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An Assessment of the Growth and Changing Trends in Women's Labour Force Participation in Golaghat District, Assam

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Abstract

This study is based on primary data gathered at random from 334 households in eight Mising tribe villages from two blocks using a well-structured questionnaire of Golaghat district Assam. This paper examines the relationship between the level of economic development or income (proxied with MPCE) and women's labour force participation rates (FLPR) in rural India across agro-climatic regions, based on primary data. We used in Linear Regression Analysis in development status of Mising women, and variables are like **Female contribution to the household, FPA, Education, Indebted, Marital status, LH, MPCE, OHH, Sex Ratio, DR, Female MPCI Grp, Household status,** are significant for labour force participation rate.

Keywords: Primary data, 334 household, Mising tribe, women labour force, levels of development, Golaghat district.

Introduction

Labour force participation rate of women greatly determines the character of socio-economic development of an area, as also the quality of life of a society. Participation of the tribal women in the workforce brings in two positive effects in their society–it raises the quality of living and exerts an effective control on family size. Women of tribal communities are very active in their household and agricultural activities. But it is seen that the process of their activities is primitive due to their illiteracy, indifferent attitude in their work. Among employed women, 85 per cent are engage in vulnerable employment, including around two thirds who work in the agricultural sector. They are drawn from the socially and economically backward classes and constitute the poorest section of rural society. They are also a less articulate section of the workers mainly due to lack of organization and low levels of education. Assam is a melting pot of many ethnic groups, sub-ethnic groups, castes, tribes and different communities. The missing tribe are the second-largest communities in Assam. According to the 2011 census, the women workforce participation rate among the scheduled tribes of Assam is 43.99 per cent as against the corresponding figure of 48.71 per cent for all schedule tribes of India.

About Mising Tribe

The Misings are the second-largest scheduled tribe (Plain) community of Assam. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman family of the great Mongoloid race. Their concentrations have been found mainly in the districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Golaghat, Sonitpur, Sivasagar, Tinsukia, and Dibrugarh of Assam. As per 2011 census their population was 6,80,424, male 3,45,786 and female 3,34,638. The Misings officially recorded as 'Miri' in the list of the scheduled tribe of India under Constitution of India Order 1950, are originally a hill tribe of the Himalayan region of North-Eastern India (Pegu, 1998). Ethnically, the Musings hail from the same stock as the Adis, the Nishi's, the Apatanis, and the Hill Miris of Arunachal Pradesh and belong to the North-Assam branch of the Mongoloid races (Kuli, 1998). Nyori (1993) also mentioned that "the Adis and the Miris originally belonged to a

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single tribe; those who migrated earlier towards the plains were known as the Miris to the men of the plain". As the Misings are a riverine tribe, they generally construct their houses on the raised platform i.e. stilt house. Agriculture is the predominant occupation among the Misings. Besides agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing are their subsidiary occupation. As mentioned by Bhandari, (2008:50) that "the economy of the Misings is primarily household economy in which the household is the unit of production and consumption". The Misings are also experts in the manufacturing of bamboo and cane goods. But, these are rather produced to meet the domestic needs and the commercial aspect of this avenue is still to be exploited (Bordoloi, 1991: 53). Weaving is also a very popular activity among the Misings. The Misings women are experts in weaving. Cooperative outlook is the salient feature of the Misings. On the occasions like the building of a house, solemnizing a marriage ceremony, observing death rites or harvesting paddies, etc., the villagers co-operate wholeheartedly in such activities. The Misings have also some village organizations to maintain social order and unity among themselves. There was a village organisation called 'Kébang'. The head of the Kébang is called 'Gam'. The post is not hereditary. Generally, a 'Kébang' is held in connection with judicial matters to give judgment of different cases. There is an institution called 'Ya:me Mímbír' and the boys and girls of a village are the members of this institution (Bordoloi, Thakur, Saikia, 1987:120). But, these institutions are gradually disappearing among Misings. 'Murong' is another important socio-economic organisation among the Mising tribe, commonly called a bachelor's dormitory. The Misings prefer to live in a joint family. "The Miris (Misings) have the tradition of living joint family based on a patrilineal and patrilocal system. The eldest male member in the family becomes its head" (Doley, 1998: 91-104). After the death of a father the property is divided equally among the sons. Daughters are not entitled to share the father's property. But if a man has no son, his daughter may share the property. According to Sharma Thakur (1972) "Misings are broadly known by two sections namely- 'Barogam' and 'Dahgam'. Further, these two divisions are divided into several clans namely -amongst the Barogam Doley, Kutum, Kuli, Pait, Patir, Kardong, Misong, etc., and amongst the Dohgam-Moying, Chayang, Panging, Yein, Morang, Bori, Taye, Noroh, Koman etc". The major festival of the Mising tribe is known as Ali-Ayé-Lígang. It is a spring festival of socio-cultural significance (Sharma Thakur, 1976). The festival is observed to mark sowing seeds on the first Wednesday of Fagun (Assamese) Month of every year. 'Po:rag' is also another important festival of the Misings. They also observe three Assamese Bihu namely- Bohag Bihu, Magh Bihu and Kati Bihu. The religious belief of Misings is based on the belief in supernaturalism and animism. They are also a follower of Hinduism. While they are devout followers of 'Vaisnavism' preached by the great saint Sankardeva and his disciples, they at the same time worship spirits and different deities and sacrifice birds and animals for the appeasement of the spirits and the deities some of which are benevolent and some malevolent (Bordoloi, 1991). The census 2011 figure reveals that the highest concentration of Mising population has been found in Dhemaji district (32.3 percent) of Assam and followed by Lakhimpur (29.1 percent), Jorhat (15 percent), Golaghat (7.8 percent), Sonitpur (7.2 percent), Sivasagar (4.1 percent), Tinsukia (2.7 percent) and Dibrugarh (1.2 per cent) districts. All these districts constitute about 99.6 per cent of the total Mising population in the state.

Increase in the workforce participation rate for the Mising population group along with males and females over the period 1991 to 2001. For males, the rate has increased from 44.9 per cent in 1991 to 54 per cent in 2001. For females, the rate has also increased from 41.1 per cent to 48.3 per cent in this period. But, there has been a marked declining trend in workforce participation rate observed during the period 2001-2011. In this period, the overall workforce participation rate among Misings (51.2 per cent) is significantly decreased (3.5 per cent

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points) to 47.7 per cent. For males, the declining rate was 1.2 per cent 69 points and for females, it was 5.5 per cent points from the previous year. But, the workforce participation rate among Misings is significantly decreased to 47.7 per cent in the year 2011, along with both males (52.5 per cent) and females (42.8 per cent) workforce participation rates. The declining trend in workforce participation rate among Misings is not necessarily a negative sign of moving downward. This may take place even as a consequence of socio-economic progress. There are studies (Vepa, 2012; Mehrotra, et al, 2013) to show that female workforce participation is sometimes given up by distress that means women a force to work because of the economic hardship of the family. So, with improvement in the economic condition, their compulsion to work may slowly be receding. Some women may stop working and concentrate on household and domestic responsibilities. Secondly, as both girls and boys as larger percentages go for higher education. Workforce participation rate may show a decline for sometimes

Methodology

Determinants in the levels of development of female labour force

In the light above review and discussion, it is to examine the relationship between the level of economic development or income (proxied with MPCE) and females' labour force participation rates (FLPR) in rural India across agro-climatic regions, based on the primary data.

Regions considered here are as classified and consists of one o districts based on their agro-climatic conditions (henceforth NSS-regions). In this exercise, the average MPCE represents its level of development of a region.

Present exercise extracted regional averages for the selected variables from like sample of the unit record data of 66th (2009-10) and 68th (2011-12) round NSSO Employment and Unemployment Survey (EUS) and Levels of Development and Female Labour Force Participation Rates 199 the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES). The average monthly per capita consumer expenditure (MPCE), as a proxy for the level of income or development is extracted from CES data of NSSO.

Along with labour force and workforce participation rates (%), the average rural wage rate (casual/daily) for females and the other important control variables are drawn from the EUS data of NSSO. In addition to income and wage rates, we have taken into account the other factors which are significant in explaining the variation in FLPR or FWPR across agro-climatic regions. For the labour force or workforce participation rates of women in rural India, the age-group we have considered is 15-59 years.

For the rural female wage rate, it is the average daily wage rate for casual labour. Analysis in the present exercise is based on data of two subsequent surveys of NSSO. On the one hand, it is to validate our results for the two survey periods. On the other, it is also to understand the impact of drought on the women's labour force and workforce participation rate pattern across regions distinguished by agro-climatic conditions. As it is known that the survey period (2009-10) was drought affected one. Many parts of rural India have witnessed drought condition during this period. Because of this, Planning Commission, Government of India directed NSSO to carry out another survey (i.e. in 2011-12) subsequently in the normal year.

Following the Mincer's (1964) : equation we have estimated the labour force participation rate of women in relation with family/household income (MPCE) and market wage rate for female labour. The Mincer's simplest specification of a labour market supply function of women can be written as:

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m = a.y + b.w + u ……

where m is the quantity of labour supplied to the market, y is a "potential" of family income computed at a zero rate of leisure and of home production, w is the women's full-time market wage or market earning power, and u reflects other factors or "tastes." We can rewrite the Mincerian equation with our construction of factors/variables, the specification would be

FLPRi = a.AMPCEi + b. AMPCIFi + error term

AMPCE – Average Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure of female.

AMPCI – Average Monthly per capita income Females (agriculture activities + non-agriculture activities)

X – other factors (set of controlled variables); U – Error/disturbance Term

The following are the other variables included in the regression:

X1 (Cult H%) percentage of cultivator's households to total rural households;

X2 (PERC%) percentage of rural females who had educational levels primary and above;

X3 (Ch14%) percentage of child population below 15 years of age to the total rural population;

X4 (Sex Ratio) Sex Ratio in general in rural areas

X5 (Contribution %) percentage of contribution to the household.

Objective: To examine the levels of development of female labour force participation in Golaghat district

Hypothesis: There is no significant of levels of development of women labour force participation in Golaghat district.

Review literature on development of female labour force:

The U-shaped hypothesis describes the correlation of the female labor force participation rate with economic development (structural shifts in economic activity and changes to household labor supply and attitudes about women working outside the home). In its basic form, the hypothesis posits that female participation rates are **highest in poor countries**, where women are engaged in subsistence activities, and fall in middle-income countries because of the transition of (mainly) men to industrial jobs. As education levels improve and fertility rates fall, women are able to join the labor force in response to growing demand in the services sector.

When examined the relationship between the economic development/growth and the labour participation rate there emerge U-shape hypothesis of women participation rate based on developed countries experience (**Goldin, 1994; Mammen and Paxson, 2000**). Initially, due to necessity to make subsistence in the presence under developed economic conditions, family labour including women is necessary. As most of them work on family farms and enterprises, social stigma attached to women participation in labour market is not a matter. But for those who do not have productive resources other than labour, they have to. Therefore, at this stage, women participation is a distress-driven one. As the economy gradually shifts from agriculture to industry along with increasing wage rate and thereby increase in family incomes reduces the compulsive participation of women and gradually reaches their participation rate a plateau. Because the growth of industry especially manufacturing sector is rather discouraging for the women's labour force participation along

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with income effect and social stigma attached to adverse working conditions of women in the labour market. But the gradual shift of economy further to services sector is encouraging with better working conditions in this sector. Therefore, the U-shaped curvature of labour participation rate of women is due to structural shifts in economy, changing income and substitution effects, educational development among women and emerging demand for female labour along with technology that substitutes women's home work (**Goldin, 1994; 2006).**

There is another hypothesis of the Discouraged Worker Effect saying that when there is economic downturn situation high unemployment discourages them to be in labour force (**Dagsvik et al., 2010).** This hypothesis is an opposite one of Added Worker Effect that developed based on the labour market situation during the Great Economic Depression. According to the Added Worker Effect, when the main breadwinner is either unemployed or unable earn sufficient income, the otherwise non-workers enter into labour force to supplement the family income. In other words, it is a distress driven participation in the labour/work force. The Discouraged Worker Effect on the opposite indicates that in situation of high unemployment and under-employment, along with lack of confidence in getting employment and a high perceived cost of job search, it discourages the otherwise potential labouers to withdraw from labour force (**Dagsvik et al., 2010**). For all these theoretical conjectures and hypotheses, the underlying thread is an economic circumstance that is the income or development levels

Empirical verification of theoretical formulations or formulation of theory based on empirical evidence in respect of labour supply began in the first quarter of 20th Century. Douglas (1934) had observed the backward bending labour supply curve based on USA data related to labour supply. In the light of Gary Becker's theoretical formulation of Home Economics and Fertility, empirical studies on female labour supply have further advanced the analysis (Mincer, 1962; Goldin, 1994). There are a large number of empirical studies in this respect that have been conducted in the developed country context particularly in USA. Empirical evidence of many studies confirms the backward-bending labour supply curve but the debate is on size of the income and substitutions effects and labour supply elasticity (See McClelland and Mok, 2012). The cross-country and time series analysis while relating the women's labour participation rate with economic development observed the U-shape labour participation rate (Goldin, 1994).

In the developing country context, empirical studies on the form of labour supply curve with respect wage rates or labour participation rates with respect to income in general and that of women in particular are very few. One study conducted in one of the developing countries observed the inverted-S shape of women's labour supply curve in respect of wage rate and income (see Sharif, 1991). Some studies have observed an inverse relationship between labour supply and wage rate at a low level of wage (Dessing, 2002; El-Hamidi, 2003). A study that investigates cyclicality in women's labour supply in response to smoothing household consumption in environments characterized by income volatility found that within-country relationship of women's employment and income is negative in Asia and Latin America but positive in Africa (Bhalotra and Umarita Aponte, 2010).

In India context there are a few systematic studies that relate the labour supply with wage rate (see Dasgupta and Goldar, 2005). But there were attempts since long back to estimate labour supply functions for poor agrarian households in India (Bardhan, 1979; 1984; Rosenzweig, 1980). Bardhan study in the Indian agrarian economy context observed that wage rate on market labour supply was not significant but asset effect is strongly negative (Bardhan, 1984). With respect to women it was observed that along with insignificant effect of wage

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rate, a strong negative effect of assets and status on female labour supply. The study states that "the dominant culture ascribes low status to women's …manual work and upwardly mobile social groups and households often withdraw their women from labour force" (Bardhan, 1984: p. 22). But among the dispossessed groups (SC/ST) at the bottom of the social hierarchy such a trend is not observed (ibid). Besides, it was also observed that demand conditions in the labour market strongly influences the labour supply behavior wherein the job search discouragement effect prevails and it can outweigh the income effect on labour supply.

A recent study observes that forced employment or need-based participation in workforce for females from BPL families in rural areas (Dasgupta and Goldar, 2005). It infers that if the female wage rate earned by BPL households in rural areas goes up substantially or if male members of such households get more employment opportunities, more and more women of BPL families may withdraw from the labour force. It argues that women withdraw from the labour force because they find the returns from home-based work higher. Another study, in the Indian context, using dynamic panel models, it did not find a significant relationship between level of economic development and women's participation rates in the labour force. It suggests that growth by itself is not sufficient to increase women's economic activity, but the dynamics of growth would matter (Lahoti and Swaminathan, 2013).

Another study (see Saha et al., 2013), based on filed survey1 observed that due to various socioeconomic and cultural factors along with security reasons females prefer to find employment opportunities in the vicinity. But the work opportunities for females were limited in rural areas with shrinking employment opportunities in agriculture and not enough employment opportunities in the non-farm sector. As, the study observed, their participation in the labour market is greatly constrained by their responsibilities in households, it restricts them from looking for jobs in areas beyond their immediate neighbourhood. Besides, lack of conveyance facilities and adequate skills are restricting their mobility beyond their vicinity (ibid).

A study that examined the stagnation in women's labour participation rate in urban India, observed that the main supply side factors were rise in household incomes, husband's education, social stigmas against educated women engaging in menial work, and falling selectivity of highly educated women. On the demand side, employment in sectors appropriate for educated women grew less than the supply of educated workers, leading many women to withdraw from the labour force (Klasen and Pieters, 2013). Another study observes that work participation decision by women depends on personal attributes, household characteristics, local economic conditions and socio-religious traditions (Mazumdar, 2013). Besides, there exist an argument that social-cultural factors particularly in the Indian context that interact with these above factors and leading to the decline (Neff et al., 2013).

The above discussion indicates that there are multiple dimensions to the change (decline) in females' labour force participation rates. Along with the safety/security considerations and social prestige that is intrigued with the cultural factors, there is a crucial economic factor i.e. income/development levels that are associated with the variation and change in labour force participation of women.

Result and Discussion

In the light above review and discussion, we have examined the relationship between level of economic development or income (proxied with MPCE) and females' labour participation rates (FLFPR) in rural Assam. We consider in this exercise that MPCE represents the levels of development of the particular agro region in Assam. Here are two aspects in this

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relationship between labour force participation rates of rural females and the level of income or development especially in the context of rural Assam, Golaghat district. At a lower level of income, all the household members, as many as they are including women their participation is necessary in order to meet the household needs (distress driven conditions).

Although women's participation in a labour market is inevitable in this distress driven situation but all that depends on the availability of employment opportunities. Thus, the low participation rates at lower income / development levels could be due to lack employment opportunities which may discourage them to be in the labour force. Working men of households, as main breadwinners, occupy all the opportunities in the labour market. Women rather occupy in domestic duties and in activities that substitute goods and services that otherwise have to seek (buy / exchange) from the market (like fetching water, collecting firewood, gleaning on the fields), in the development / economic parlance they are non-SNA activities.

However, expanding labour market along with an expanding economy may facilitate women working in the labour market and that may raise the demand for their labour. It could be, on the one hand, that increasing opportunities for women along with the men. On the other, in an expanding economy, when men move away (prime movers in shifting / diversifying) from their traditional occupation, for instance, agriculture, the space left behind in this labour market is occupied by the women labour. Also, the increasing wage costs in the production may encourage the producers to look for a cheaper labour and hence to restructure the labour market in a segmented manner (gendered) by engaging the female labour at cheaper wage rate. There may be difference in productivity of labour by gender. If at all, then, when the gains to employers through the difference in wage rates (between male and females) is much higher than loss accrued with the difference in labour productivity between them, it may augment the demand for cheaper female labourers. It is however, may be limited to specific operations where men and/or women can perform

But the declining participation rates at higher income levels must be due to either women relieving themselves from their participation under distress driven condition or growing aspirations and leaving the agriculture with an expectation of better opportunity in non-agricultural activities, but lack of opportunities in this sector may discourage them for being in the labour force. In a distress driven situation labour force participation of women is doubling burden on her shoulder as she has to carry out household / domestic duties along with labour market work. Once the household is comfortable with the men wage earnings or income, the women of the households may wish to relieve themselves from that burden of their working in the labour market desperately to meet the household's basic needs. They may restrict themselves in carrying out domestic duties. Also, there is a cultural factor that household that is not desperate in depending on the contribution of women's wage earning or market income particularly out of menial / manual work in agricultural or other activities, earns a social prestige particularly in a village society. The Sanskritization of this cultural norm with the increasing household's income and reproduction of such a culture among the households that are experiencing an upward economic mobility may reduce / restrict women's entry in or encourage withdrawal from the labour force / market.

Notwithstanding the line of argument elicited above, one should not ignore the displacement of labour in the advent of mechanization process leading to decline in participation rates at higher levels of development. As we know when the elasticity of substitution is higher in the production process, mechanization definitely affects the opportunities in the labour market; it substitutes and thereby dispenses the labour. It may affect especially the feminized rural labour market particularly that of agriculture; as we know most of the female workforce in

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rural areas is engaged in agriculture. As this mechanization process may go along with the level of development, one can find that regions at higher income levels may have higher levels of mechanization. Thus, the lower labour force participation rates of women may be a fall out of the above phenomenon. Hence, herein again, it is be due to lack of opportunities affected by mechanization that is taking away opportunities of women. Therefore, one has to find whether it is the income effect or the substitution (mechanization) effect due on declining or low female labour force participation at higher income levels.

The result is based on the estimated equation that included all the variables above mentioned, presented in above mention shows that all they are statistically significant, at one per cent level (**see Table ..)** Although the estimated equation still leaves unexplained a little more than two-fifths (R2 = 0.101) of the variation in it, the significance of these selected variables is explicitly exhibited and a considerable proportion of variation in FLFPR is explained through these variables.

The positive association of FLFPR with LH, INDEBTED, HOUSE SIZE, FEMALE MPCI, EDUCATION which is included in our analysis to reflect the cultural factors – low social and economic value for females – in predominantly patriarchal societies in some parts of the country particularly in northern regions. In south and tribal regions, the sex ratios are not so adversely against the females and the labour force participation rates are also fairly moderate. Most of these caste households especially those belonging to ST community own none of the productive assets like land, rather they have to depend on their labour power. In tribal and hill regions in general and tribal communities anywhere in particular, women participation in labour force is higher when compared to other regions and castes.

On the whole, what one can make out from above analysis and discussion is that the female labour participation rate varies along the level of income / development. Particularly in a rural and agrarian economy, lack of opportunities at lower levels of development may result in lower participation rates and it rises with the increasing opportunities in any expanding economy. If the women's participation in labour force is desperate in a distress-driven circumstance, at higher levels of development with the ease of distress conditions women withdrawal from the labour force is inevitable (income effect). The cultural factor may further augment the income effect. However, it may also be possible that if mechanization which dispenses the labour, is associated with the level of development, the declining or low female labour force participation rates at higher income levels could be partly associated with mechanization (substitution effect) that dispenses the labour. Herein one has to see whether the phenomenon of declining or the low participation rates at higher incomes/development levels are due to the income and substitution effect.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.318[a]	.101	.083	.474

a. Predictors: (Constant), female contribution to the household, FPA, Education, INDEBTED, MARITAL, LH, MPCE_grp, OHH, Sex Ratio, DR, Femal_MPCI_Grp, HOUS_size

The R-square value 0.101 signifies the strength of the regression analysis and the variance explained by the model. In this case it is 101 %.

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ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15.658	12	1.305	5.803	.000[a]
	Residual	139.648	621	.225		
	Total	155.306	633			

a. Predictors: (Constant), female contribution to the household, FPA, Education, INDEBTED, MARITAL, LH, MPCE_grp, OHH, Sex Ratio, DR, Femal_MPCI_Grp, HOUS_size

b. Dependent Variable: FLP

c. In the ANOVA table, the p-value 0.000 (< 0.05) signifies that the data considered for regression analysis is appropriate and valid.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.409	.198		2.068	.039
	DR	.000	.001	-.033	-.676	.499
	FPA	-.093	.083	-.045	-1.121	.263
	OHH	-.080	.083	-.037	-.956	.339
	Sex Ratio	.000	.000	-.032	-.797	.426
	MARITAL	-.008	.038	-.008	-.211	.833
	Education	.044	.020	.086	2.212	.027
	LH	-.107	.032	-.136	-3.376	.001
	HOUS_size	.039	.016	.148	2.492	.013
	INDEBTED	-.104	.030	-.134	-3.418	.001
	MPCE_grp	.063	.056	.053	1.131	.259
	Femal_MPCI	.127	.033	.200	3.852	.000
	female contribution to the household	-.030	.023	-.053	-1.348	.178
a. Dependent Variable: FLP						

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From the above coefficient table of regression analysis, it has been observed that the LH, INDEBTED, HOUSE SIZE, FEMALE MPCI, EDUCATION are found to be significant towards labour force participation rate.

Conclusion

High growth of Indian economy combined with decelerating rate of growth in labour force resulting in jobless growth. The declining labour participation rate of women particularly in rural areas raises concerns as women' labour force participation has implications for the gender equality and women empowerment. In this backdrop, we have tried to examine factors associated with the variation in female labour force participation rates in rural Golaghat, Assam in India.

Our results based on quadratic form of equation for regression show that the relationship between income and females' labour force participation rate is significant and the fitted curvature is inverted U-shaped one. Also, LH, INDEBTED, HOUSE SIZE, FEMALE MPCI, EDUCATION is found to be significant towards labour force participation rate.

FLFPR is negatively associated with female DR, FPA, OHH, SEX RATIO Marital Status, MPCE group, female contribution to the household**.** Our results show the significance of the level of income / development in variation in females labour force participation rates of Golaghat district.

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