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Role of Economic, Household and Education Background on Female Decision Making for Labour Force Participation in Afghanistan

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Abstract

Despite significant global efforts to address gender inequalities, discrimination against women persists across countries, religions, ethnicities and regions. Women's participation in economic activities has dual benefits: it enhances women's empowerment and contributes to their country's economic development. The present paper attempts to test the impact of economic, household and household educational backgrounds on female decision-making for labour force participation (LFP) in Afghanistan. The researchers collected 414 responses from women aged 15 to 65 years old living in Afghanistan. Females engaging in any activity that generates money or actively seeking paid jobs were considered to be in the labour force. The results show that economic and household factors have a negative association with female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan. Females from poorer families and with unemployed parents and husbands are less likely to enter the labour market than females from wealthier families and with employed parents and husbands. Moreover, females from larger household sizes and living in joint families are less likely to participate in the labour force compared to females living in nuclear family types and smaller household sizes. However, the relationship between household educational background (education qualifications of parents and husbands) and female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan was not significant.

Key Words

Female Labour Force Participation, Economic, Household, Household Education, Family Types

INTRODUCTION

Despite significant global efforts to address gender inequalities, discrimination against women persists across countries, religions, ethnicities and regions. Women's participation in economic activities is widely recognized as having dual benefits: it enhances women's empowerment and contributes to their country's economic development. However, data reveal a persistent gender gap in labour market participation, with women significantly underrepresented compared to men. Researchers highlighted the importance of various factors influencing female employment in different countries. Some of these factors, such as social norms, patriarchal values, religion, educational background and household type, deter women from entering the labour force (see, for example, Göksel, 2013; Yasmin *et al.*, 2013; Sharifi and Sira, 2023). In contrast, factors such as education qualifications and self-efficacy have shown a positive association with women's employment.

Abraham *et al.* (2017) categorized the determinants of FLFP into three key groups: *enabling conditions* (e.g., childcare responsibilities), *facilitating conditions* (e.g., education and training) and *precipitating conditions* (e.g., household financial pressures). Similarly, Cook (2011) highlighted how household factors like caregiving responsibilities for young children and elderly family members disproportionately deter women from entering the labour force. He argued that the presence of children below 5 years old in the family discourages women from employment. Mothers with young children (below 5 years old) are expected to stay at home and take care of the children. Additionally, young females are expected to care for elderly family members, which requires them to stay at home rather than work outside the family

While much of the existing literature examines factors such as household education background, household composition and income levels in shaping FLFP, significant gaps remain. Most studies focus on developed or rapidly developing countries, while in countries like Afghanistan, has remained unexplored. This country is characterized by deeply rooted patriarchal structures, unique household dynamics and ongoing economic challenges, which presents a critical case for investigation.

Factors such as household head gender, family poverty levels and cultural expectations around caregiving remain particularly relevant but are insufficiently addressed in the context of Afghanistan. For instance, while researchers have examined poverty and household consumption as influencing factors in other countries (e.g., Andlib and Khan, 2018; Koyuncu and Özen,

2017), there is limited evidence on how these dynamics interact with Afghanistan's unique socio-political environment.

The current study aims to fill this gap by examining the interplay of economic, household and household education factors on female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.This study consists of five main sections: introduction (presented), review of literature, research methodology, results and discussion and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Widarti (1998) examined the relationship between the husband's occupation and the wife's LFP. It was found that women whose husbands had white-collar jobs (professional, administrator, manager, or clerk) were less likely to enter the labour market compared to women whose husbands were salespersons or worked in service occupations. This paper also found a negative association between a husband's education and a wife's LFP.

Naqvi and Shahnaz (2002) examined the household factors influencing FLFP in Pakistan. They found that the characteristics of the household head are important factors in FLFP. Females with an illiterate household head are more likely to participate in the labour force. In families where the head of the household is an employer or employee, the chance of women participating in the labour force is less, but in families where the household head is unpaid, women are more likely to participate in the labour force.

Bratti (2003) investigated the role of education on FLFP and fertility in Italy using data from the Survey of Household Income and Wealth (SHIW) of the Bank of Italy from 1993. Women participating in the labour force are considered employed, while those who identify as housewives (non-participants) are considered unemployed. The results of this research show that education, especially at higher levels, increases the job attachment of women and the fertility rate among university-educated women is extremely low.

Aromolaran (2004) examined the role of the husband's education on the wife's LFP in Nigeria. This paper found a non-linear relationship between education and FLFP in this country. Women with a higher level of education are more likely to participate in the labour market than women with a lower level of education. It was also found a positive relationship between the husband's education and the wife's participation in the labour market.

Faridi *et al.* (2009) investigated the impact of different levels of education on FLFP in Punjab, Pakistan. The data for this study were obtained from 164 women (aged 15-64 years) interviewed through random sampling from urban and

rural areas. The results highlight the importance of family in FLFP among Pakistani women. Females belonging to joint families were more likely to participate in the labour force compared to females from nuclear families. The reason might be because in nuclear families, females are typically involved in household activities such as child care, cooking and washing, whereas, in joint families, these responsibilities are shared among other female family members. Therefore, household size had a positive impact on FLFP, with females from smaller families (1-4 members) being less likely to participate in the labour force.

Yakubu (2010) examined the factors influencing FLFP in South Africa using logistic regression models. This study indicates that education is an important predictor of FLFP. Educated females (with primary education or less) are more likely to be employed compared to those who are not educated. It was also found that living together and divorced/separated females are more likely to participate in the labour force, compared to those who are married, never married, or widowed/widower.

Shaheen *et al.* (2011) examined the determinants of women's labour force participation decisions and their wage rates in Pakistan. They reported that most women in this country were working in the informal sector or engaging in non-market activities inside their homes. Their findings show that demographic factors such as age and family size influenced FLFP, with a large family size potentially pushing mothers into the labour force.

Bridges *et al.* (2011) examined the role of poverty and social norms on labour market outcomes in Bangladesh. The results showed that men prefer daily wages, while women prefer salaried work. Individuals from poor households were more likely to participate in the labour force. Men and women from extremely poor households were more likely to participate in daily wage work, while those from wealthier households tended to pursue self-employment or salaried employment. Furthermore, they found that females from households where men were employed were more likely to participate in the labour market.

Yasmin *et al.* (2013) investigated the impact of earnings on FLFP. A total of 200 women were randomly selected from both rural and urban areas, with respondents aged between 22-55 years old. The findings show that age and occupation play a significant role in FLFP. Household income also plays an important role in female entrance to the labour market. Females from higher-income households are more likely to be involved in the labour market. Higher-income families were more 'open-minded' compared to lower-income families. However, other factors such as the number of earners, gender wage gap, access

to health facilities, marital status, household size and participation in family decisions were statistically insignificant.

Rahman and Islam (2013) investigated the trends and barriers of FLFP in Bangladesh. They applied logistic regression tests in their study and reported that the FLFP rate in Bangladesh increased due to better enumeration of women's home-based economic activities. They found that women who were heads of households, less educated, from small families, living in urban areas and with lower wealth were more likely to participate in the labour force. They also reported a positive relationship between poverty and FLFPR, as poverty is expected to act as a 'push' factor for FLFP. While 'social attitude' is an important factor for FLFP in Bangladesh, poorer women would break the social barrier if it enables them to earn a livelihood. They also found that family responsibilities have a significant negative impact on FLFP.

Andlib and Khan (2018) conducted research in Pakistan and found a negative association between household size and FLFP in Sindh and KPK provinces, while they found a positive association between these two variables in Punjab province. Further, they found that women living in separate families were less likely to participate in the labour force compared to those living in joint families. They also found that technical/vocational training increased women's probability of entering the labour market.

Sharifi and Sira (2023) examined the impact of patriarchal values and generalized self-efficacy on female decision-making regarding labour force participation in Afghanistan. They found that generalized self-efficacy and educational qualifications were the most important factors determining women's employment in this country. Females with higher levels of self-efficacy and higher educational qualifications were more likely to enter the labour market compared to those with lower levels of generalized self-efficacy and lower educational qualifications.

HYPOTHESIS

- $\mathbf{H_{01}}$ Household size has a negative association with female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.
- $\mathbf{H_{02}}$ Living in a joint family has a positive association with female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.
- $\mathbf{H_{03}}$ Household monthly income has negative relation with female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.
- $\mathbf{H_{04}}$ The employment status of parents and husbands has a negative

association with female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.

H_{05} Household education level has a positive relation with female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study employed a descriptive research design and, based on the time dimension, was conducted as a cross-sectional study. A quantitative research approach was utilized to achieve the study's objectives.

Population of the Study

As of 2021, Afghanistan's population was 32,890,171, with 16,130,405 females, accounting for 49.04% of the total population (NSIA, 2021). Based on this report, approximately half of the population was within the working-age range of 15–64 years, with minimal differences between males and females in this category.

The research population for this study comprised females aged 15–64 years living in Afghanistan. According to the *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2021* (NSIA, 2021), there are 8,253,188 women in this age group. Therefore, the research population for this study is 8,253,188.

Sampling Determination and Size

According to the Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook (2021), the total number of females aged between 15 and 64 years old was 8,253,188. Following the Taro Yamane (1967) formula for determining the sample size, 399 samples were selected.

n = N / [1+N(e)2]
n = correlated sample size
N = Population size
e = Margin of error (e = 0.05)
8,253,188 / [1+8,253,188(0.05)2]
n = 399.9 or 400.

Therefore, the final sample size determined for the study was 400.

Types and Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary data were utilized in this study. Primary data was collected by distributing a questionnaire to 414 women between the ages of 15 and 64 in Afghanistan. Secondary data for this study was gathered from various sources including books, journals, magazines, research papers, newspapers and websites.

Data Collection Methods

The data for this study were primarily quantitative. The survey method was employed as the data collection method. Quantitative data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire from the respondents. This method is commonly used in survey research, especially when dealing with a large number of respondents spread across different locations.

The data collection process involved distributing a self-administered questionnaire to the participants, who read the questions and completed them independently.

Measurement

The scale for measuring household, economic and household education background was developed by the researcher, following Carpenter's (2018) scale development steps, which propose ten specific procedures. These steps guided the development of a scale aimed at measuring the influence of household, economic and household education backgrounds on female decision-making regarding labour force participation. Following Carpenter's recommendations, a total of 30 items were developed after an in-depth literature review (14 items for measuring economics, 10 items for the household scale and nine items for household education background). Additionally, five experts were asked to examine the content validity and label the items and factors accordingly. All statements were presented on a 5-point Likert scale. Subsequently, the researchers conducted a pre-test analysis with a sample of 52 responses.

In the second step, the researcher collected 414 responses from the target population. The data quality was assessed by checking for missing values and outliers. The factorability of the data was examined using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, which yielded a significant Bartlett's chi-square test result ($p < .001$) and a KMO value of .818, allowing for further analysis. Explanatory factor analysis (EFA) was then employed and items with factor loadings less than .05 were removed. Thirteen items remained, with four about educational background, four about the household and five about economics.

Factor extraction was tested, indicating that more than 65% of the variability in the data had been modeled by the extracted factor. Parallel analysis confirmed that the first three actual eigen values exceeded those generated by parallel analysis (Hayton *et al.*, 2004). Varimax rotation analysis revealed that the 13 items loaded under three factors, with factor loadings exceeding .50. Following these procedures, 17 items were removed due to either cross-loading or low factor loading

The scale's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, revealing that the translated scales for all seven factors were reliable.

Female labour force participation, following Atasoy's (2016) and Hafeez and Ahmad's (2002) methods, the female labour force participation was measured by asking respondents whether she is doing an activity that generates money, if No, she is actively searching for a paid job.

The Economic factor was measured through five statements "Females from poorer families more likely to participate in labour force.", "Father's employment status plays an important role on daughter's labour force participation.", "Mother's employment status plays an important role on daughter's labour force participation.", "Husband's employment status plays an important role on wife's labour force participation." and "Females with high-income households less likely participate in the labour force. These statements were developed by the researcher.

The Household factor was measured through the following fourteen statements : "Household size is playing an important role in female labour force participation.", "Females from small size households less likely participate in the labour force.", "Females from large size households more likely participate in the labour force.", "Living in the joint family increases female's labour force participation.", "Living in a nuclear family decreases female's labour force participation.". These statements were developed by researcher.

The Household Education Background factor was measured through the following seven statements: "Females with a lower level of education less likely participate in labour force.", "Education qualification of father plays important/positive role on daughter's labour force participation.", "Education qualification of the mother plays important/positive role on daughter's labour force participation.", "Education qualification of husband plays important/positive role on wife's labour force participation.", These statements were developed by researchers.

All the above statements (except labour force participation) were presented on a five-point Likert scale 1=strongly disagree 5=strongly agree.

Statistical Analysis Tools

SPSS software version 26.0 was used in analyzing data. Frequencies were utilized to provide the demographic characteristics and profile of the respondents. Descriptive statistics were utilized to provide the mean and standard errors of the respondents.

The logistic regression analysis was conducted to find out the relationship between dependent and independent variables. FLFP was the

dependent variable of this study and social norms, religion, household factors, economic factors, education factors and personality factors were the independent variables.

RESULT

Descriptive Details of the Respondents

The results of the current study are presented in two sections. The first section provides the demographic background and descriptive analysis of the respondents, while the second section presents the logistic regression analysis.

Table 1
Demographic Background of the Respondents

	Descriptive Statistics						
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Age	414	1.96	.922	1.286	.120	2.004	.239
Edu Level	414	2.99	.965	-.268	.120	-.251	.239
Marital Status	413	1.52	.519	.146	.120	-1.495	.240

The above Table shows the demographic background and descriptive analysis of the respondents. It shows the age (M = 1.96, SD = .922), Education Level (M = 2.99, SD=.965) and Marital Status (M = 1.53, SD = .519). Moreover, it shows that Skewness and Kurtosis values are in the threshold (between -2 and +2).

Regression Analysis

Logistic regression can be conducted in the situation where the dependent variable is categorical or in yes/no type. In this study, the logistic regression was applied in this study.

Table 2
Omnibus Test

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients				
		Chi-square	**df**	**Sig.**
Step 1	Step	22.206	3	.000
	Block	22.206	3	.000
	Model	22.206	3	.000

The Omnibus coefficient model was tested to see the model fit. If the result is significant, it illustrates that the model is significantly better than null. The result for the current study was significant ($p < 0.001$). It illustrates a good model fit.

Table 3
Variables in the Equation

Variables in the Equation							
		B	**S.E.**	**Wald**	**df**	**Sig.**	**Exp (B)**
Step 1[a]	HEDU	.046	.056	.663	1	.416	1.047
	ECO	-.100	.050	3.912	1	.048	.905
	HH	-.204	.056	13.275	1	.000	.815
	Constant	4.724	.921	26.295	1	.000	112.622

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: EDU, ECO, HH.
HEDU = Household Education
ECO =Economic
HH = Household

The Table above indicates that the relationship between economic and household factors with the dependent variable was significantly negative, while the relation between household education background and female decision-making for labour force participation was insignificant

It can be interpreted that the economic status ($B = –0.100$, $p = 0.048$) has a significantly negative association with female decision-making for labour force participation. In other words, females with lower levels of household monthly income and unemployed family members (parents and husband) are less likely to participate in the labour force than females with higher levels of household monthly income and employed family members.This leads to the acceptance of hypotheses H_{03} and H_{04}. Therefore, females from households with lower monthly income and employed family members are less likely to enter the labour market in Afghanistan.

Moreover, the table above indicates that household characteristics ($B = –0.204$, $p < 0.001$) have a significantly negative association with female entrance to the labour market. It can be interpreted that females from larger household sizes and joint family types are less likely to enter the labour force than females from smaller household sizes and nuclear household types. This leads to the acceptance of hypotheses H_{01} and H_{02}. Therefore, it can be

concluded that females from larger household sizes and joint family types are less likely to enter the labour market compared to females from smaller household sizes and nuclear family types.

However, the association between household education background (education levels of family members, especially parents, and husband) and female entrance to the labour market was insignificant. The researchers failed to reject the alternate hypothesis H_{05}.Therefore, household educational background does not play a significant role in female decision-making regarding labour force participation in Afghanistan.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current paper examined the impact of economic, household and household education backgrounds on female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan. The results indicate that economic factors have a significantly negative impact on women's decision-making regarding entering the labour market. Females from households with higher levels of monthly income and employed family members (parents and husbands) are less likely to enter the labour market compared to females from households with lower levels of monthly income and unemployed family members.

It was also found that household characteristics (such as household size and type) have a significantly negative relationship with female decision-making entering the labour force in Afghanistan. Females from larger household sizes and living in joint family types are less likely to participate in the labour force than females from smaller household sizes and nuclear family types.

However, the results show that the association between household education background (specifically, the education qualifications of parents and husbands) and female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan was not significant. We argue that the educationalqualifications of family members do not have a significant relation with FLFP because the educational qualification of women themselvesis one of the main factors determining their labour force participation in Afghanistan. Educated women have more bargaining power and play a higher role in the decision-making process, regardless of the education qualifications of their family members. Hence, the education qualifications of parents and husbands do not significantly impact FLFP in Afghanistan.

Contrary to the findings of Andlib and Khan (2018), Tavva *et al.* (2013) and Shah and Sathar (1986), who reported a positive association between household poverty and FLFP, our results regarding the economic status of the

family do not support this notion. We claim that due to conservative social norms and patriarchal values in Afghanistan society, even females from poorer households do not receive permission to work outside the home. Rahman and Islam (2013) reported from Bangladesh that social attitudes are one of the main barriers to FLFP in that country. While they reported that poorer women in Bangladesh would break social barriers, it seems that in Afghanistan, even poorer women cannot overcome these social barriers due to higher levels of conservatism and patriarchal values. As Yasmin *et al.* (2013) found, families with higher income levels are more open-minded. Therefore, females from higher-income families in Afghanistan may be more open-minded, enabling them to break social barriers and enter the labour force.

Our findings regarding the positive association between employed family members and female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan are supported by Bridges *et al.* (2011). Their findings in Bangladesh indicate that females from households where men were employed were more likely to participate in the labour market. Additionally, as reported by Sharifi and Sira (2023), there is a negative association between patriarchal values and FLFP in Afghanistan. We argue that this may be due to a lower existence of patriarchal values among employed family members compared to unemployed family members. Consequently, in families with employed household members, females are more easily granted permission to work outside their households.

However, our finding regarding living in a nuclear family does not support the findings of Faridi *et al.* (2009) and Shaheen *et al.* (2011), who reported that females from joint families are more likely to enter the labour market. Additionally, Andlib and Khan's (2018) findings show that family size had a positive association with FLFP in the Punjab province of Pakistan, while they found a negative relationship between these two factors in the Sind and KPK provinces. Our finding also suggests that females from smaller household sizes are more likely to participate in the labour force compared to females from larger household sizes.

We argue that living in a joint family is considered an old-fashioned type in society. In contrast, those living in nuclear families are more open-minded with lower levels of patriarchal values. In nuclear families, parents (elders) have less influence on the decision-making of the youth because they live separately and make decisions autonomously. Conversely, joint families are directly controlled by elders and the younger generation has less influence on the decision-making process. Therefore, females from nuclear families have a greater

chance to enter the labour market than females living in joint families.

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