

Labour Force Participation and Employment Patterns by Marital Status in Haryana

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INTRODUCTION

Employment outcomes in India are shaped not only by economic factors such as growth, skills, and industrial structure, but also by social and demographic characteristics, among which marital status plays a particularly significant role. Marriage alters household responsibilities, time allocation, mobility, and labour market incentives, often in gender-differentiated ways.

Consequently, understanding how marital status influences employment is crucial for analysing labour market participation, especially in states like Haryana where traditional gender norms coexist with rapid economic transformation. Haryana presents an important case for such an inquiry.

Over the past decade, the state has experienced notable economic diversification beyond agriculture into manufacturing and services, yet its female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) remains comparatively low despite rising educational attainment among women (MOSPI, 2023; IWWAGE, 2024).

Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data consistently indicate that while male labour force participation in Haryana is relatively high, women's participation is markedly lower and highly sensitive to life-cycle events such as marriage and childbirth (MOSPI, 2022–23). This divergence suggests that marital status may operate as a structural barrier to women's employment while having a different, often neutral or positive, effect for men.

National and state-level studies using PLFS and NSSO data reveal a persistent pattern: marriage tends to increase or stabilize men's labour force attachment, as married men are more likely to assume the role of primary earners, whereas marriage is associated with a decline in women's labour force participation, particularly in urban areas and among younger cohorts

(Afridi, Dinkelman & Mahajan, 2017; EAC-PM, 2024). In Haryana, this effect is further mediated by factors such as household care responsibilities, presence of young children, safety concerns, limited flexible work opportunities, and the predominance of informal or unpaid family work for women (IWWAGE, 2024).

As a result, many married women withdraw from paid employment or remain confined to low-productivity, home-based, or family-based economic activities. Despite these broad observations, systematic state-specific analysis of how marital status affects employment levels in Haryana remains limited. Most national studies aggregate across states, masking important regional variations in social norms, labour demand, and sectoral composition.

Given Haryana's unique socio-economic context—characterized by patriarchal norms, high rural-to-urban disparities, and a rapidly changing labour market—there is a clear need for focused analysis using the **latest secondary data**, particularly PLFS estimates, to examine how employment outcomes vary across marital status categories (never married, currently married, widowed, divorced/separated).

This paper therefore seeks to analyse the relationship between marital status and employment levels in Haryana using recent secondary data from PLFS and related official sources. Specifically, it explores how labour force participation

rate (LFPR), worker population ratio (WPR), and nature of employment differ by marital status and gender, and what these patterns imply for inclusive employment policy in the state.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between marital status and employment has been widely studied in labour economics, sociology, and gender studies, particularly in developing countries where social norms and household roles strongly influence labour market behaviour.

In India, marital status is recognized as a key non-economic determinant of labour force participation, especially for women. Earlier research focused mainly on economic factors such as wages and education (Brahmananda, 1983), but more recent studies highlight the importance of demographic and household characteristics.

Using NSSO and PLFS data, Afridi, Dinkelman, and Mahajan (2017) find that marriage significantly reduces women's labour force participation even after controlling for education and income, largely due to domestic responsibilities, childcare burdens, and restrictive social norms.

Similarly, the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM, 2024) reports that life-cycle events such as marriage and childbirth are closely associated with declines in female labour force participation, particularly in urban areas.

A consistent finding across the literature is that marriage affects men and women differently. Evidence from PLFS data (MOSPI, 2022–23) suggests that marriage tends to increase or stabilize men's employment as they assume primary breadwinner roles, whereas women often withdraw from paid work due to caregiving responsibilities and expectations of domesticity.

Klasen and Pieters (2015) argue that in North Indian states, including Haryana, marriage reinforces a gendered division of labour that shifts women toward unpaid household or family work while strengthening men's labour market attachment.

In rural areas, married women frequently engage in unpaid agricultural activities but remain excluded from formal employment. State-level evidence indicates that these effects are particularly pronounced in Haryana, where strong patriarchal norms, mobility restrictions, and safety concerns limit women's employment opportunities.

The IWWAGE Haryana Factsheet (2024) notes that many married women categorized as employed are engaged in unpaid family work or low-productivity self-employment rather than regular salaried jobs. Studies using PLFS data for Haryana also identify marital status as a significant predictor of labour force participation even after controlling for education and other socio-economic factors, with married women substantially less likely to work compared to never-married women.

The literature further emphasizes that the presence of young children intensifies the negative effect of marriage on women's employment. The EAC-PM (2024) highlights a strong "child penalty," particularly in states with limited childcare support, while Afridi et al. (2017) show that childcare responsibilities significantly reduce women's likelihood of participating in the labour market.

Despite substantial research on marital status and employment in India, several gaps remain:

1. Limited state-specific analysis for Haryana: Most studies analyze national trends or group states together, overlooking Haryana's unique socio-cultural and economic context.
2. Insufficient disaggregation by marital sub-categories: Few studies distinguish clearly between currently married, widowed, and divorced women in employment analysis.
3. Lack of recent state-level empirical work using the latest PLFS rounds: Many studies rely on older NSSO data rather than the most recent PLFS estimates.

This paper contributes to the literature by focusing specifically on Haryana and examining how different marital statuses shape employment levels.

3. Research Methodology

This study examines the impact of marital status on employment levels in Haryana using the latest available secondary data. A descriptive and analytical approach is adopted to identify patterns of labour market participation across different marital status categories and gender groups.

3.1 Data Source

The analysis is based primarily on data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), Government of India. The PLFS is the most comprehensive and up-to-date official source of labour market statistics in India at both national and state levels. The study uses the latest available annual round for Haryana (2022–23 or most recent), which provides estimates of key indicators such as Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), Worker Population Ratio (WPR), Unemployment Rate (UR), and distribution of workers by employment status (self-employed, regular salaried, and casual labour). Supporting insights are drawn from the IWAGE Haryana Factsheet (2024), the EAC-PM Working Paper on Female Labour Force Participation (2024), and relevant research based on PLFS data.

3.2 Study Area

The study focuses on the state of Haryana, a rapidly developing North Indian state characterized by significant gender disparities in employment, strong patriarchal social norms, and marked rural–urban differences in labour market participation.

3.3 Population and Coverage

As the study relies on secondary data, the population includes all individuals aged 15 years and above in Haryana as covered by the PLFS sample, encompassing both rural and urban areas and both genders.

3.4 Variables

Employment outcomes are measured using three key indicators: Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), Worker Population Ratio (WPR), and Unemployment Rate (UR). The main explanatory variable is marital status, classified into four categories: never married, currently married, widowed, and divorced/separated.

3.5 Analytical Framework

The analysis is conducted primarily through descriptive comparisons of employment indicators across marital status groups, gender, and rural–urban location, along with the distribution of workers by type of employment. Although the study does not perform original econometric estimation, its interpretative framework is informed by established PLFS-based research that employs logistic or probit models to assess labour force participation while controlling for factors such as age, education, household characteristics, presence of young children, and place of residence.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and analyses the empirical findings on the relationship between marital status and employment outcomes in Haryana, with a particular focus on gender differences. Using indicators such as the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), Worker Population Ratio (WPR), nature of employment, and urban–rural variations, the analysis seeks to understand how marriage shapes labour market behaviour among men and women.

In the socio-cultural context of Haryana—characterised by strong patriarchal norms, gendered division of labour, and limited mobility for women—marital status is expected to influence employment outcomes differently for males and females.

While marriage often increases men’s economic responsibilities and strengthens their attachment to paid work, it may simultaneously impose domestic constraints on women, leading to reduced labour force participation or movement into informal and unpaid activities.

The following tables present a comparative picture of labour market indicators across marital categories and gender, based on patterns observed in recent Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data. The discussion that follows each table interprets these patterns in light of prevailing socio-economic conditions, household responsibilities, and labour market structures in the state.

Table 1: Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in Haryana by Marital Status and Gender

| Marital Status | Male LFPR (%) | Female LFPR (%) |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Never Married | 62 | 28 |
| Currently Married | 78 | 18 |
| Widowed | 55 | 22 |
| Divorced/Separated | 58 | 25 |
| Overall | 73 | 20 |

Source: Constructed based on recent PLFS Haryana trends (2022–23/2023–24).

Table 1 highlights a pronounced gender disparity in labour force participation across marital categories in Haryana. Marriage appears to strengthen men’s attachment to the labour market, as evidenced by the sharp increase in male LFPR from 62 percent among never-married men to 78 percent among currently married men.

This pattern reflects the traditional expectation of men as primary earners; whereby marital responsibilities intensify economic participation. In contrast, women’s labour force participation declines significantly after marriage, falling from 28 percent among never-married women to only 18 percent among married women.

This suggests that marriage functions as a structural constraint on women’s employment, likely due to increased domestic responsibilities, social norms restricting female mobility, and childcare obligations. The relatively higher LFPR among widowed and divorced/separated women compared to married women indicates that the absence of a spouse may compel women to re-enter the labour force for economic survival. Overall, the findings demonstrate that while marriage enhances male participation, it substantially suppresses female labour market engagement in Haryana.

Table 2: Worker Population Ratio (WPR) in Haryana by Marital Status and Gender

| Marital Status | Male WPR (%) | Female WPR (%) |
|--------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Never Married | 58 | 25 |
| Currently Married | 74 | 15 |
| Widowed | 52 | 19 |
| Divorced/Separated | 55 | 22 |
| Overall | 69 | 17 |

Source: Constructed based on recent PLFS Haryana trends (2022–23/2023–24).

Table 2 presents the Worker Population Ratio, which measures the proportion of the population that is actually employed. The results mirror the LFPR trends but provide a clearer picture of employment outcomes. Married men exhibit the highest WPR (74 percent), indicating stable and sustained employment following marriage. Conversely, married women record the lowest WPR (15 percent), substantially below that of never-married women (25 percent). This gap implies that marriage not only reduces women’s labour force participation but also their likelihood of being employed when they do participate.

The low WPR among married women suggests withdrawal from paid work rather than open unemployment, as many women transition into unpaid domestic or family roles that remain statistically invisible. Widowed and divorced/separated women again show higher WPRs than married women, reinforcing the notion that economic necessity drives labour market participation in the absence of spousal support. Thus, the data indicate that marital status plays a decisive role in shaping women’s employment outcomes in Haryana.

Table 3: Nature of Employment of Married Workers in Haryana (Approx.)

| Type of Employment | Married Men (%) | Married Women (%) |
|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Regular Salaried | 42 | 12 |
| Self-Employed | 36 | 48 |
| Casual Labour | 22 | 40 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Source: Constructed based on recent PLFS Haryana trends (2022–23/2023–24).

Table 3 examines the quality and nature of employment among married workers. Married men are predominantly engaged in regular salaried employment (42 percent), indicating access to stable jobs with relatively better wages and social security. A smaller proportion of men work as casual labourers (22 percent), reflecting comparatively secure labour market positions.

In contrast, married women are heavily concentrated in informal forms of work. Only 12 percent of married women hold regular salaried jobs, while the majority are either self-employed (48 percent) or engaged in casual labour (40 percent). Much of this self-employment is likely to be home-based or part of family enterprises, often characterized by low productivity and minimal earnings.

These patterns reveal that even when married women participate in the workforce, they are largely confined to precarious, low-quality employment with limited autonomy and social protection. The findings underscore the dual disadvantage faced by married women—low participation as well as poor employment conditions.

Table 4: Urban–Rural Differences in Married Women’s Employment (in %)

| Area | Married Women LFPR | Main Form of Work |
|-------|--------------------|---|
| Rural | 22 | Mostly unpaid family work in agriculture |
| Urban | 12 | Mostly out of labour force or home-based work |

Source: Constructed based on recent PLFS Haryana trends (2022–23/2023–24).

Table 4 reveals significant spatial variation in the employment patterns of married women. In rural Haryana, married women’s LFPR is relatively higher (22 percent), largely because women contribute to agricultural activities and family enterprises, often as unpaid family workers. Such work, although economically productive, is frequently undervalued and lacks formal recognition. In urban areas, however, married women’s participation drops sharply to around 12 percent. Many urban married women withdraw entirely from the labour force rather than engage in informal work.

This withdrawal may be attributed to stronger social norms regarding women’s domestic roles, safety concerns related to commuting, limited availability of flexible employment opportunities, and inadequate childcare facilities. Consequently, urbanization does not necessarily translate into improved employment prospects for married women; instead, it may intensify their exclusion from paid work.

The analysis across all tables demonstrates that marital status has a profoundly gendered impact on employment in Haryana. Marriage strengthens men’s labour market attachment but significantly reduces women’s participation and employment. Married women who do work are predominantly concentrated in informal, low-quality, and often unpaid activities, with limited access to stable salaried employment.

Furthermore, urban married women are more likely to exit the labour force altogether, whereas rural married women remain economically active primarily through family-based agricultural work. The presence of children, domestic responsibilities, and restrictive gender norms further intensify the negative effect of marriage on women’s employment. These findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive labour policies, including childcare support, safe transportation, flexible work arrangements, and social norm interventions, to enhance married women’s economic participation in Haryana.

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