

The impact of marriage & children on labour market participation ^[1]

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Excerpted from introduction

In communities around the world, active engagement in the labour force is the key means through which women and men earn a living. It is one of the main ways that working-age individuals can have an independent source of income, and it is an essential means through which women and men ensure decent living conditions for themselves and their families. Moreover, for women, the extent to which they have control over assets and an independent source of income has a significant bearing on their position within their families and communities and on the well-being of their dependents, especially children.

Paid work provides a path towards economic independence, overall well-being, human dignity, personal development and self-actualization. However, for all this to be true, employment must be decent – providing adequate earnings, sufficient working time, and safe and secure work environments. Decent employment opportunities must also be available to everyone. Women and men both rely on these opportunities to care for and sustain their families.

Equal opportunity and equal treatment in the labour market are key aspects of decent work, and of sustainable development. But does everyone in society have the same access to decent work? Do women and men have the same opportunities? What is the impact of discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes on women's labour force participation? To what extent is the participation of women and men linked to their family situation?

Until recently, reliable and consistent global data needed to explore the links between gender gaps in labour force participation, marital status and the presence of children were lacking. In response, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UN Women have partnered on a joint effort to produce a global dataset with new indicators that allows for the analysis of labour market outcomes from a gender and family perspective. The analysis, based on data from 84 countries, focuses on the ways in which the labour market participation of women aged 25 to 54 varies by marital status, household type and the presence and age of children. It also looks at the gender gap in labour force participation across these different categories and sub-categories.

The findings point to persistent gender gaps in labour force participation globally and across regions. When the data are disaggregated by marital status and the presence of children, they show that marriage and childbearing often dampen women's labour force participation, while having the opposite effect for men. The specific vulnerability faced by women is driven by discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes that reinforce their role as caregivers, while simultaneously promoting men's role as breadwinners.

Region: International ^[4]

Tags: female labour force participation ^[5]

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