

How educated, urban Indian women spend their time

In Brief

- Female labor force participation (FLFP) in urban India has remained consistently low at 20% during 1987-2011. This contrasts sharply with increases in FLFP globally, and in other developing countries over the same period. Moreover, unlike the international experience, increase in female education has not been accompanied by a commensurate rise in FLFP in the country.
- While existing research focuses on specific constraints on FLFP in a reduced-form framework, this project seeks to holistically evaluate multiple constraints on FLFP within a single macroeconomic framework, in order to inform policy better.
- Married women in urban India spend significantly less time at work than married, urban men, and significantly more time on domestic work, particularly child care. Women and men spend comparable time on leisure. Increase in education levels among women does not seem to affect these trends.
- To enhance FLFP, policy should focus on provision of reliable and accessible child-care arrangements to address the issue of time poverty among women. Flexible working conditions for women can support them in managing their dual responsibilities of work and home.

Research Context

It is plausible that multiple factors together hinder FLFP when we envision decisions being made over the life cycle. This project builds and tests a structural model that explains observed changes in FLFP, using data on urban, married women from the Time Use Survey (1998) and various rounds of the National Sample Survey (NSS). The model focuses on women's work participation, educational attainment, and other characteristics, and time spent in the labor market, home production, and leisure.

Given the pro-male bias in India, parents have implicit preference towards investing in boys' education. This can endow boys with higher quality of schooling and skills,

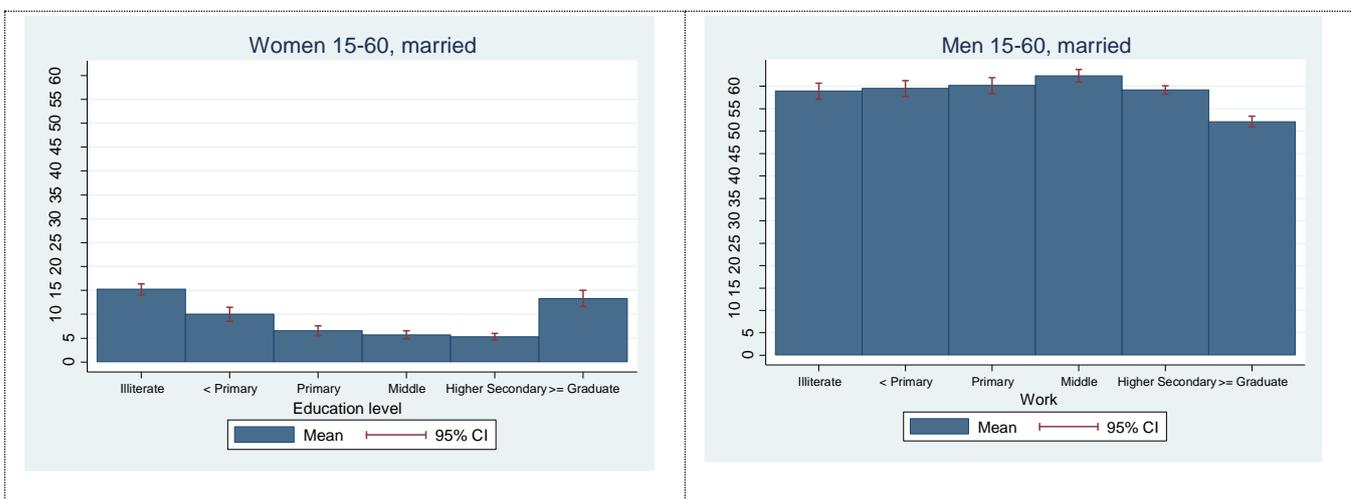
making them a better fit for jobs. While parents also invest in girls' education, the reasons may be completely different, say, to make them a good match in the marriage market, where acquiring a certain level of education, rather than the quality of schooling or skills, is more important. Due to lower skills, the market returns for women may be lower relative to men. If women, as rational decision-makers, observe that the return from the time spent at home on kids or home production is sufficiently higher than their market wage, they would choose to stay at home. If this hypothesis is held up by the data, it would point to considerable inefficiencies in educational investments, and underline the need for policy measures that strengthen skill training for women.

Key Findings

Across education levels, women spend significantly less time at work than men

On average, 15-60 year old married women in urban India spend a mere 9.36 hours at work per week, while their male counterparts spend 58.71 hours. As women go from being illiterate to completing higher secondary schooling, work hours show a declining trend, and then jump up at the 'graduate and above' level. Despite the rise in the time spent at work by women at the highest education level, the average weekly hours only reach 13.32. The gender gap in work hours rises with education, peaks at the middle school level, and then begins to fall.

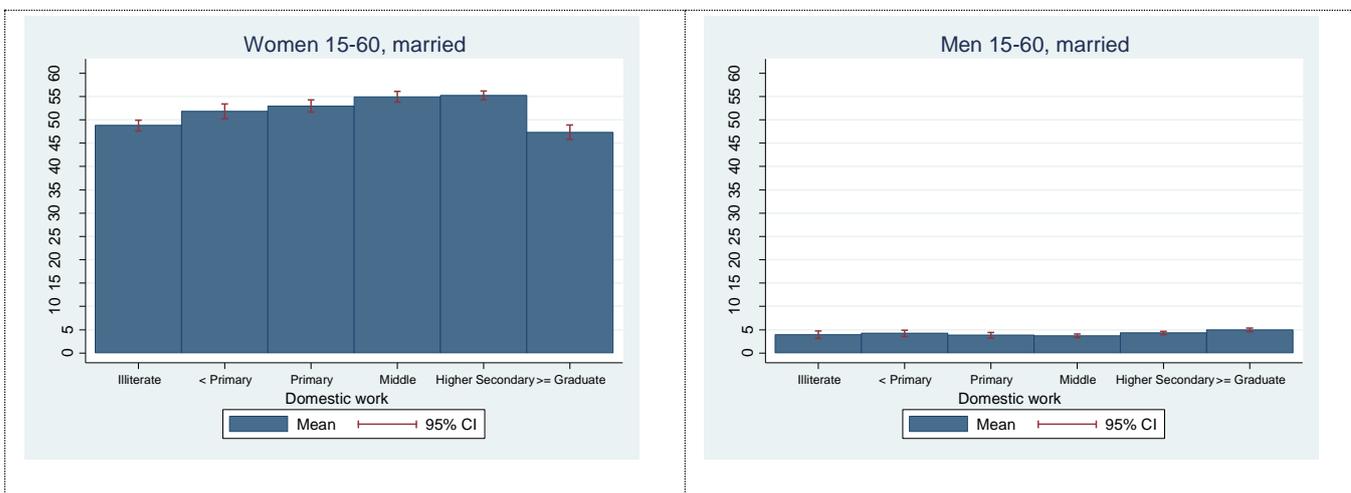
Figure 1. Time spent at work by urban, married women and men aged 15-60



Across education levels, women spend significantly more time on domestic work than men

On average, 15-60 year old married women in urban India spend 51.85 hours on domestic work per week, while their male counterparts spend 4.18 hours. Average weekly hours of domestic work increase for women – although at a declining rate – up to the higher secondary schooling level and then fall by 14.25% at the ‘graduate and above’ level but still remain at 47 hours per week. The domestic-work hours of men do not vary significantly by education.

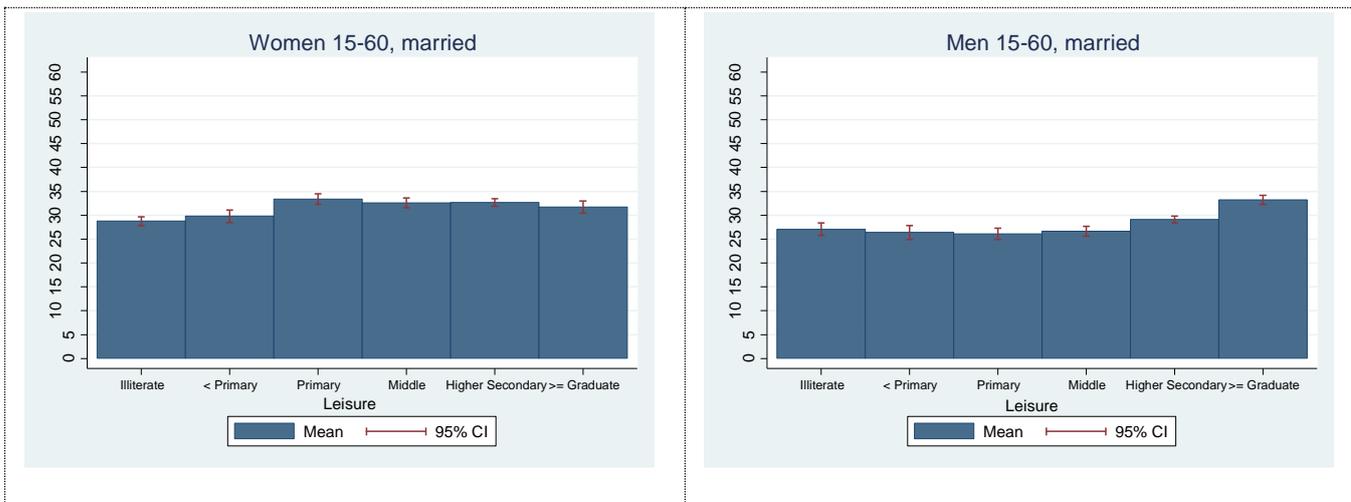
Figure 2. Time spent at domestic work by urban, married women and men aged 15-60



Men and women spend comparable time on leisure

Leisure is measured as the time spent on leisure activities, which are chosen in a discretionary manner, and does not include time spent on sleep, for instance. Urban, married women in the 15-60 age group spend 31.49 hours per week, on average, on leisure while men spend 28.11 hours. Leisure hours for women increase with education up to primary school and then begin to fall; the opposite is true for men. It is only at the ‘graduate and above’ level, that men have slightly higher (by 1.52) weekly leisure hours than women.

Figure 3. Time spent at leisure by urban, married women and men aged 15-60



Across education levels, women spend significantly more time on child care than men

Child care refers to physical care of children, for example, washing, dressing, feeding, teaching, instruction, accompanying children to doctor/school/sports/other activities, and travel related to their care. When there are children below five years of age in the household, married women in urban India spend an average of 12.68 hours per week on child care. The corresponding figure for men is 2 hours. When there are children below 14 years of age in the household, the figures are 9.91 and 1.73 for women and men, respectively. The gender gap in child-care hours does not vary significantly across levels of education in both cases.

Figure 4. Time spent at child care in households with under-five children, by urban, married women and men aged 15-60

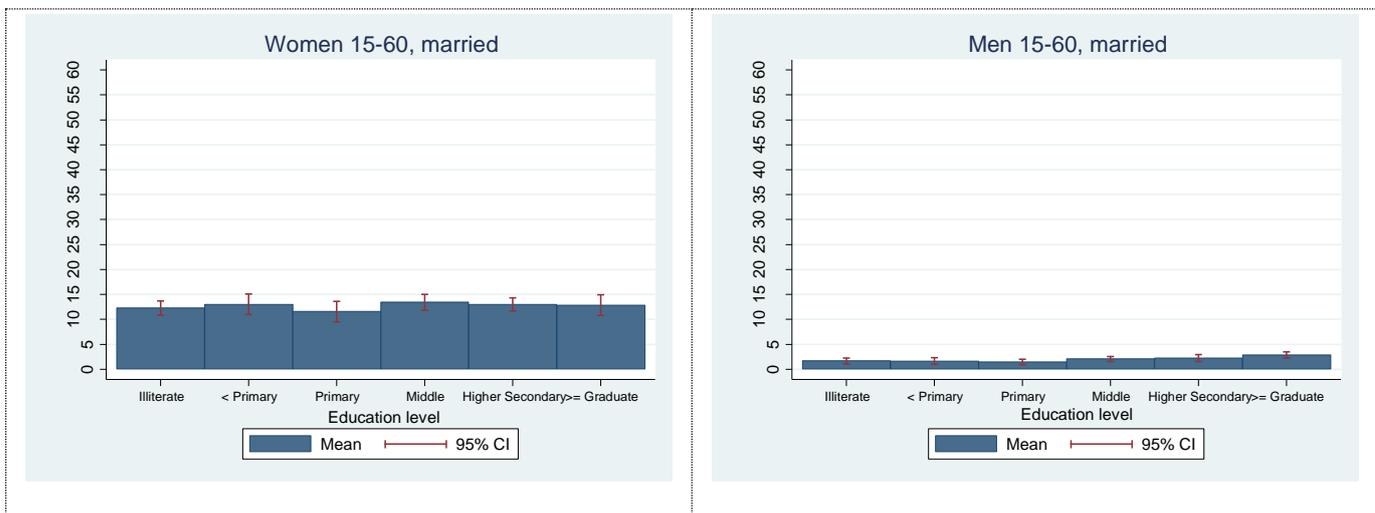


Figure 5. Time spent at child care in households with under-14 children, by urban, married women and men aged 15-60



Extended child care is defined more broadly to include time spent on both exclusive child care and other household chores which typically affect child well-being, such as cooking, and can be done while supervising children. When there are children below five years of age in the household, married women in urban India spend 50.74 hours per week, on average, on extended child care, while their male counterparts spend 2.76 hours. When there are children below 14 years of age in the household, the figures fall to 48.73 and 2.44 for women and men, respectively. For both age groups of children, the burden is mostly borne by women, even at the 'graduate and above' level of education.

Figure 6. Time spent at extended care in households with under-five children, by urban, married women and men aged 15-60

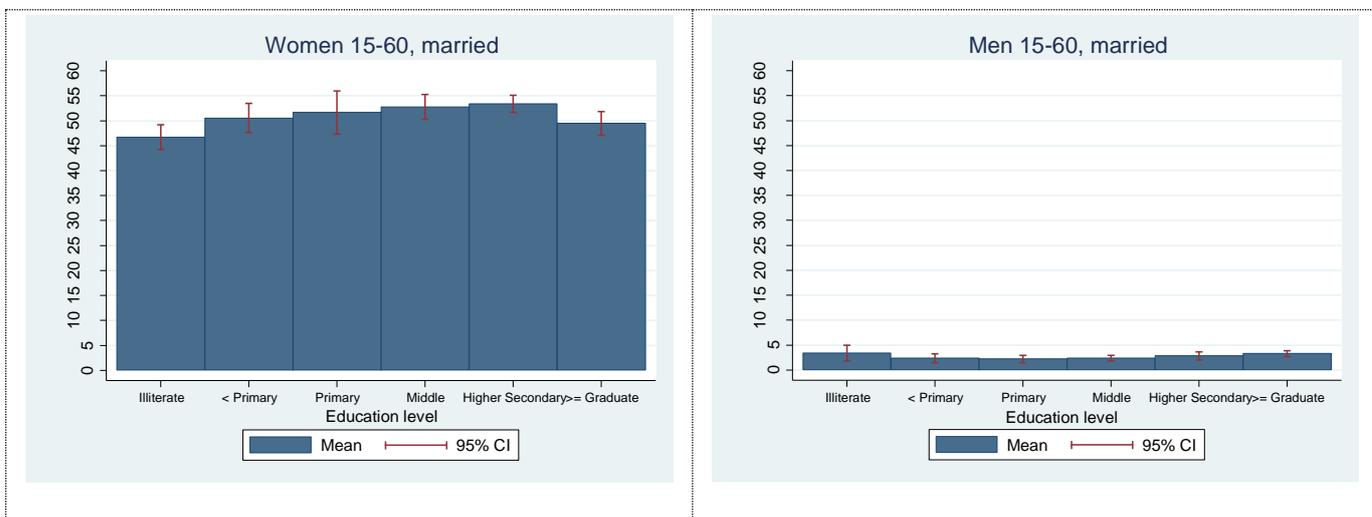
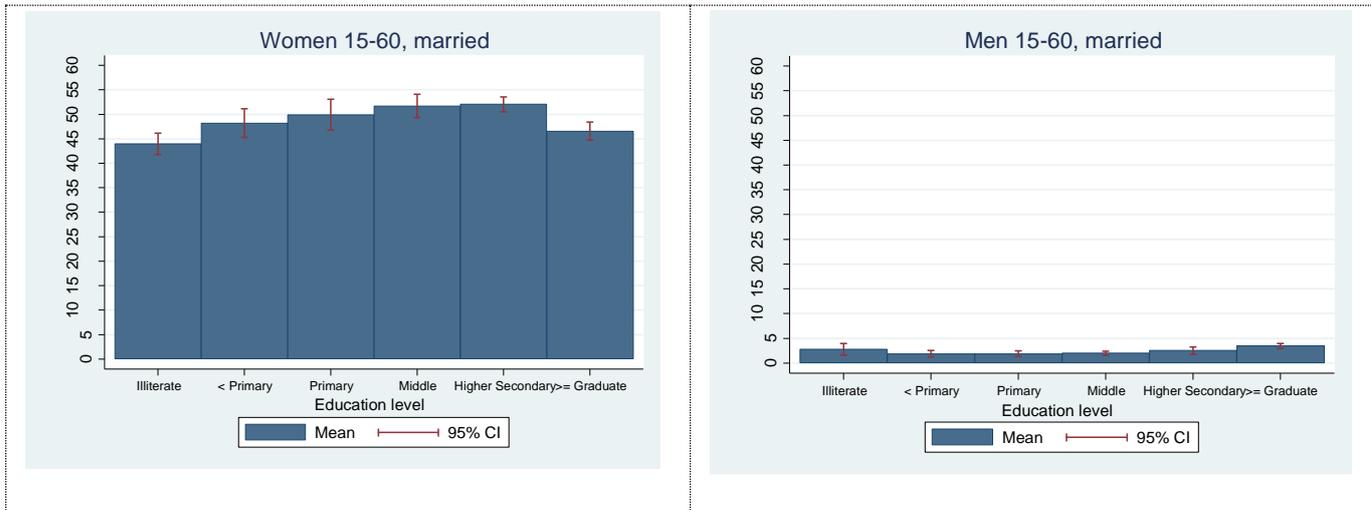


Figure 7. Time spent at extended care in households with under-14 children, by urban, married women and men aged 15-60



Policy Implications

Women disproportionately bear the burden of domestic work in the household and hence, face time poverty. It appears that child care, which is a large component of domestic work, is a key constraint on FLFP, even for educated women. Therefore, to enhance FLFP, increasing women's education is not sufficient. Policy should focus on provision of reliable and accessible child-care arrangements for working women. Further, flexible working conditions for women can enable them to balance work and home better.