

**Culture, economics and women's engagement with the labor market:
preliminary findings from Bangladesh**

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Alternative title:

Women's engagement with the labour market in Bangladesh: a paradox, a puzzle, a challenge and a conundrum!!!

Bangladesh: from test case to paradox

The development test case of the 1970s: devastating cyclone, a war for independence, a nation-wide famine, series of political assassinations, military take-over, negative growth rates, high and apparently intransigent rates of fertility and population growth, deep and widespread poverty and landlessness and 'one of the least negotiable patriarchies in the world'

A case study of 'medium human development' in the 2000s: respectable rates of per capita growth, moderate but steady declines in poverty rates, considerable progress on a number of social indicators

The paradox: Progress has occurred in a context of limited structural and institutional change ('dysfunctional politics and a stunted private sector')

Uneven progress on gender equality

Remarkable progress on social development:

Closing, and reversal of gender gap in primary and secondary education

Closing of gender gap in infant and child mortality rates

Equalizing of life expectancy

Gender equality in child nutritional outcomes and health seeking behaviour

Revaluation of daughters??

BUT slower progress on economic front.

Ownership of land/housing still largely male dominated

Gradual rise in women's labor force participation rates, but still lagging far behind that of men

Trends in labour force participation rates

- Male Female
- 80% 4% 1974 Bangladesh Census
- 78% 8% 1984 Labour Force survey
- 74% 23% 2000 Labour Force Survey
- 83% 36% 2010 Labour Force Survey

Occupational patterns

- ‘Inexplicable’ rise in percentages of working women in unpaid family labour from 18.6% in 1995 to 48% in 2003 accompanied by commensurate decline in every other category including wage employment, self employment and salaried employment (World Bank, 2008)
- Women made up 64% of unpaid family labour in 2005 and 77% in 2010.
- 56% of women and 7% of men in unpaid family labour, 25% of women and 48% of men in self employment and 9% of women and 17% of men in formal employment (to be checked)

The first puzzle

- Why despite respectable rates of growth and progress on other measures of gender equality does women's labour force participation rates remain so low?

And why should we care?

- General rationale: increasing women's labour force participation rates relative to men's contributes to pace of economic growth and progress on social development
- Bangladesh-specific rationale: Pathways study suggests women in paid work, particularly in formal paid work, exercise greater voice and agency within their households and community.
- Women themselves attached a great deal of value to an income of their own: *You can tell as soon as you see a working woman. If women work and earn an income of their own, then there is a different sense about them. They have a mental strength.*

The second puzzle

- Why despite the apparently transformative potential of paid work are so many working women in unpaid family labour?

Explanations of women's labour market behaviour in Bangladesh

- *Economics is all about how people make choices; sociology is all about how people don't have any choices to make'. (Duesenberry)*
- Purdah and patriarchy (eg Cain et al. 1979)
- *The market for a woman's labor is normally demarcated both physically and functionally. The physical limits of the market for a particular woman's labor are described by a circle with a radius of 200-400 meters, with her homestead as the center of the circle....What is important is that, geographically, the market for the labor of any given women is small, and the pool of potential employers is limited by the condition that some sort of prior social relationship exist between the woman seeking work and the employer. The norms of purdah influence the distance a woman would be willing to travel to work, the distance a husband would permit his wife to travel, a woman's willingness to work for a stranger, and the receptivity of potential employers.... the psychic and more tangible costs of the job search rise quickly when a woman leaves the confines of her "circle."*

Economics and sociology in explanations of women's labour market behaviour in Bangladesh

- Purdah and patriarchy
- Economic calculus
- Renegotiating purdah
- Cultural norms and economic calculus

The data

- 2008 survey of 5198 women randomly selected from 8 districts selected to represent variations in cultural norms and economic development.
- 3% in formal employment
- 6% in informal wage employment
- 4% in informal self employment outside home
- 47% in informal self employment within home
- 18% in unpaid family labour
- 22% economically inactive

Characteristics of different categories of economic activity

- Formal wage employment: wealthier households, educated, younger than average, 18% single, fewer children,
- Informal wage employment: poorest, least educated, more divorced/separated,
- Informal self employment outside: also poor and uneducated
- Informal self-employment and unpaid family labour: a lot in common (levels of education, more likely to be married) but latter had more land
- Economically inactive: wealthier than most, more educated than most, more likely to be single and more likely to be urban based
- Women in paid work generally more likely to be members of NGOs, most women in sample (90%) were Muslims. Those in outside less likely to wear purdah/hijab when going out than those working at home or inactive. Women in informal waged work least likely.

Multivariate analysis: estimation procedure

- Interested in understanding factors which predict women's labour force participation as well as those which predict their selection into different categories of employment. We distinguish for this paper between paid work outside the home, paid work within the home, waged employment, self-employment and unpaid family labour
- Modelled as a two-step process, with first step being decision to be economically active and the second the process of selection into different categories of economic activity
- Modified probit estimation technique that allows modelling of selection into economic activity along with factors determining selection into particular activity
- Based on Heckman's original two-step selection but uses maximum likelihood estimator to jointly estimate the two stages. Selection into a particular category only observed for those who are economically active

Multivariate analysis: findings for selection into economic activity

- Results of selection into economic activity very similar across categories:
- Increases with age but then declines. Marital status only relevant and positive for single women (also observed elsewhere)
- Education has negative impact (not in line with other findings)
- Number of children, but more strongly responsibility for household chores/care work reduces likelihood
- Muslim women have higher likelihood of economic activity but those wearing burkha/hijab have lower
- NGO/loans not significant.

Multivariate analysis: findings for selection into particular categories of economic activity for economically active population

- Widowed/divorced/separated women more likely to be found in paid work outside the home, and divorced/separated in wage work
- Number of children reduces likelihood of work outside the home and waged employment but effects even stronger for women reporting domestic and care responsibilities
- Impact of education varies by level: Women with primary education more likely than uneducated to work within the home while those with post-secondary more likely to work outside the home and in wage employment
- NGO members more likely to work within the home
- Household wealth and land reduce likelihood of work outside the home, reduce likelihood of wage employment and increase likelihood of unpaid family labour
- Women with phones/households with electricity more likely to work outside the home and to work in waged employment
- Muslim women more likely to work within the home, particularly if they wear purdah/hijab

Multivariate analysis: findings for selection into particular categories of economic activity for economically active population

- Higher educational attainment of household head reduces likelihood of work outside the home
- Heads involved in agriculture increase likelihood of women working in the home but reduce unpaid family labour
- Heads in wage or salaried employment increase likelihood of women in work outside the home and in waged employment
- Head in business or skilled work increases likelihood of women in work inside the home but reduces involvement in unpaid family labour
- Not shown: taking own decision to work increases likelihood of work within the home. Reporting family resistance to decision to work reduces likelihood of economic activity but among younger active women, increases likelihood of outside work
- Unpaid family labour mostly determined by household and household head characteristics
- Geography matters!!

Discussion of results

- Some evidence of variation and change: age, marital status, geography, technology, location of work, changing discourses of inside and outside
- Strong evidence of continuity

Most preferred occupations

- Livestock/poultry rearing
- Tailoring
- Teaching
- Quilt-making and handicrafts
- **Reasons given:**
- Ability to stay at home
- Ability to earn from home
- Respect/honour

Least preferred occupations

- Domestic service
- Daily wage labour
- Begging
- Garment work
- **Reasons given:** Hard work
- Work outside home/in others' homes/ in sun and rain
- People say bad things
- People do not honour
- Lack of respect

The nature of the alternatives

- 20% of women in outside work reported experience of harrassment compared to 6-9% of women working at home
- 57% of women in informal outside work reported negative effects on health

The nature of the alternatives

- *Before the loans, women used to work on other people's fields, cutting lentils, rice, wheat. They got 20/- to 30/- takas a day. That is happening less now because so many women are getting loans, they are raising cows, goats, they can work for themselves so why should they work for someone else. If you can work for yourself, look, I am sitting here with you, could I do that if I worked for someone else? They would pay me less then. I would pull up lentils, they would give me 20/- a day, this was four years ago. Before women used to clear the irri blocks, they would stand in the water and get leeches on them. Now they don't. Now, with the loans, they have some peace.*

The nature of the alternatives

- *Before I used to work in people's houses to eat. I worked all day for the stomach alone, not for money. Isn't it better to work in your own house rather than having to work in some one else's just in order to fill your stomach. You stay at home, you raise ducks and hens, you feed yourself, and you make some profit.....How many people behave well with you if you work for them for money? There is no honour in working for someone*

Revisiting economics and sociology!

- Not all of economics is about the choices people make, survival imperatives can leave very little choice. Not all of sociology is about how people have no choices to make but how norms can become values...

The conundrum and the challenge

- The conundrum: if paid work outside the home promotes women's voice and agency but reduces her social status, then how can we expect them to respond to market opportunities?
- The challenge: to what extent are the constraints to women's labour market options amenable to policy interventions?

Next steps:

- Resurvey Pathways respondents plus 2500 men from 8 districts
- Detailed life histories and focus group discussion in 8 districts
- Carry out focus group discussions with men in 8 districts
- Carry out focus group discussions with respondents, employers, NGOs, local officials