



Sakshamaa Briefing Paper

Exploring Time Use and Care Work: Why Are So Many Women Absent from the Workforce in Bihar?



There is increasing recognition that women's workforce participation is essential, both to realise women's rights, and to achieve broader development objectives such as poverty eradication, and inclusive economic growth. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) emphasize the promotion of gender equality and empowerment by eliminating prevailing gender disparities. India is a signatory to the SDG, but labour market outcome indicators suggest continuing high gender gaps. In terms of economic participation and opportunities, India is placed abysmally low at 149 out of 153 countries.ⁱ Of course, there are also wide regional (rural vs. urban) and state-wise differences. Bihar, the third-most populous state in India records the lowest women workforce participation rate (WPR) in the country at 2.7 percent (2018-19). According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (2018-19), women WPR in Bihar is much lower than the average women WPR for India, and also among all other states in India – and this is an important policy concern. However, both Bihar and India show similar trends in the loss of employment opportunities for women, but the trend is especially stark for women in rural areas. Moreover, the decline in rural women WPR in Bihar has been much sharper (85 percent decline) than the decline observed at the national level (42 percent decline) over the 25 year period between 1993-94 to 2018-19.

Existing literature proposes different hypotheses for the decline in women's WPR in India up to 2011-12. But recently from 2011-12 onwards, in addition to the increasing enrolment of younger women in educational institutions (Rangarajan, Kaul, & Seema, 2011; Vinoj, 2013)^{ii iii}, there are attempts to explain it in terms of the shift to more women engaging in unpaid household work (Chakraborty, 2020)^{iv}. Against this backdrop, this briefing paper attempts to explain the reasons for the recent decline in women's WPR in Bihar, and examines whether women in Bihar are not working, as the data continually suggest, or that the official labour force statistics continue to invisibilize women's work, failing to measure it accurately. It also highlights the overt disparities in women's work through a comparison with the national average.

In labour force data, as defined by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and Time Use Survey (TUS), individuals can be classified into three categories based on the range of activities they engage in:

- 1) Those who are working or being engaged in any economic activity (work)- Employed/Worker
- 2) Those not engaged in economic activity (work) but either making tangible efforts to seek 'work' or being available for 'work' if 'work' is available-Unemployed
- 3) Those not engaged in any economic activity (work) and not available for 'work'- Outside Labour Force

Following the definition adopted by the NSSO of the Government of India, Workforce Participation Rate (WPR) is defined as the number of persons/person-days employed per 1000 persons/person-days.

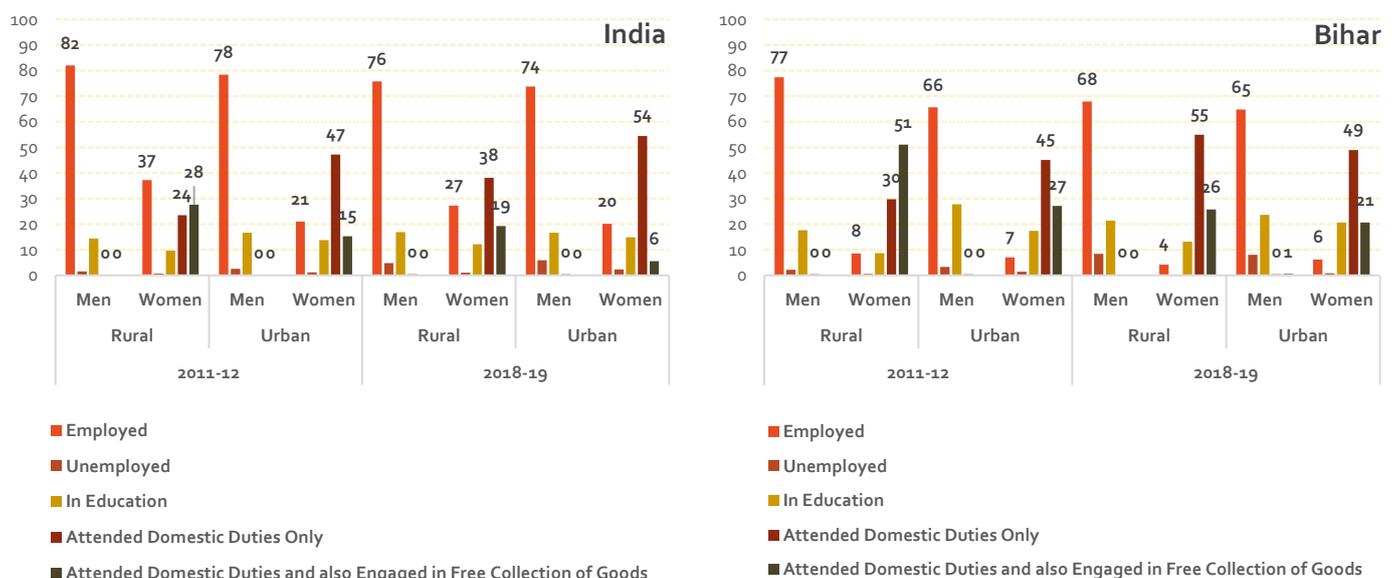
$$WPR = \frac{\text{Number of employed persons}}{\text{Total Population}} * 1000$$

So, the production boundary as defined by the Employment and Unemployment Surveys of the NSSO excludes many activities undertaken by women from the ambit of economic production. Moreover, though the NSSO surveys collect information on women's participation in different unpaid activities, none these activities is taken into account in calculating/counting work. This raises the question as to how women are classified as workers or non-workers.

The Responsibility of Unacknowledged, Unpaid Work on Women

In India, and Bihar, the work that women do encompasses a wide variety of unpaid activities which are essential for the effective functioning of society. Aided by this unacknowledged and unpaid contribution by women, men have a hidden advantage in the labour market. Figure 1 shows that workforce participation rate of women of the age group 15-59 years is significantly lower compared to men, and fewer urban women participated in the workforce relative to rural women in India, in 2011-12 and 2018-19. Importantly, it also presents that the share of women engaged solely in domestic activity and domestic and allied activity^v together was 57.4 and 60 percent, compared to just 0.5 and 0.6 percent for men in rural and urban areas respectively, in 2018-19. This holds true for Bihar as well, fewer women (aged 15-59 years) participated in the workforce relative to men. Moreover, the gap between men and women WPR is higher in Bihar compared to India, in both rural and urban areas. The interesting point to note is that while in 2011-12, women WPR in Bihar was lower in urban areas compared to rural, in 2018-19, because of the significant decline in the proportion of women involved in casual wage labour in rural areas, WPR declined substantially for rural women, and urban women WPR surpassed the rural women WPR (Figure 1). It also notes that compared to national average, a large proportion of women (81 percent in rural and 70 percent in urban) in Bihar are involved in unpaid domestic activities (which includes only domestic activity and domestic and allied activity) compared to less than one percent of men. Evidently, the responsibility of unpaid work falls overwhelmingly on women in the state and can be considered a key reason behind the low WPR of women in Bihar in these years.

Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Persons by Activity Status in India and Bihar



Source: Computed from NSS 68th round and PLFS (2018-19) unit-level data on Employment and Unemployment. Note: Age Group 15-59 years. Activity Status UPSS is considered, which includes the principal activity (on which the person spent a relatively long time) and the subsidiary activity (on which the person spent a relatively short time but at least 30 days) during 365 days preceding the date of the survey. Figures will not add to 100, as rentiers, pensioners, remittance recipients, disabled and others are excluded

The Impact of Child Care and Importance of Family Support

There is also evidence that women's decision to join the labour market is negatively associated with the presence of young children in the household. Over time the burden of child-rearing has increased in India, and also in Bihar- in 2011-12, 33 percent of married women in India (aged 25-55 years) with young children participated in the job market while in 2018-19, it reduced to just 24 percent. The same trend of low WPR of married women with young children under age 6 in the household is also

observed in Bihar, while if there are no young children in the household then the labour force participation rate of women is higher in both rural and urban areas. Interestingly, having older parents or other elderly members in the household increases women’s chances to join the labour market, which may reflect how child care and other domestic responsibilities are delegated between household members, thus freeing up women’s time for paid work.

In situations where this child care and domestic support is not available, women continue to be outside the workforce. As families have become more nuclear especially in urban areas, women have fewer potential helpers in child care and domestic responsibilities, and hence have less time for paid work. This is also validated from the National Sample Survey 68th round (2011-12) data, as among those married women (aged 25–55) who reported not being in the labour force in 2011, a significant majority (70 percent) of Indian women reported staying in the domestic realm due to compulsion. Further, it is possible that while the fertility rate among women has declined, families put greater emphasis on the quality of childrearing, and make higher investments in educating children, both as a route to reflect social status and in response to pressure from schools. It is for instance possible, that especially in recent years, mothers in urban areas spend more time in tutoring and mentoring their young children. The recently released pan-India Time Use Survey (2019) confirms the same, by providing information about the activities performed by every individual, and the time spent in all of these activities.

The Time Use Survey (TUS) is unique in comparison to other labour force surveys as it offers a framework for measuring time dispositions on different aspects of human activities like paid activities, unpaid activities, caregiving activities, volunteer work, learning, socializing, leisure activities and self-care activities which are otherwise not possible in other surveys.

According to the TUS data (2019), almost all women (94 percent in India and 96 percent in Bihar) are involved in unpaid caregiving and domestic activities, while only around half of the men in India and 62 percent in Bihar are engaged in unpaid activities. The bigger gender gap in the unpaid workforce participation rate is also reflected in the less time spent on such activities by men^{vi} compared to women in both Bihar and India. On average, in India women spend six and a half hours, while women in Bihar spend more than eight hours daily, on these unpaid activities. It is also disheartening to note that because of the larger time spent in unpaid activities, women in Bihar get less time to participate in paid/employment activities (see Table 1). Furthermore, this burden is greater on women in rural areas, who spend longer time on unpaid activities, compared to urban women, in both Bihar and India.

Table 1: Percentage of persons participating in different activities and time spent in a day

<i>Description of the activity</i>	India				Bihar			
	Rural		Urban		Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Percentage of persons participating in a day in paid and unpaid activities								
<i>Unpaid activity</i>	53.7	95.1	37.8	90.9	63.1	95.8	52.9	93.1
<i>Paid activity</i>	67.1	21.3	71.5	18.9	73	6.6	66.3	5.4
Time spent in a day in paid and unpaid activities (minutes per day)								
<i>Unpaid activity</i>	166	400	108	357	149	491	135	461
<i>Paid activity</i>	422	317	490	371	420	254	466	345

Note: Age Group 15-59 years

Source: Computed from unit-level data of Time Use Survey (2019)

Women’s Contribution to Production of Goods for Household Use and Unpaid Work

The 2019 TUS also finds that more men participate in employment and related activities daily compared to women. Table 2 provides a detailed break up of paid, unpaid and other residual activities and it reiterates that only 22 percent women in India, and 7 percent women in Bihar in the age group 15-59 years participate in employment and related activities, in contrast to 71 percent men in India

and 76 percent in Bihar. Crucially, a significant percentage of women (23 percent for India and 10 percent for Bihar) are involved in the 'production of goods for own final use', which is also considered an unpaid activity.^{vii} This work includes different activities like growing crops and kitchen gardening, farming of animals and production of animal products for own use, and supplying water and fuel for own final use. **However, between rural and urban areas, more rural women are engaged in the production of goods for own final use compared to urban women, because of the larger presence of agricultural related activities, and still partial availability of affordable fuel and clean drinking water within the household premises in rural areas of Bihar, as well as India.**

Table 2: Percentage of persons participating in different activities in a day in 2019

<i>Description of the activity</i>	India		Bihar	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<i>Employment and related activities</i>	70.9	21.8	76.1	7.2
<i>Production of goods for own final use</i>	15.6	22.7	12.3	10.3
<i>Unpaid domestic services for household members</i>	28.9	92.3	41.4	94.7
<i>Unpaid caregiving services for household members</i>	16.2	32.8	29.1	47.5
<i>Unpaid volunteer, trainee and other unpaid work</i>	2.9	2.2	3.4	1.2
<i>Learning</i>	14.3	10.9	17.3	10
<i>Socializing and communication, community participation, and religious practice</i>	93.4	92.6	82.7	83.2
<i>Culture, leisure, mass-media and sports practices</i>	86.9	83.8	74.8	66.2
<i>Self-care and maintenance</i>	100	100	100	100

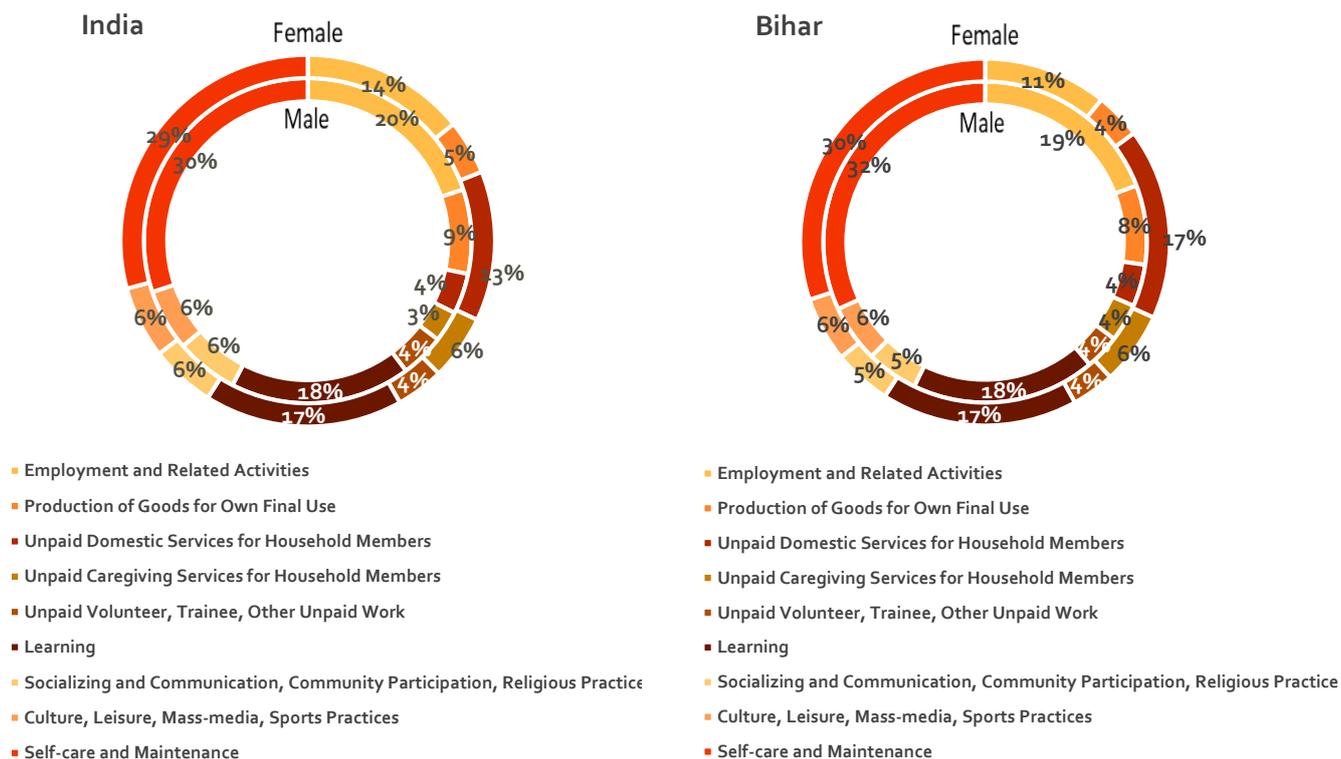
Note: Age Group 15-59 years

Source: Computed from unit-level data of Time Use Survey (2019)

A further break up of unpaid activities- whether in the form of unpaid domestic services (like cooking, cleaning, serving foods, storing, arranging, preserving food and other preparation activities related to cooking) or unpaid caregiving services for other household members (like caring for children, caring for dependent adults and ill members, helping non-dependent adult household members), indicates that more women engage in these compared to men, and more women in Bihar participate in these two unpaid activities compared to the national average. In India, 87 percent of women are involved in preparing food for all members of the household, 72 percent manage cleaning and mopping of the house on their own and 48 percent of women are washing, drying and ironing clothes of the all household members alone and they spend more than six hours daily on all of these.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) was launched in 2016 with a target to give 5 crore clean cooking fuel-LPG connections to women member of poor households by March 2019 to safeguard their health so that they don't have to compromise their health in smoky kitchens.^{viii} Later on, the target was raised to 8 crore connections by 2021, and now envisages giving all households a connection. According to the official data, PMUY achieved 87 per cent of 8 crore free LPG connections target as on 2019 and 80 million families have been benefited under the scheme among which 85 lakh was in Bihar.^{ix} But, it is disheartening to note that inspite of all of this, 4 percent of women in rural areas are involved in gathering firewood and other natural products used as fuel for own final use. On average, they spend more than one hour daily in collecting firewood, other natural products for use as fuel to reduce out-of-pocket expenditure in rural as well as urban areas in 2019, and Bihar is no exception. **Because of the larger responsibility of unpaid care work and activities like this, women participate less in cultural and leisure activities, with women in Bihar further deprived of this.**

Figure 2: Average time spent in a day per participant in different activities in India and Bihar



Note: Age Group 15-59 years

Source: Computed from unit-level data of Time Use Survey (2019)

Figure 2 shows a more detailed breakup of the average time spent by men and women between the ages of 15-59 years on different activities in India and Bihar. It is interesting to see that men spend 20 per cent of their daily time on employment-related activities, by contrast, when it comes to working for others in unpaid ways- whether in the form of unpaid domestic services or unpaid caregiving services for other household members, men spend only 7 per cent of their daily time on this, while women spend 19 percent, or seven and a half hours daily on these. Similarly, in Bihar, women spend larger time (23 percent of their daily time) on unpaid domestic and care services relative to men, and this is why women in Bihar also appear to have less time for employment-related activities. However, this is not to deny that the significant decline in WPR of young people (15-29 years age group) relative to the other age groups is due to the prevailing job crisis in the labour market, particularly for the educated young job aspirants in India, as well as in Bihar.^x

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the main finding of the TUS of larger involvement of women in unpaid domestic work and care services, and less towards paid employment in India and in Bihar, implies that gendered norms influenced by the patriarchal notion of women and men's role in the society, and lack of basic public infrastructure facilities, like access to clean water and affordable fuel, take away a significant chunk of women's time. Additionally, the lack of necessary infrastructure in terms of child care centres, elderly care, and health infrastructure puts the burden of looking after these dependent members of the family on women in India. While women in urban areas can outsource some of these responsibilities by hiring domestic help, but women from the poorest consumption class have to bear the burden on their own. In times when there is a necessity to step out and take on paid work to support family income, young daughters or elderly women of the family have to step in to take on

the responsibility of the unpaid chores. Certainly, if an attempt is made to include the entire realm of 'unpaid work' into the formal definition of work, then more women (95 percent) than men (85 percent) usually work in India, and also in Bihar (96 percent women versus 87 percent men). Since the 1980s, feminist economists have vociferously argued for measuring the large volume of work that women do, which remains unrecognized and therefore unpaid, but indicates the time poverty faced by women, and has a direct impact on their quality of life. It also undermines the quality of goods and services provided through unpaid services, and fails to recognize the importance of the services provided by caregivers in our society. It is therefore extremely important to revisit the definition of "economic activities" and create scope for the systemic, as well as socio-cultural recognition of women's unpaid contribution to the economy.

Overall, deeply entrenched social norms regarding gender roles make it difficult for Indian women to escape discrimination, receive better opportunities, and empower themselves. Even so, prioritising the following issues can create a more conducive environment for greater women's workforce participation.

MEASUREMENT

- ⇒ Measurement is important in dealing with unpaid work, and focus should be on 5R's: important to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work; reward paid care work, and guarantee care workers' representation (Addati et al 2018)
- ⇒ It is vital to measure the impact of the PMUY, piped water scheme in Bihar on women's time use and domestic care burden, since these policy efforts to alleviate the care work burden have been undertaken by various Governments

COMPLETING EDUCATION

- ⇒ Completing education is critical for women to be equipped and qualified for decent work opportunities, therefore focus on girls education is critical
- ⇒ Evidence shows how early exposure to gender, life skills education instills gender egalitarian attitudes in men and women, strengthening and scaling these programs is crucial

ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO WORK

- ⇒ Child care support and after school child care are important from the lens of women's economic participation and empowerment (Murthy, 2020), and require policy attention
- ⇒ Universal availability of child care facilities to all women workers across organised and unorganised workers is the need of the hour
- ⇒ The presence of creches in all MGNREGS sites should be guaranteed and enforced
- ⇒ Importance of transport to address time poverty should be recognized and addressed. Poor public transport and safety prevent women from accessing learning and employment opportunities (Sakshamaa at Centre for Catalyzing Change, 2020)

Sources:

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ⁱ World Economic Forum (2020) Global Gender Gap Report http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf

ⁱⁱ Rangarajan, C., Kaul, P. I., & Seema (2011). Where is the missing labour force? Economic & Political Weekly, 46(39), 24 September, 68–72.

ⁱⁱⁱ Vinoj, A. (2013). Missing labour force or 'defeminization' of labour force in India? Centre for Development Studies. Working Paper 452, May 2013.

^{iv} Chakraborty, S. (2020). COVID-19 and Women Informal Sector Workers in India. Economic and Political Weekly, 17-21.

^v Only domestic activity includes cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping, caring for the elderly and children. Domestic and allied activity includes domestic duties plus extended System of National Accounts (SNA) activities like free collection of goods like vegetables, firewood, cattle feed, etc, water collection, sewing, tailoring, weaving, etc. for household use.

^{vi} Men in India, and also in Bihar, spend two and a half hours daily only on unpaid activities.

^{vii} According to the System of National Accounts (SNA) of the United Nations (UN), production of agricultural products and their subsequent storage, process of production of other primary products, processing of agricultural products and other kinds of production processes by households are included within the production boundary, whether intended for own final consumption or not. But this full spectrum of economic activities as defined in the UN System of National Accounts was not covered in the definition of economic activities adopted for the employment and unemployment survey of NSS

^{viii} Press Information Bureau (2018) Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana achieves 5 core mark

<https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1541545>

^{ix} Deepak Upadhyay (2019) PMUY: How to avail full benefits of Ujjwala Yojana. Mint.

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^x Soumya Kapoor Mehta (2018) Women's Economic Empowerment in Bihar: Opportunities and Challenges. Centre for Catalyzing Change. https://www.c3india.org/uploads/news/Sakshamaa_WEE_in_Bihar_Landscape_Report.pdf



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Centre for Catalyzing Change's, Sakshamaa: Initiative for What Works, Bihar, aims to accelerate gender focused and evidence-based transformative policies for women and girls in Bihar.

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