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Title: Skill Development opportunities and its influence on employability of urban women

ABSTRACT

Keywords: Skill development, Female labour force participation, Gender stereotypes, Employability, Working women

Gender gap in employment is a matter of global concern and skill development is considered the global currency of the 21st century. The vital points of consideration for this study were (a) declining numbers of urban women in the Indian workforce, despite rising education levels and (b) emphasis on skill development for all Indians in the working age group. The study aims to understand if skill development opportunities are acting as an enabler for women's intention to take up paid employment. The study explores the socio-economic background of urban women who enrol for skill development programs, the types of skill development options available to them, their perceptions, expectations and level of satisfaction with the skilling programs and the driving and impeding factors affecting women's intention to take up paid employment.

This is a descriptive study using a mixed method - convergent parallel design. Quantitative & qualitative data was collected simultaneously and the findings were compared for a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Quantitative data was collected from women (15 – 59 years) pursuing skilling programs in Delhi using survey questionnaires. Qualitative data was collected using semi structured interviews from female program participants and administrative or teaching staff at skill development centres. Delhi was chosen because female labour force participation in Delhi has remained significantly lower than the national average over the years.

This study finds that majority of female skill development program participants come from economically less privileged sections of society. Most study participants had completed class 12th and were unmarried. They had mostly chosen their skilling program in consultation with family and friends considering good employment prospects and the positive image of the profession they can pursue after course completion. While participants were largely happy with their skilling course curriculum and teachers, still they seemed apprehensive about the value of the program on its own and were striving to gather other qualifications as well. Most felt that they will need to undergo more training to find a good job.

Attitudes of young women towards paid employment was found to be very positive, yet there are times when they feel constrained by gender and social norms. This seems to be transitional phase; wherein young women are trying to find balance between their aspirations and demands of their role as a nurturer for the family. Over 92 % stated that being financially independent was important to them. 85 % felt that financial independence empowers women to have greater say in their life decisions and expressed their keenness for employment even if they are not in financial distress and also continuity of paid work after motherhood. Majority were inclined to choose professions considered suitable for women and favoured flexi timings. Although, 65.3% believed that there are no disadvantages of being a working woman, yet close to 50 % strongly agreed that working women are overworked. Among the top three factors for choosing a job offer - a good pay packet emerged as the clear winner for maximum survey respondents, followed by opportunity for growth and good working environment.

It was found that father's approval of working women has a positive influence on daughters. It gives them the confidence to overcome prevalent gender stereotypes and encourages them to become financially independent. Most of the motivational advice from mothers focuses on countering hardships and being prepared for the uncertain future. 60.7 % respondents reported that their parents take important decisions together, indicating that women's voice is being heard in households. Families of 70 % participants believed that being skilled and financially independent can improve their marriage prospects.

Annual family income of participants was found to influence the type of skill development institution chosen by them (Government, private or NGO run) as well as their intention to opt for paid employment after course completion. Higher the family income, less likely is the woman to opt for paid employment. Respondents pursuing their programs at NGOs were found to be most keen for employment after course completion but had low salary expectations.

Findings of the study point towards the need to raise the perceived value of skill development programs and implementation of the National Skills Qualifications Framework which can help overcome the discrepancy in salaries offered to skilled workers. Creating and promoting more suitable job opportunities for women is vital so that the encouraging outcome of women's earning potential is in clear line of sight.