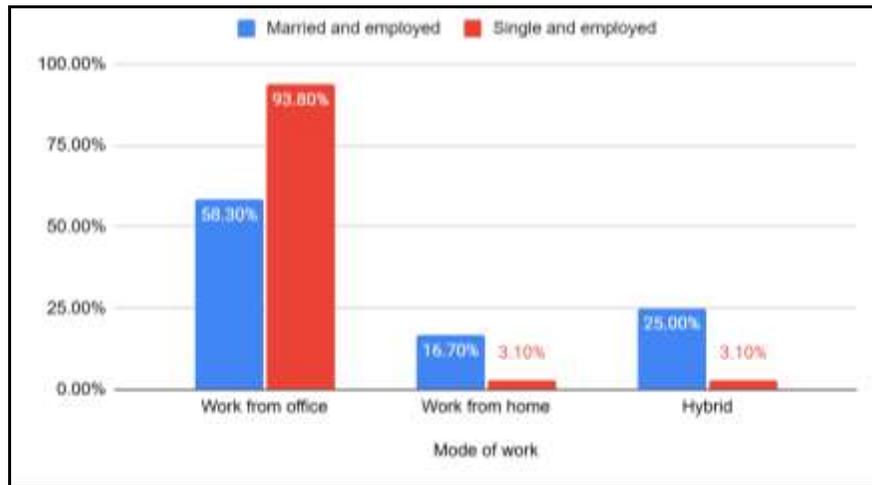


Figure 1: Current Mode of work of employed respondents

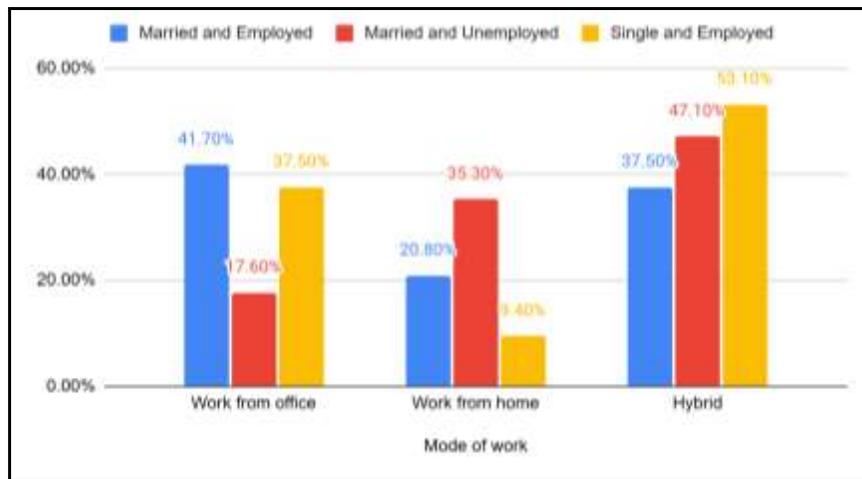


Figure 2: Respondents' preferred mode of work

Figure 1 depicts the current mode of work of employed respondents. The results show that a huge percentage of working married and single women, 58.3% and 93.8% respectively, work from the office. Whereas only 16.7% working married women and 3.10% single women work from home. Lastly, 25% married and 3.10% single women work in a hybrid setup. This shows a common trend among employed women working from the office. Subsequently, Figure 2 shows the respondents' preferred mode of work. When surveyed about the preferred mode of work, a vast majority of married and employed women (41.7%) stated that they preferred to work from the office, 20.80% preferred to work from home and 37.5% preferred to work hybrid. In comparison 17.6% married and unemployed women prefer working from office, 35.3% prefer work from home, and 47.1% prefer hybrid mode. Among the single and employed women, 37.5% prefer working from office, 9.4% from home, and 53.1% hybrid. This leads to the interpretation that a huge percentage of married women who aren't currently working could potentially join the workforce if allowed to work from home or a hybrid option.

The stats from the above figure also suggest that a much larger percentage of single women prefer to work from home, whereas married and employed women prefer to work from the office. The reason for

this is because of the fact that domestic responsibilities increase for working women once they start working from home, hindering their work. A research study states that the work environment of an individual determines their productivity, with a large positive and significant effect of working from the office. In contrast, those who work from home have negative productivity (Atkin, 2023). Among those who work from home, workers with familial responsibilities, poor living conditions, and children suffer higher constraints and lower productivity. This could potentially explain why workers prefer employees to work from the office, as depicted by the findings of the survey employed in this study. Another study states that the amount of responsibilities is a major factor in determining a woman's choice in deciding the place of work and the time to work (Chauhan, 2022). Women find it difficult to navigate through 'gendered time-space arrangements' when working from home, that is, the gender norms pertaining to the domestic duties of women, and the role that gender norms play a huge part in work-from-home settings. Most families perceive the idea that it is the man's job to be the breadwinner of the family, whilst the women have to give higher priority to household work. A subsequent research finds that societal expectations, which position women's primary role within the home, strongly influence their preferences (Jalota & Ho, 2024). The same study finds that younger and more educated women have a personal preference to work from home.

ii) Pursuit of Education

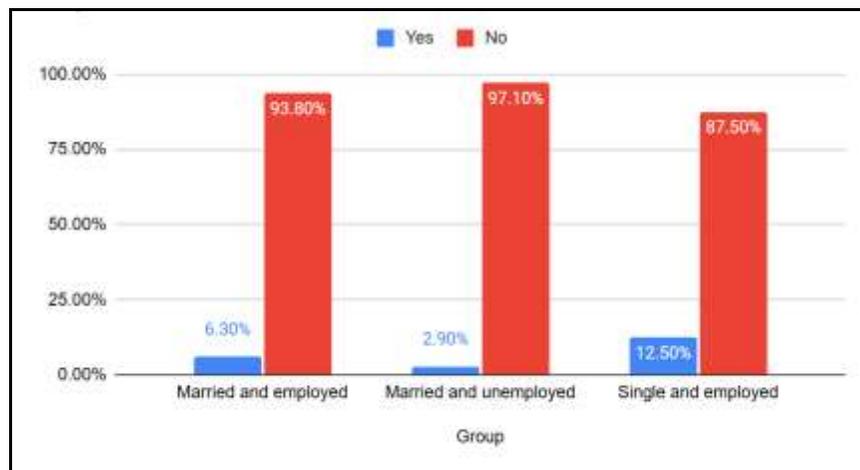


Figure 3: Percentage of respondents currently pursuing an educational degree

Figure 3 depicts the percentage of respondents currently pursuing an educational degree for all the surveyed groups. Contrary to expectations, 93.8% of married and employed women, 97.1% of married and unemployed women, and 87.5% of single and employed women are not currently pursuing an educational degree. This contradicts the expectation that women, perhaps, are unemployed due to the ongoing pursuit of educational degrees. A finding in a study by Neff et al. (2012) states that women in rural area are not available for work due to the pursue of higher education. However, this is not the case for urban women, as only a small proportion of married and employed and married and unemployed women are currently pursuing education. Amongst the single and employed women, a larger proportion of women currently partake in education (12.50%), which does not appear to be a determining factor in their decision to take part in the labour force. This leads to the conclusion that the present pursuit of education is not a key contributing factor to the decline in urban women's participation in the labour force. A study finds that there exists a "J-shaped" relationship between the education levels of women and their workforce participation. Ideally, one would expect higher education to translate into higher productive services and thus higher employment. However, this is not the case for women in India

(Chatterjee et al., 2018). Nonetheless, the study reveals that beyond secondary level education, education does lead to an increase in the possibility of female participation in the labour force.

(iii) Type of family

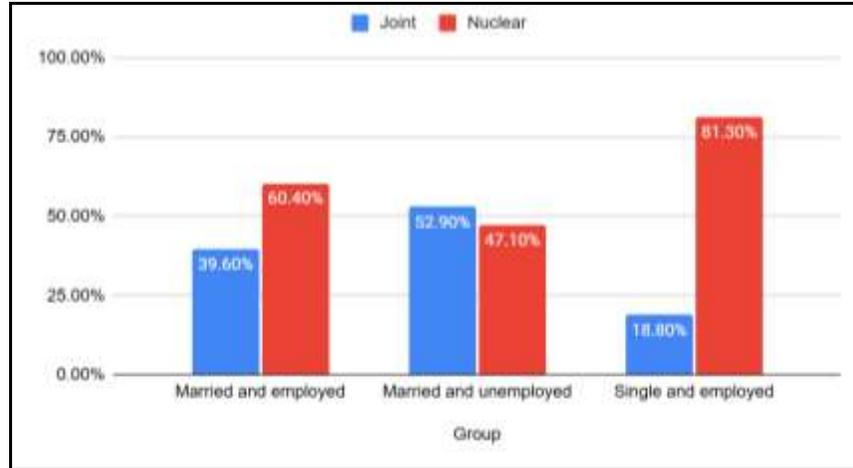


Figure 4: Respondents' Family Setup

Figure 4 shows the type of family structure of the respondents (Joint or Nuclear). From the figure, it can be seen that a major proportion of married and unemployed women live in joint families (52.90%), while 47.10% of them live in a nuclear family. In comparison, a pattern is noticed among employed women, i.e., they tend to live in a nuclear family. 60.40% of married and employed women and 81.30% of single and employed women live in nuclear families. This leads to the conclusion that one of the reasons why women are not employed is that they live in joint families and cannot step into the workforce due to familial constraints. A research study reinstates that family structures are conducive to restricting female participation in the workforce (Jayaraman & Khan, 2023). This is because the increase in domestic demand prevents women from taking up work. Another study conducted in Pakistan finds that women's decision-making authority is constrained within joint family structures (Rahman et al., 2025). This is because the decision of the senior male members in the family holds higher importance, and often curtails women's opinions in household and financial matters. Women's attempts to speak up are often criticised, leaving them without much power. Moreover, the females in these families are largely dependent on their families for financing. Even if the women end up working, they are restricted from spending their own earnings, and the male members of the family have power over the finances. Furthermore, women in joint families face restrictions on their mobility due to prejudices within the family and societal expectations. In contrast, nuclear families offer higher autonomy for women to make their own choices (Bhasin, 2016). Women also face fewer restrictions in mobility. They have the freedom to do things within their own discretion, without having to worry about the comfort and lives of the additional dependents. This leads to an avoidance of stress and discomfort.

(iv) Household income and contribution of women to household expenses

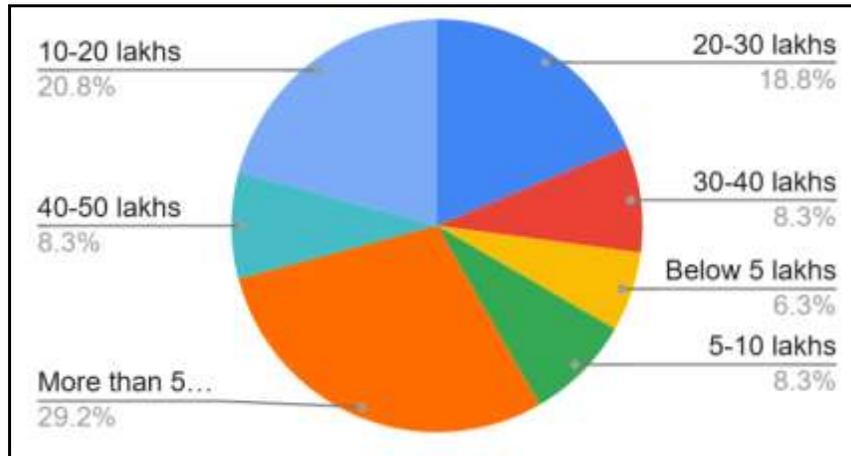


Figure 5: Household annual income of married and employed women

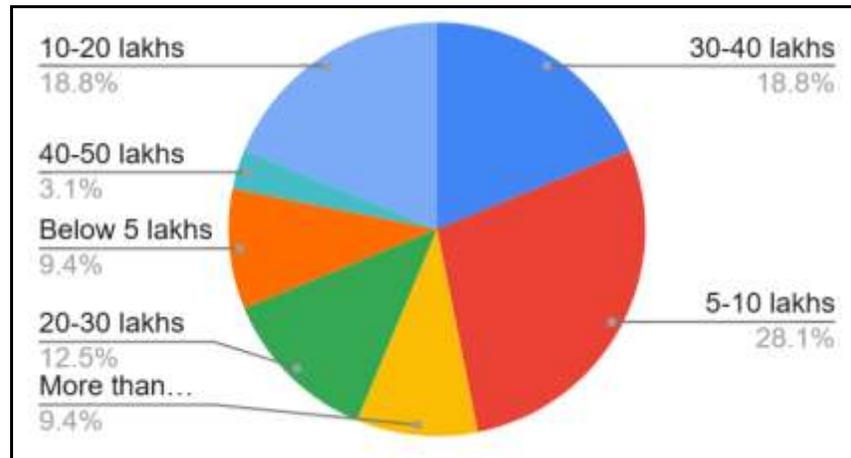


Figure 6: Household annual income of single and employed women

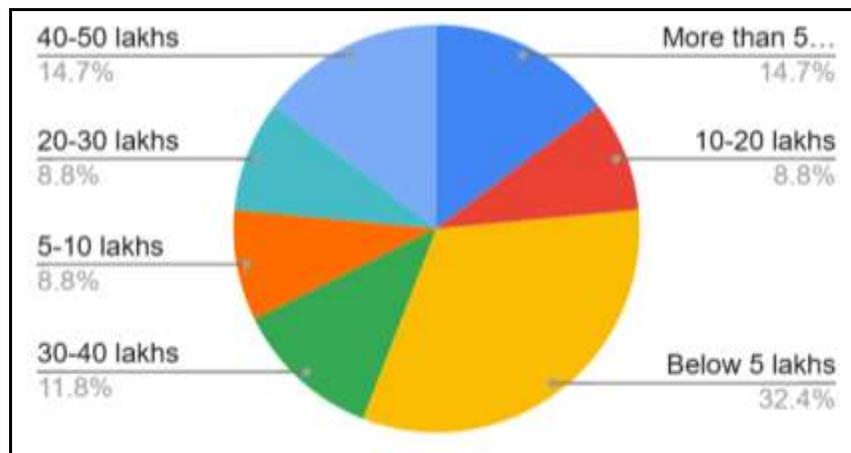


Figure 7: Household annual income of married and unemployed women

Figures 5, 6, and 7 show the household annual income of the respondents. The household income of Married and Employed women is mainly either between 10-20 lakhs (20.8%) or more than 50 lakhs (29.2%). This is because women’s earnings increase the overall number of income earners in the household, thereby raising total household income. That of Married and Unemployed women is below 5 lakhs (32.4%). For single and employed women, it is mainly 5-10 lakhs (28.1%) or between 10-20 lakhs, or 30-40 lakhs (18.8%).

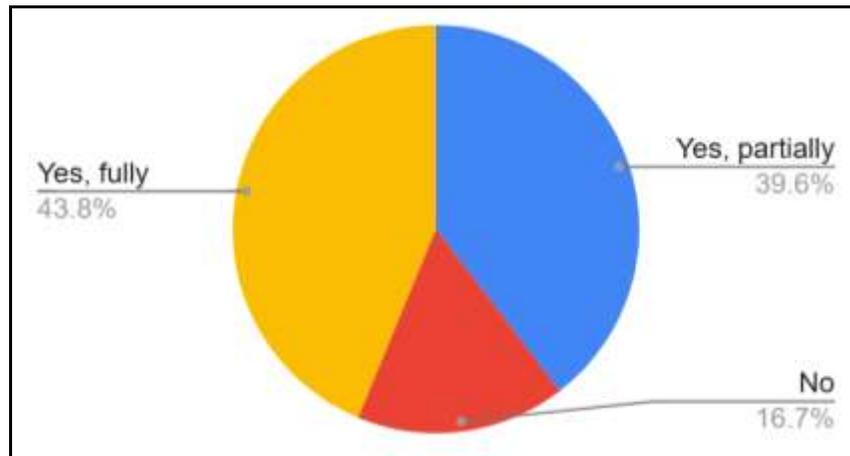


Figure 8: Proportion of married and employed women who regularly contribute to household expenses

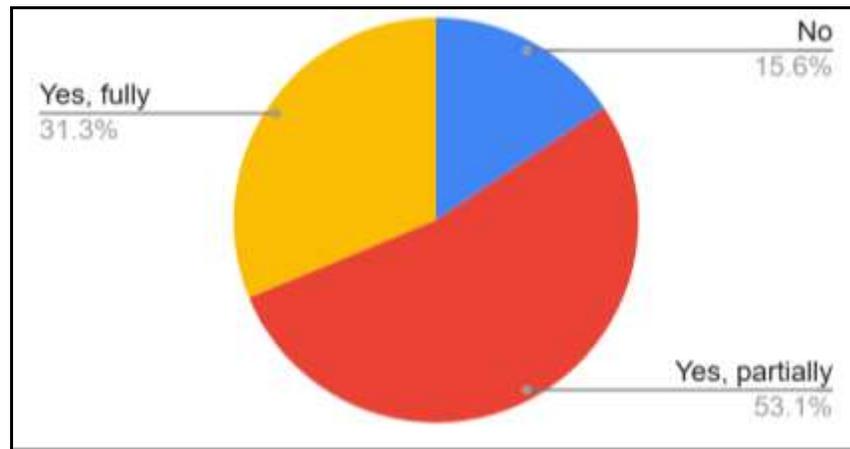


Figure 9: Proportion of single and employed women who regularly contribute to household expenses

On observing the contribution of the employed women to their household income, in figures 8 and 9, it can be seen that a vast majority of married women either fully (43.8%) or partially (39.6%) contribute their income. The same pattern is observed for single women, where 31.3% contribute their income fully and 53.1% contribute their income partially to the household expenses. From this, it can be derived that the families of employed women have a higher income as these women contribute their money to household expenses, or a higher number of working individuals. This also leads to the conclusion that female LFPR does not depend on the household income. A study finds that there is an inverse relationship between the household income of a woman, excluding her own earnings and the labour force participation of women (Chatterjee et al., 2018). However, the findings from this study contradict that.

Moreover, it can be observed that even if the household income is lower, it does not motivate women to work. This contradicts a study which finds that women generally enter the labour force to supplement household income (Sabarwal et al., 2010). It finds that women in low-income and middle-class families are more likely to do so in face of an economic crises rather than those from upper-class families.

(v) Number of children and dependants

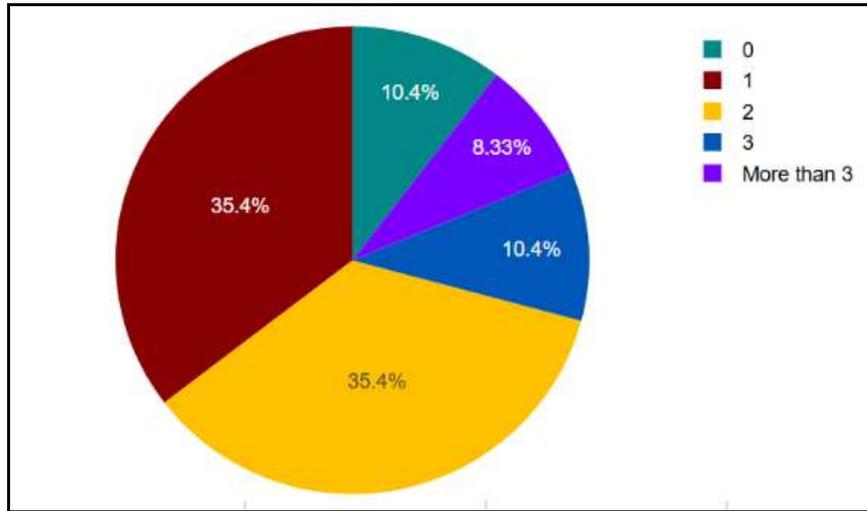


Figure 10: Number of dependants of married and employed women

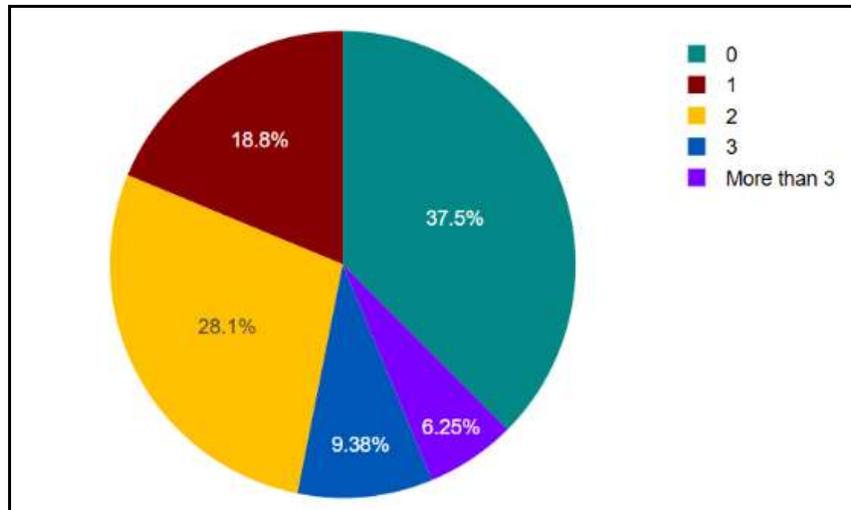


Figure 11: Number of dependants of single and employed women

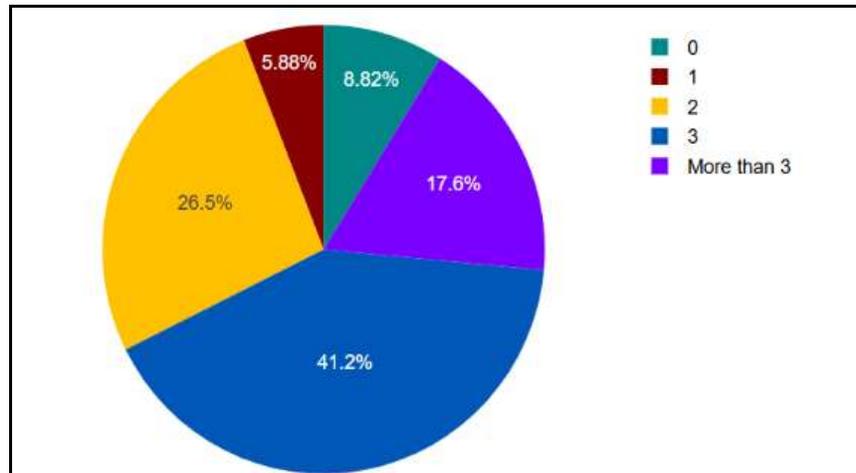


Figure 12: Number of dependants of married and unemployed women

Figures 10, 11, and 12 depict the number of dependents of the respondents. Married and employed women largely have 1 or 2 dependents (35.4%) living in their households. Married and unemployed women, on the other hand, have majorly 2 (26.5%) or 3 (41.2%) dependents, which is more than that of married and employed women. This indicates that the larger number of dependants in the house could result in female unemployment. A study by the UN finds that women have a prominent role in caring for dependents in their families (Azcona et al., n.d.). With the increase in responsibilities, women often have to substitute their time by decreasing the resulting outcome or moving out of paid work opportunities. The study also points out that the weight of childcare responsibilities is higher on women than that of marriage. Nonetheless, the presence of older-age dependents adds to the caregiving burdens of women and moves them out of the workforce. Lastly, single and employed women have 0 (37.5%), 1 (18.8%), or 2 (28.1%) dependants who could probably be the parents. Therefore, the number of dependents can negatively influence female participation in the workforce. However, this impact is higher for married women as they have the responsibility of children.

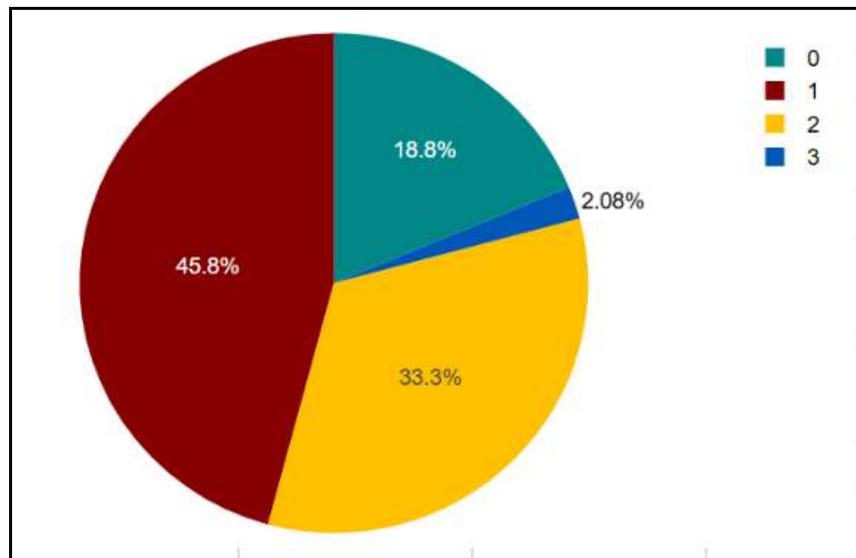


Figure 13: Number of children of married and employed women

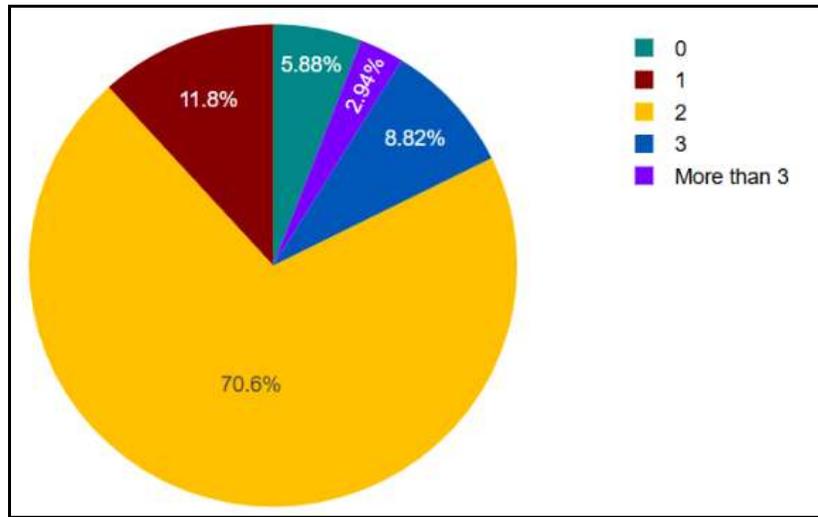


Figure 14: Number of children of married and unemployed women

Figures 13 and 14 depict the number of children of married women. Among the married and employed women, a major chunk of the women have 0,1, or 2 children. 45.8% of the women have 1 child, 33.3% have 2 children, and 18.8% of them do not have any children. In comparison, 70.6% of the married unemployed women have 2 children, which is a much larger percentage than compared to married and employed women. A study justifies this result by stating that a majority of women leave the labour force, even if temporarily, due to pregnancy (Doren, 2019). However, the time of leaving and the choice of doing so depend on the number of children. Women are very likely to leave the work force during workforce, and this likelihood increases with the increase in each child.

Among the married and employed women, a huge percentage of women only have 1 child, representing a lower burden of childcare. Among the married and unemployed women, a very small percentage (5.88%) do not have any children, suggesting that it is mainly childcare responsibilities that keep them out of the workforce. In a similar direction, a study finds that the responsibility of children reduces the number of hours that women devote to work (Linjuan, 2025). Hence, higher birth rates inversely relate to wages and career progression, which in turn reduces the female LFPR.

(vi) Management and support of household members in childcare

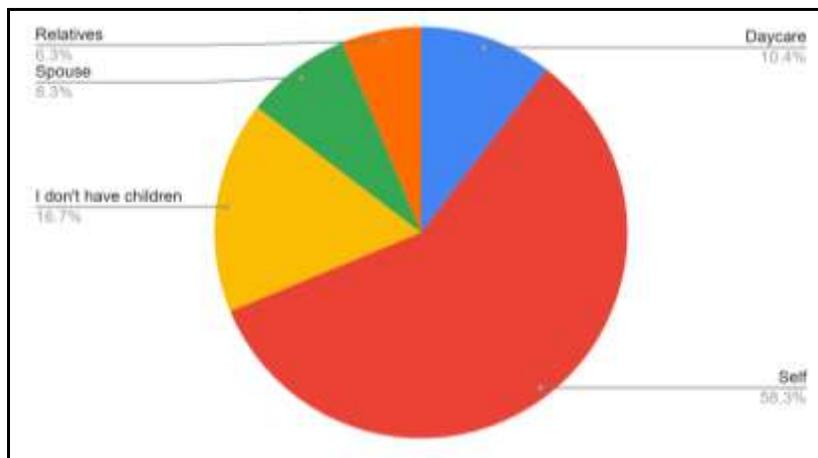


Figure 15: Means of managing childcare by married and employed women

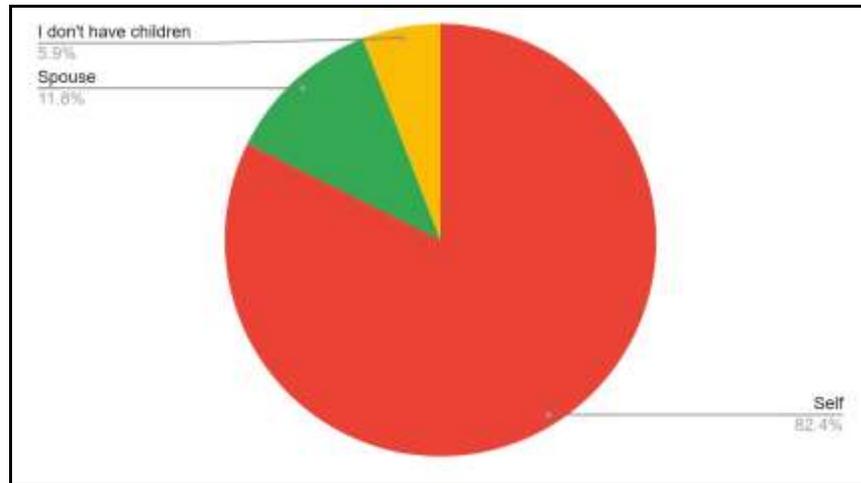


Figure 16: Means of managing childcare by married and unemployed women

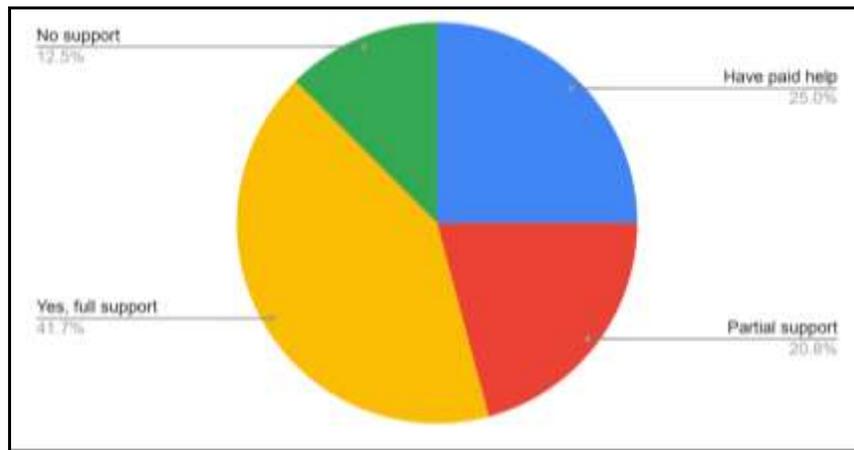


Figure 17: Family Support in managing household chores for married and employed women

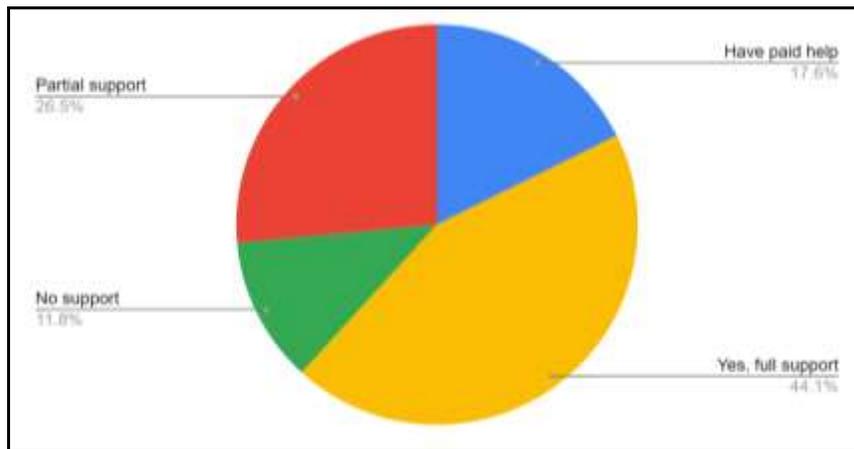


Figure 18: Family Support in managing household chores for married and unemployed women

Figures 15 and 16 show the ways that women manage childcare. The figures depict that 58.3% of married and employed women manage childcare themselves, in contrast to 82.4% of married and

unemployed women who manage it themselves. Supporting this, Figure 17 shows that amongst the married and employed women, 41.7% receive full support from their families, 20.8% receive partial support, and 25 % have paid help in managing household chores. Moreover, Figure 18 shows that among the married and unemployed women, 44.1% receive full support, 26.5% receive partial support, and 17.6% have paid help in managing household chores. There isn't a huge difference between the percentage of employed and unemployed women who receive paid help. Thus, the view that earning women have paid help because they can afford it is contradicted. This also contradicts the view that higher availability of child-care services (like daycare) encourage women to take part in the labour force. A study in Canada finds that there is a direct relationship between child-care programs and female labour force participation (White, 2001). Considering the percentage of number of dependants and children, on diving further into childcare management, it can be derived that married and employed women generally don't have a higher number of children and are, hence, working due to the lack of burden of childcare. Among the married and unemployed women who have children, 82.4% manage childcare themselves, which could be a restrictive burden keeping them out of the workforce. A study finds that having young children within the household lowers the labour force participation rate of women (Maurer-Fazio et al., 2011). The effect of having pre-school children is especially detrimental, with the women with pre-school children being more likely by 4.2 points to exit the labour force than those with older children. In both cases, spouse support in childcare management is similar but still very low (8.3% for married and employed and 11.8% for married and unemployed).

(vii) Family and Societal pressures

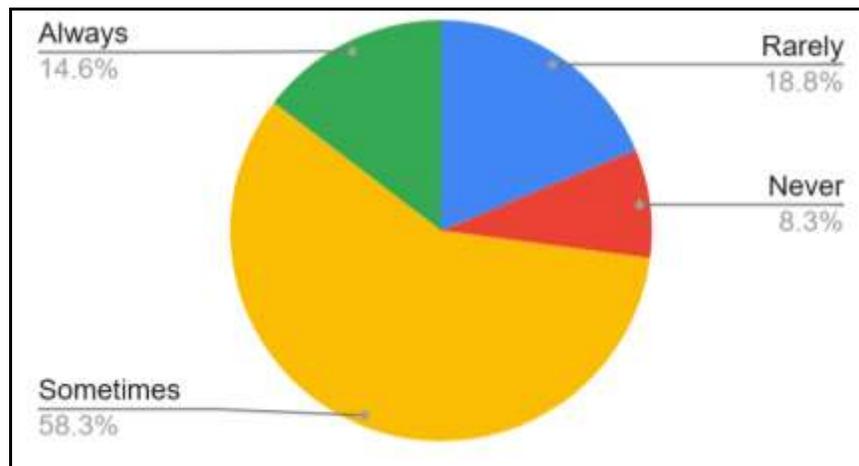


Figure 19: Feeling of overburden amongst married and employed women due to household chores

Figure 19 depicts the feeling of overburden amongst married and employed women due to household chores. A huge percentage of married and employed women have felt overburdened by household pressures at some point in time. 58.3% have felt the overburdened sometimes, and 14.6% always feel it. Since feeling overburdened by household chores can lead women to leave their jobs, perceptions regarding this issue were collected. Figure 20 depicts the thoughts of quitting a job amongst married and employed women. Despite the feeling of overburden, the figure depicts that 72.9% have never thought of quitting their work.

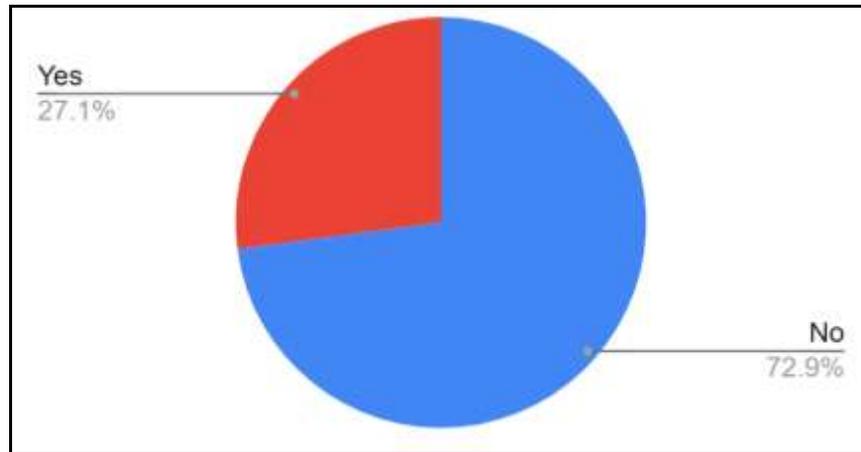


Figure 20: Thoughts of quitting job amongst married and employed women

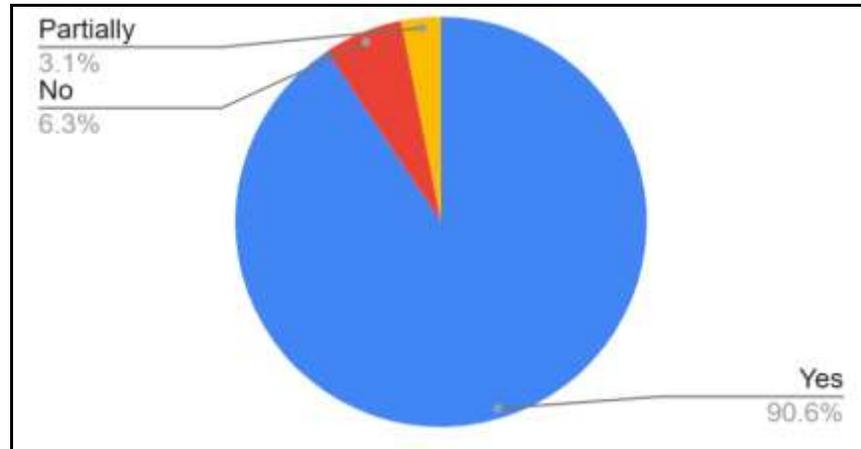


Figure 21: Support of family members towards the jobs of single and employed women

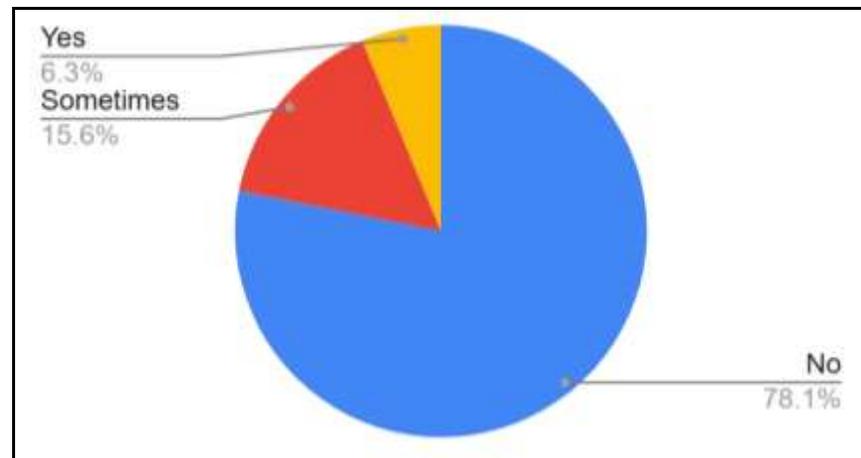


Figure 22: Facing societal pressures as single and employed women

Subsequently, Figure 21 shows the support of family members towards the jobs of single and employed women. 90.6% of the women’s families support their careers. Moreover, Figure 22 shows the societal pressures that single and employed women tend to face. It can be seen that 78.1% of them have not felt societal pressures, while 21.9% of the single employed felt the pressure to leave work and get

married. To support the large proportion, a study finds the shift in the mindset of urban Indian nuclear families on traditional role expectations (Narayan & Bharadwaj, 2005). Both husbands and wives are receiving the same levels of support from their spouses and family. This has led to an increase in life satisfaction. Hence, family and societal pressures are not highly influential in determining female workforce participation.

(viii) Career Break and disruption

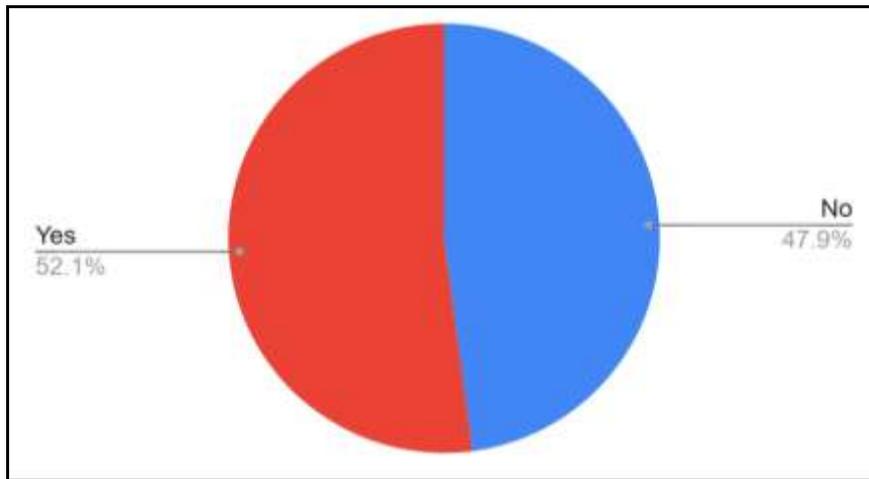


Figure 23: Career breaks taken by married and employed women

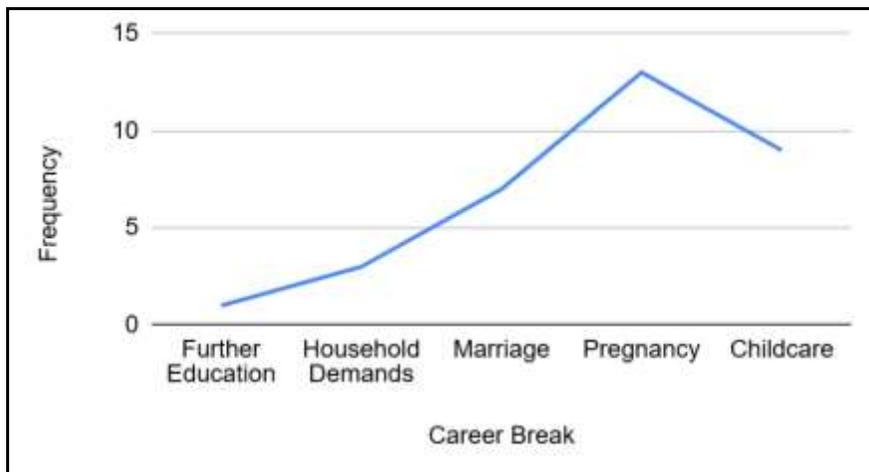


Figure 24: Reasons for career breaks amongst married and employed women

Figure 23 shows the career breaks taken by married and employed women. 52.1% of women have taken a career break, while 47.9% haven't. This distribution is almost equal, and there isn't a significant difference. Figure 24 shows the reasons for career breaks amongst married and employed women. Among those who have taken a break, pregnancy has been the main reason, followed by childcare, marriage, and household demands, and further education.

A study supports this finding by stating that several women end up taking career breaks in their 30s, a period when their career growth is essential due to pregnancy, family obligations, and societal norms (Thakur et al., 2024). The impact of gender stereotypes, lack of support systems, and societal expectations can be observed here, which makes it difficult for women to achieve a work-life balance.

The same study also reveals that several women have no choice but to exit the workforce due to the presence of aforementioned issues. While the rest of them are forced to do so by miscellaneous factors.

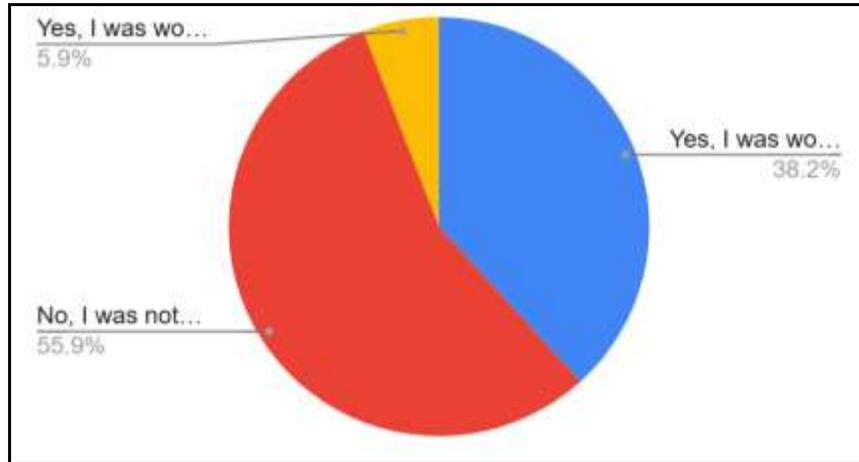


Figure 25: Proportion of married and unemployed women working before marriage

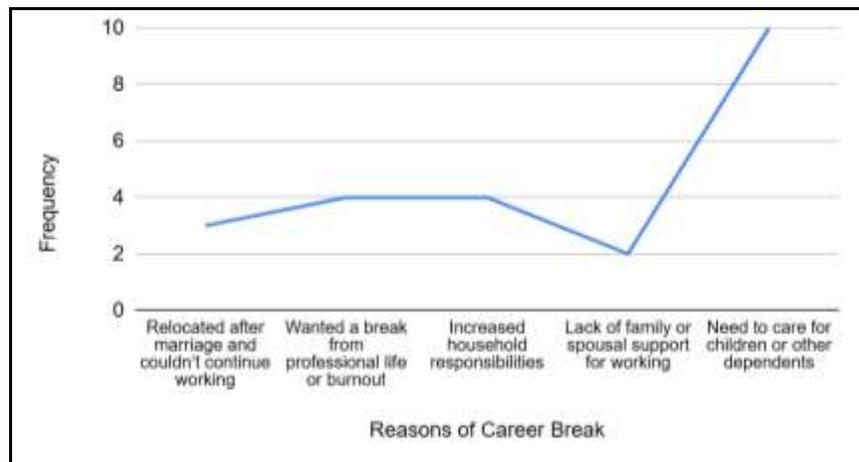


Figure 26: Reasons for career breaks amongst married and unemployed women

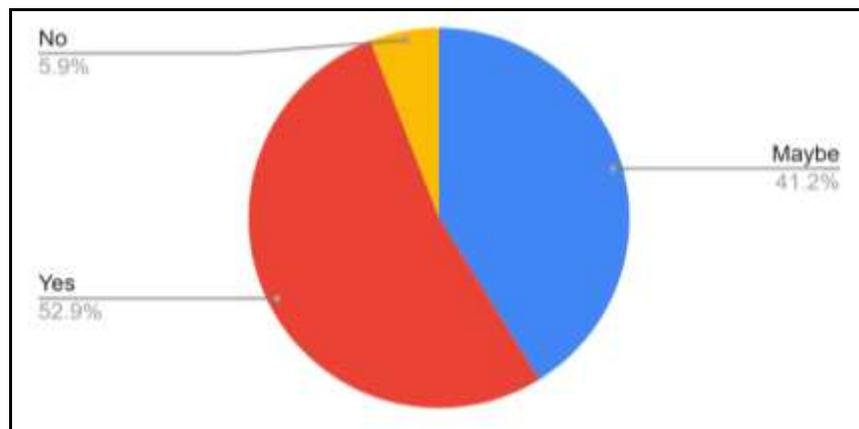


Figure 27: Decisions of married and unemployed women to work in the future

From Figure 25, which depicts the proportion of married and unemployed women working before marriage, it can be seen that a huge percentage of the married and unemployed women (55.9%) were not

working before marriage, while 38.2% were working full time, and 5.9% were freelancing or working part time. Furthermore, Figure 26 shows the reasons for career breaks amongst married and unemployed women. Among those who were working, they stopped doing so after marriage due to the need to care for children or other dependents. This can be linked to the fact that a huge percentage of married and unemployed women have 2 or more children. As the previous findings suggest, the increase in the number of children of women increases the possibility of them withdrawing from the labour force (Doren, 2018). Moreover, the other reasons include, in ascending order of contribution, want of a break from professional life or burnout, increased household responsibilities, relocation post-marriage, and lack of family or spousal support for working.

Figure 27 shows the decision of married and unemployed women to work in the future. 52.9% of married and employed women stated that they would want to work in the future if they are given the opportunity to do so, while 41.2% of women responded with maybe to the same. A study found that getting married also creates supply-side issues (Tauheed, n.d.). It found that married women face discrimination by employers when it comes to getting contacted for the hiring process. The study revealed that married females and single men experience discrimination during the initial contact stage of the hiring process. This discrimination is more prominent in gender-neutral domains, like human resources, in comparison to single women. The study identified that the implementation of the Maternity Bill 2017 is the cause for this filtration, as it places additional costs on the hirers.

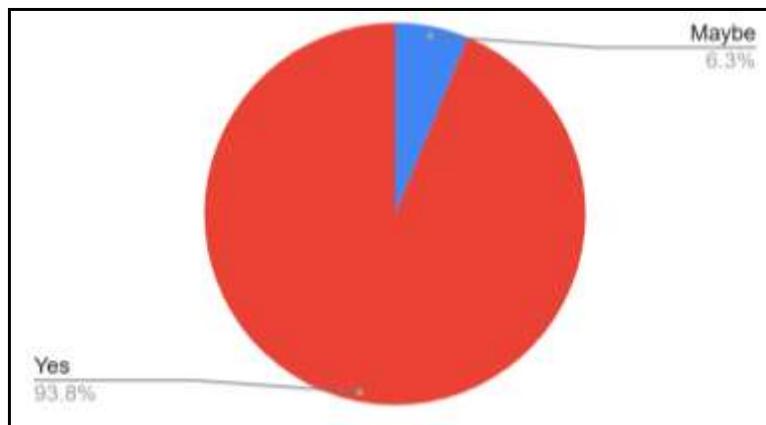


Figure 28: Decisions of single and employed women to keep working in case of marriage

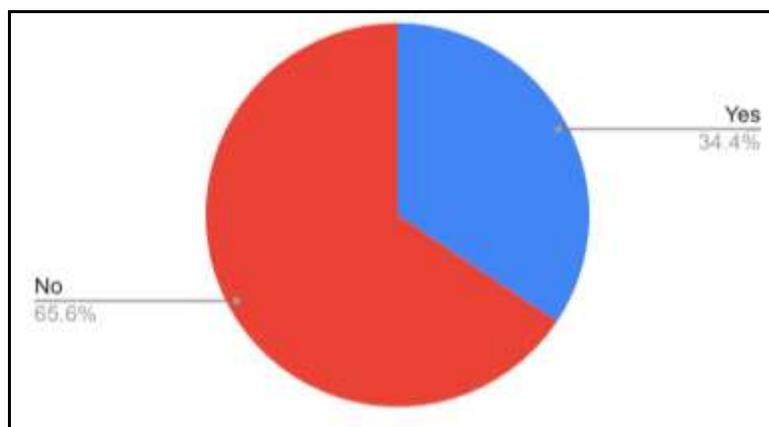


Figure 29: Fear amongst single and employed women of career disruption in case of marriage

Finally, Figure 28 shows the decisions of single and employed women to keep working in case of marriage. Among the single and employed women, 93.8% of the women wish to continue working if they

get married in the future and the rest responded maybe. Hence, it can be noted that none of the women wanted to quit working by their own choice. To depict the fear amongst single and employed women of career disruption in case of marriage is shown through Figure 29. A majority of them (65.6%) do not fear career disruption post marriage but a considerable percentage (34.4%) of women fear job loss even they are living in urban areas. Supporting this, a study finds that getting married has a negative impact on the participation of females in the labour force (Park, 2024). The effect is varied depending on the regional characteristics; that is, socio-cultural factors affect female participation. Restrictions due to marriage in urban areas are much more severe for women than in rural areas.

Thus, it can be concluded that education does not have a role to play in female labour force participation. Mode of work, family structure, number of children and dependants can play a key role in driving the participation of women. Finally, Pregnancy, marriage, childcare, household demands, a want of a break from professional life or burnout, relocation post-marriage, and lack of family support have a negative impact on female participation.

4. Conclusion

The labour force participation rate of women in urban India continues to be significantly lower than in rural areas, despite the availability of apparent greater opportunities. This is due to the prevailing gender stereotypes, marriage responsibilities, pressure from in-laws, structural shifts, and higher availability of capital-intensive jobs regarding their participation. This study aims to find out the factors impacting the lack of female workforce participation in urban areas, with a special emphasis on marital status. The study used a survey to collect this data, which was circulated in north-Indian urban cities. After filterations, 114 responses from single and married women above 24 years of age were evaluated using visualizations. Firstly, it was revealed that a vast majority of the respondents are currently not pursuing any educational degree, contradicting the view that women are unemployed due to the ongoing pursuit of educational degrees. Secondly, the majority of working women presently work from the office. Married and employed women's preference would be to continue to do so due to the existence of household and childcare responsibilities that reduce their productivity when working from home, whereas single and employed women would prefer to work hybrid environment. Married and unemployed women, on the other hand, would prefer to work from home or a hybrid environment because of societal expectations of women to primarily reside at home. Hence, mode of work impacts the female participation in workforce.

Thirdly, a vast proportion of married and unemployed women live in joint families, whereas single and married employed women live in nuclear families. Thus, unemployed women are unable to join the workforce due to the familial constraints and dominance of senior male family members that exist within joint families. This indicates that family setup also determine the participation of a women in labourforce. Fourthly, many single and married employed women regularly contribute their income, either fully or partially, to household income, which results in higher household income as compared to that of unemployed women. Nevertheless, household income does not compel women to seek employment in metropolitan settings, as there are instances where, despite low household income, women remain unemployed. Fifth, unemployed women tend to have more dependents or children than employed women, suggesting that the burden of their responsibilities keeps them out of the workforce. Lastly, a huge proportion of married and employed women have taken career breaks, mostly due to pregnancy, followed by marriage, childcare, household demands, and further education. Most of the married and unemployed women were not working before marriage and would like to work in the future, but are unable to do so due to a lack of a break from professional life or burnout, increased household responsibilities, relocation post-marriage, or lack of family or spousal support for working. Moreover, the single and employed women would wish to continue working if they got married in the future, but fear

career disruption in case they do so. Thus, it can be concluded that education does not have a role to play in female labour force participation. Mode of work, family structure, number of children and dependants can play a key role in driving the participation of women. Finally, Pregnancy, marriage, childcare, household demands, a want of a break from professional life or burnout, relocation post-marriage, and lack of family support have a negative impact on female participation.

5. Policy Implications and Limitations

The results from this study can be used by multiple stakeholders. Firstly, the government should introduce some policies related to the enhancement of female labour force participation in India. There are several schemes that already exist, such as Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Proposed Women's Urban Employment Guarantee Act (WUEGA) and Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana. These policies could aim at reducing the household responsibilities, familial constraints, and societal pressures faced by women when it comes to accepting a job. Secondly, non-profit organisations should implement workshops or campaigns to create awareness amongst people to enhance the participation of females, as well as to encourage them to take part in the labour force. Lastly, industries and offices should implement work-from-home policies targeted at women in order to increase their participation.

Despite the insightful findings and policy recommendations of this study, there are several limitations. Firstly, the survey has a smaller sample size and could have gathered more respondents. Secondly, there are geographical constraints such that the survey population is restricted to northern Indian cities like Punjab, Delhi, Gurgaon, Haryana, etc. It does not account for the factors influencing urban women in other regions of India. Thirdly, A comparison between the different studies would have been conducted to show the impact of the factors across different regions. Fourth, the study could have incorporated an analysis of the impact of the identified factors across different age groups. Lastly, secondary data could also have been analysed on a macro level; this study mainly focuses on primary data analysis.

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