



### **Women and Work in India: What do we Know?**

At 27% of working age women, India's female labor force participation rate remains stubbornly low – and by some accounts, is declining. Other information about women's labor force participation is well documented: urban female labor force participation is lower than rural women's, education and labor force participation exhibit a U-shaped relationship, meaning women with middle levels of education participate least in the labor force; labor force participation by high caste Hindus and Muslims is particularly low; and major employers of the women who are working are agriculture and education (Fletcher, Pande, and Moore 2014). While social norms appear to limit women's labor force participation, recent studies highlight that a substantial portion of the decline in women's labor force participation also reflects changes in the labor market that traditionally absorbed female labor: notably, sectors that employ more females have been relatively low growth, (Klasen and Pieters 2015) and new, female-suitable jobs fail to materialize even as agricultural employment continues to decline (Chatterjee, Murgai, and Rama 2015). This recent work, based on National Sample Survey (NSS) data, also asserts that non-agricultural jobs suitable for Indian women would allow them to work close to home and would provide regular part-time work.

Regardless of the reasons for the low participation, it is clear there is significant latent demand by women to participate in the labor force: NSS data shows that, of women engaged solely in domestic duties and currently classified as out of the labor force, nearly a third report they would like to work, and this number increases to over half of highly educated women in rural areas (Fletcher, Moore, and Pande 2015). Our pilot survey data, discussed below, also backs this idea.

#### **Highlights from Madhya Pradesh Pilot Survey**

- 1.)** Youth want to work and are willing to migrate for employment. Females' willingness is similar to males', although females are more reluctant to migrate far from home.
- 2.)** Household members' preferences over women's work differ substantially by gender and generation. The difference between young men and women's beliefs over whether women should work is quite large, with young men holding relatively more traditional attitudes on women's roles.
- 3.)** Youth, especially females, have little say in who they marry. Childbearing, more than marriage alone, appear to constrain female labor force participation.
- 4.)** Parents are particularly concerned about young women's safety, reporting less willingness to let daughters migrate for work and more frequently preferring daughters be trained by female instructors in vocational training programs.

### **The Pilot Survey**

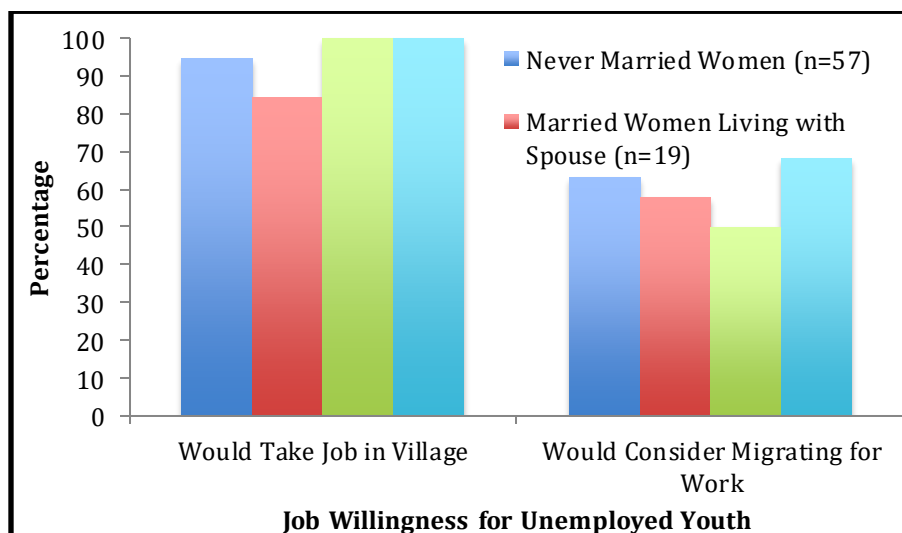
At Evidence for Policy Design, based at the Harvard Kennedy School in the United States and IFMR LEAD in India, we set out to learn more about women's low labor force participation rates, focusing on below poverty line (BPL) women between the ages of 18 and 25 in 20 Gram Panchayats in two Bhopal-area districts (Bhopal and Sehore) in Madhya Pradesh, a relatively conservative area of the country. With support from J-PAL's Youth/PPE Initiative, we collected survey data from a random sample of 170 BPL youth (117 women) and their parents in August and September 2015. We focus on youth to understand how and why women enter the labor force and their demand prior to having children. We report preliminary results here, with a focus on women's willingness to participate in the labor force, interest in undertaking vocational training, and willingness to migrate.

We report the results with the caveat that the sample was quite small and we do not claim it is generalizable beyond our study area.

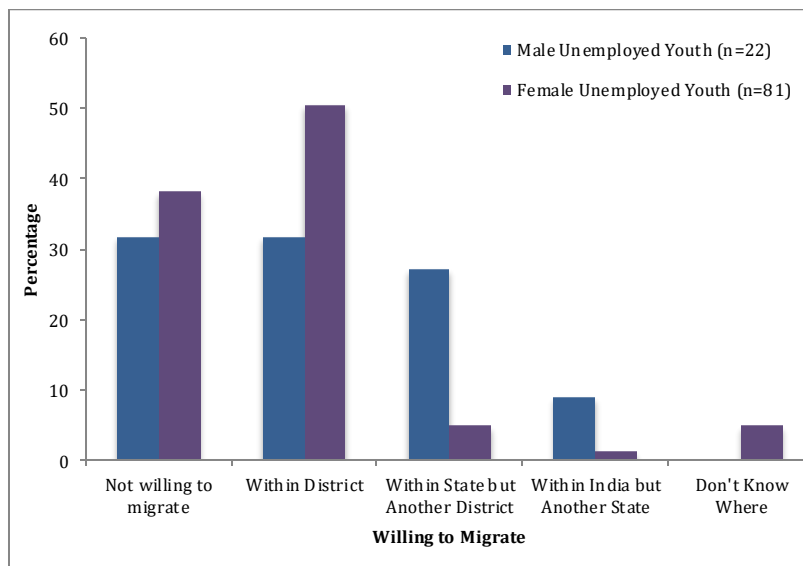
The data was collected in partnership with the AISECT, an organization providing vocational skills training to rural youth through the DDU-GKY skills training program, an initiative situated in India’s Ministry of Rural Development and part of the much-touted Skill India program. DDU-GKY aims to train 1.2 million rural, BPL youth, and place them in the labor force by 2017. We are using the survey results, along with national-level secondary data analysis, to prepare for a larger study focused on how to effectively bring women into the labor force and keep them there.

***I. Who wants to work, and are they willing to migrate?***

First, 59% of surveyed male youth, and 30% of female youth of our sample, had worked for pay in the last year. Of those who had not worked, 100% of male youth and 93% of female youth would take a job if they could work from home or in the village. A substantial proportion is also willing to migrate: 68% of unemployed male youth and 62% of unemployed female youth said they would consider migrating for a job. Additionally, married women are no less likely to be willing to migrate than unmarried women (see chart below).



Despite more than 50% of unemployed youth reporting they would currently be willing to consider migrating for work, youth - and in particular young women - are very reluctant to relocate to large urban centers, like Delhi, following training. While 100% of male and 78% of female youth report they are willing to relocate to Bhopal for a job following training, only 59% of male and 23% of female youth report they are willing to relocate to Delhi. Similar proportions of respondents report willingness to migrate to Bhopal and Delhi for training.

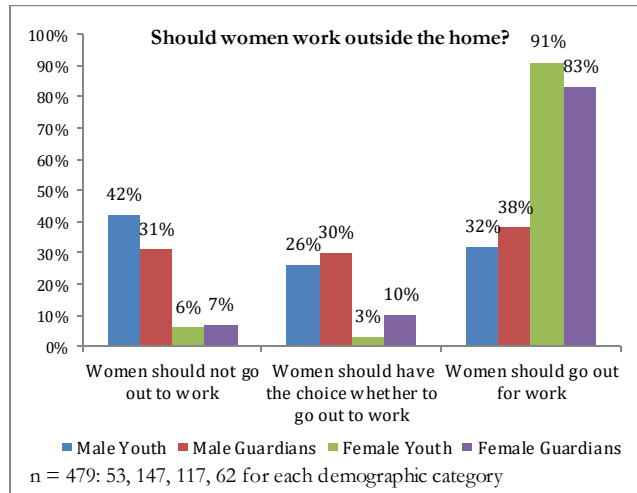


Men report they require higher wages to migrate than women, but both require significantly higher wages to relocate to Delhi as compared to Bhopal. Male youth report they would need to earn 13,754 Rs./month to accept a job in Bhopal and women report they would need to earn 12,209 Rs./month. These reservation wages nearly double when considering migration to Delhi: male youth report that they would need to earn 26,660 Rs./month to relocate to Delhi and female youth require only 20,657 Rs./month on average. In contrast, average monthly wages for the youth who were employed was Rs. 8,771 for male youth and only Rs. 1,527 for female youth.

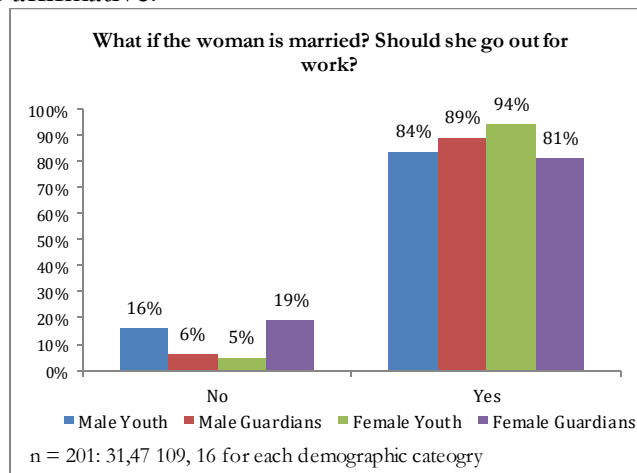
Safety appears to be a predominant concern for women when considering migrating, even for skills training: 69% of female youth report it is unsafe to live away from home even during training, compared to 32% of male youth. Male guardians also overwhelmingly report they believe crime is more likely to happen in urban areas than the village (83%), and both violent and non-violent crime are more likely to happen to women (86% and 84%, respectively), suggesting they would be relatively more concerned for their daughters' safety post-migration than a son's.

## ***II. Marriage, Family, and Labor Force Participation: Incompatible for Females?***

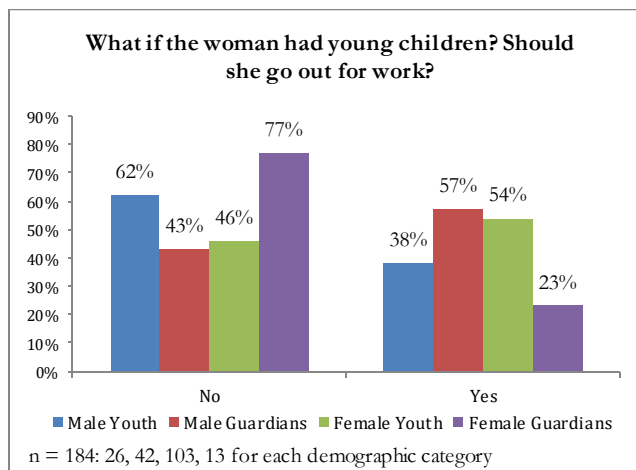
Social norms are often blamed for India's low female labor force participation. In our survey, we asked guardians and youth whether they thought women should work outside the home, saying, "Some people feel that women should not work and they should only look after their families, while others say that there is nothing wrong if women go out for work. What is your opinion?" There is a large amount of variation in household responses, with women overwhelmingly stating that women should work and men being much more likely to report that women should not go out to work. Surprisingly, male youth appear to have an even stronger belief that women should not go outside the home to work than male guardians, which stands in contrast to the fact that female youth are more likely than female guardians to report that women *should* go out for work. The difference in the percentage of respondents reporting that women should go out to work is 59% for youth and 45% for guardians.



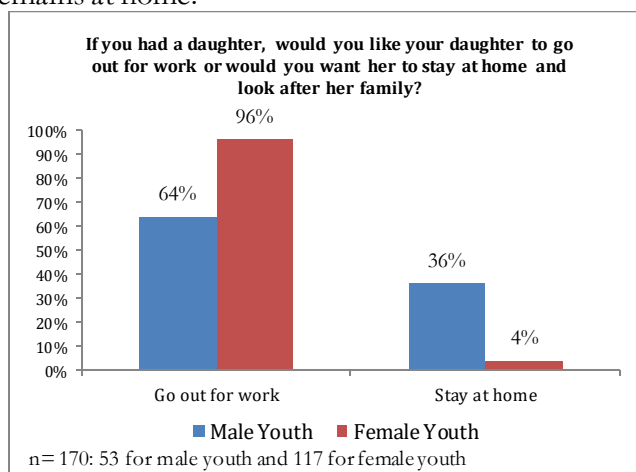
Those who responded that women should have the choice or should go out to work were then asked, “What if the woman is married? Should she go out for work?” Given the constraint that the woman is married, very few respondents amended their answer and, most respondents still report that women should go out for work. However, between 15 and 20% of male youth and mothers no longer responded in the affirmative.



Finally, those who still responded that married women should go out for work were then asked, “What if the woman had young children? Should she go out for work?” Given the children prime, nearly 50% of respondents amended their answer stating that when a woman has a child she should not go out for work. Female guardians and male youth were the groups most likely to report that women with children should not go out for work, although sample sizes were getting quite small for female guardians (n=13) for this question.

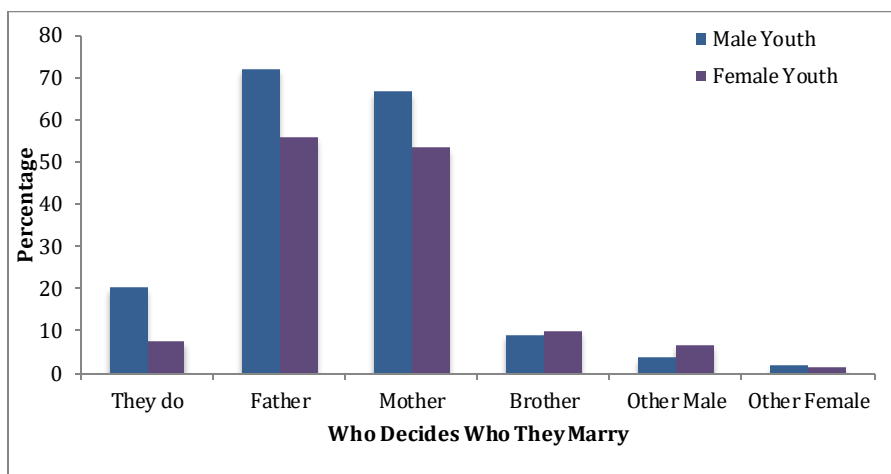


We then asked youth respondents, “If you had a daughter, would you like your daughter to go out for work or would you want her to stay at home and look after her family?” The results underscore the clear divide where young women want their future daughters to work, but one-third of young men would prefer she remains at home.



IIA. How is marriage decided, and does it affect youths’ labor force participation decisions?

Both young men and women have limited power to decide whom they marry: only 7% of women report they are included in the decision over whom they marry. Men and women report much more decision-making power over the decision of when to have children, with over 30% of women and nearly 50% of men reporting that they can take this decision. (Due to the sensitivity of these questions and concerns of social desirability bias, all surveys happened in complete privacy and females were only surveyed by female enumerators.)



Both men and women report that they would expect to get married at an older age if they were to participate in vocational training. Unmarried female youth report that, on average, they expect to marry at 23 years old, however when asked at what age they would expect to marry if they were to undertake vocation training, the same female youth report that on average they expect to marry at 24 years. For male youth these are 25 years and 26 years respectively. With our data, we cannot say whether these expected marriage delays are due to desire labor market behavior or to the expectation that training will take one year to complete.



Respondents were also hypothetically asked if they were working away from home in Bhopal and got married, would they be allowed to continue working. 77% of female respondents reported that they would be able to keep working as compared to 95% of men. These higher percentages for women may be due to gender norms and women’s capacity to work or alternatively they may reflect women’s latent demand for labor which we have shown does not correlate with women’s actual take-up of employment.

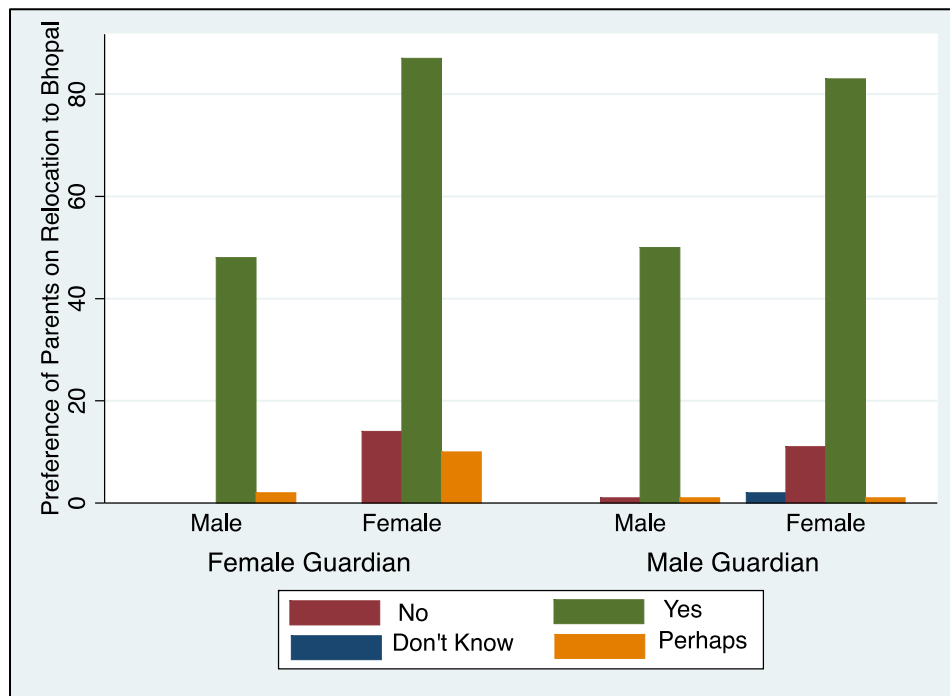


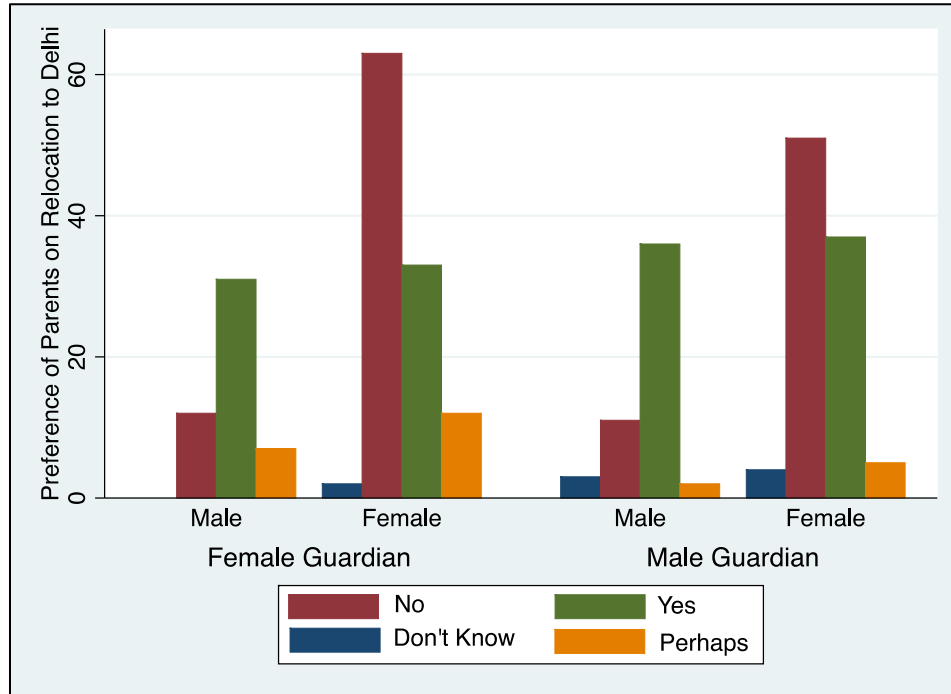
We also asked female youth respondent’s parents, “Would you like your daughter to go out for work or would you want her to stay at home and look after her family?” 88% of mothers would allow their daughters to go out to work, while only 71% of fathers would allow their daughters to go out; suggesting fathers’ preferences about their own daughters’ labor force and household activities are more conservative.

### ***III. Preferences of parents with regard to vocational training***

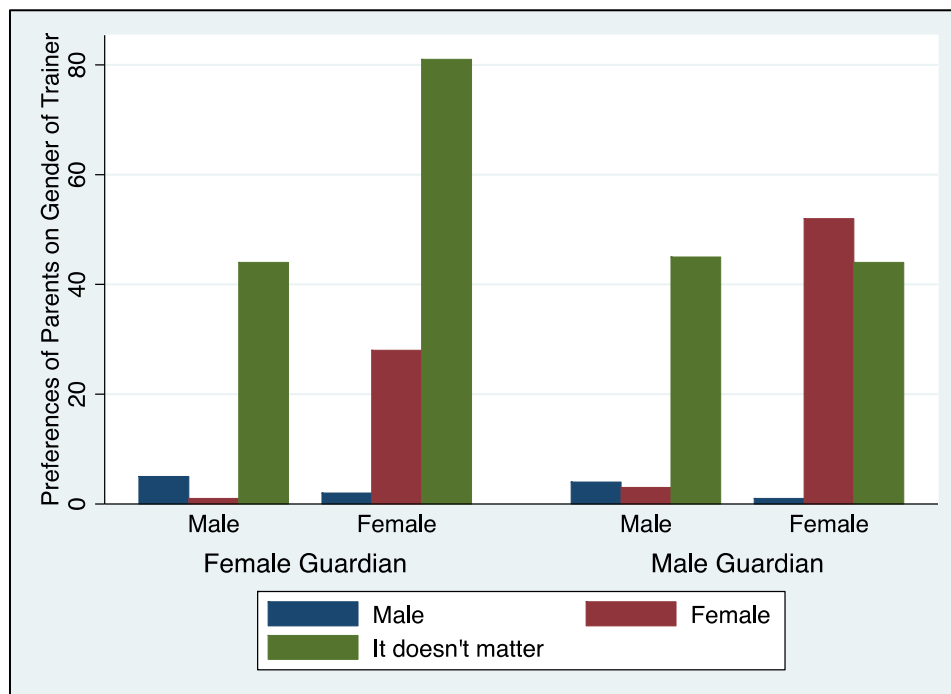
In addition to understanding demand and take-up of employment, part of this survey aimed to study demand and take-up of skills training programs. Parents of youth were asked about their beliefs regarding skills training and their desire for their child to participation in a skills training program. When parents were asked of their knowledge of skills training programs, 80% of the mothers reported that they were aware of these programs while only 39% of the fathers could say the same.

When asked whether they would allow their son or daughter to migrate after participating in a vocational training program, 96% of mothers with a (son?) said they would allow this child to relocate to Bhopal after training and 79% of mothers with a female youth (daughter?) would allow her to do the same; fathers’ permission for their children’s relocation to Bhopal was similar. But when asked about whether they would allow their child to relocate to Delhi or Mumbai after training, 62% of mothers and 69% of fathers with sons said they would allow them to relocate, while 31% of mothers and 38% of fathers with daughters would allow them to do so. This suggests that parents are more reluctant to allow their children, particularly their daughters, to migrate to the largest metro areas.





Parents also reported that they would prefer their daughters be trained by female trainers: 88% of mothers and 87% of fathers report that the gender of the trainer would not matter for their sons, while only 73% and 57% of fathers said the same about their daughters. This suggests that fathers have stronger opinions regarding the gender of trainer for their daughter but that mothers and fathers generally agree on the gender of the trainer for their sons.







Youth and their parents were asked about which trade the youth should pursue if they were to attend a training program: IT and sewing emerged as the two most demand trades. More parents (believed that their sons should pursue IT (21%) and that their daughters should pursue sewing (16%). Parent's desires for their children match their children's preferences: 28% of male youth were interested in IT and 31% of female youth were interested in sewing.

### **Next Steps**

Our preliminary survey analysis highlight fascinating dynamics at play – both inside and outside the household - when considering the issues affecting women and their engagement in the labor force. The results presented here only scratch the surface of what we expect to discover. We will continue to probe more deeply into the constraints keeping women out of the labor force, and investigate what can be done to help them join in. We plan to conduct additional analysis and fieldwork that will lead to a full intervention and evaluation in support of young women's skilling and integration into the labor force.