Female Labor Force Participation, Gender Norms, and Sexual Harassment in Public Spaces – Peshawar, Pakistan

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The data are from the Peshawar Urban Household Survey, Data were collected by the survey firm RCONS.
Motivation: FLFP in Pakistan—particularly urban—remains among the lowest for a lower middle-income country, and hasn’t improved.

This exclusion of women from the labor force comes at a cost. For instance, potential GDP gains from closing the country’s gender gap in employment range from 5% to 23% (Eberhard and Gutierrez 2022).

Source: Poverty in Pakistan: Dynamics 2001-2019; using data from on PAK LFS.
WHY? Barriers to FLFP in Pakistan

NORMATIVE
Marriage, Mobility, Safety and Attitudes towards FLFP

HOUSEHOLD BARRIERS
The Burden of Housework and Childcare

HUMAN CAPITAL
Education and Occupation

ECONOMIC BARRIERS:
Firm Preference and Workplace Laws
Sexual harassment as a barrier to FLFP

- Sexual harassment and violence imposes substantial psychological costs on its victims, which may impact labour market outcomes both directly and indirectly through diminished human capital acquisition*

- In Delhi, India, women are willing to choose a college in the bottom half of the quality distribution over a college in the top quintile for a route that is perceived to be one standard deviation (SD) safer**

- Women are less likely to work away from home where the perceived threat of sexual harassment against girls is higher.***

- Evidence from Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Buenos Aires (Argentina), and Lima (Peru), show that the lack of safe transport options for women impede them from accessing job opportunities
The PESHAWAR Urban Household Survey

- Attempts to improve the measurement of FLFP:
  1. Collect information on labor (and other topics) directly from all working age women living in the household, besides primary (male) respondent;
  2. Expands questions to capture all possible forms of employment; and
  3. Allow the accounting of production of goods for family consumption.

- Attempts to measure norms, mobility, and sexual harassment (safety)

- Special module in questionnaire based on qualitative evidence, rigorous piloting, rigorous training of male and female enumerators
Sexual harassment is highly prevalent in Peshawar

- Almost **one-third** of Peshawari women reported having experienced sexual harassment in their lives
- Evidence from other countries suggests this is an **under-estimate**
- More than a quarter of women have had to deal with **inappropriate staring or comments** and more than one-tenth with **sexual harassment**
Sexual harassment and its fear seep into women’s daily lives

Restrictions on life activities

- Women spend almost their entire lives inside the home: 23.1 average daily hours (vs. 13.7 for men)
- 30% of girls who reported never having attended school said it was because of lack of permission
- 46% of women working from home said it is because they are not allowed to leave home
- 84% of women are always accompanied by someone when they leave home

Daily insecurity

- About 65% feel safe walking within their neighborhood
- 2/3rds do not feel safe walking outside own neighborhood
- 75% of those using a toilet outside the home do not feel safe
FLFP in Peshawar

**Women**

- Labor Force Survey: 9.4
- Peshawar Survey: 13.4
- Peshawar Survey, Including Work for Own Consumption: 15.5

**Men**

- Labor Force Survey: 75.9
- Peshawar Survey: 74.2
- Peshawar Survey, Including Work for Own Consumption: 74.3

Increase: +42% for Women, +16% for Men.
Drivers of low FLFP

- **Human capital**: limited education endowment for women (63% of women have no schooling vs. 45% of men)

- **Burden of house/care work**: rigid polarization of gender roles. Time use data show that women tend to spend a similar amount of time doing house/care work (4 to 5 h/day) regardless of their employment status
Gender norms: attitudes and perceptions

Should women in general work for pay?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
<th>Men (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In some cases</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What would your ideal job be? (women’s answers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home-based work</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside the home: government job</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside the home: private/NGO job</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most important condition under which is acceptable for women to work for pay? (men’s answers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work is home based</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work as a teacher or nurse</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No interaction with non-mahram men</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic necessity</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can work while observing purdah</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If outside the home, sex segregated workspace</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not interfere with responsibilities at home</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If outside home, workplace should be close to home</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good salary</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to safe transport</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical and other benefits (e.g. childcare...)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Gender norms: decision-making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who decides...</th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Spouse</th>
<th>You + spouse together</th>
<th>Mother/M. in law</th>
<th>Father/F. in law</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 To whom and when you should be married?</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 If you can work outside your house for pay?</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 If you can work inside your house for pay?</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 To start or continue your education?</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 To seek professional medical treatment?</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 About buying goods like clothes/shoes for yourself?</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FLFP and labor market awareness

Survey probes motives of men and women out of the labor force, who are willing to work, but not looking for a job

Out of the labor force – not searching but willing to work

Women willing to work but not looking for a job – main reasons

- Don't know how to look for work: 41.47%
- Don't know what work I can do for pay: 7.44%
- Family/Society does not allow: 15.29%
- Family/household responsibilities: 11.5%

FLFP >> 20.4
FLFP >> 15.6
FLFP >> 15.4
Next steps and recommendations

- **Facilitating awareness**
  - Job seeking platforms for women
  - Professional networks and mentoring

- **Human Capital Investment**
  - Removing constraints to girls’ education
  - Fostering marketable skill development

- **Supporting women’s businesses**
  - Increasing access to financing options
  - Facilitating access to internet and digital skills

- **Facilitating safer workplaces and infrastructure**
  - Safe, affordable public transport
  - Childcare options, flexible hours, rest areas and toilets
  - Enacting laws on sexual harassment

- **Evidence based policies**
  - Robust measurement of FLFP
  - Legal reform to support informal HBWs and conducive work environments in private and public sector

- **Tackling social norms**
  - Media campaigns
  - Behavior change interventions
  - Empowering women in public leadership as role models