

Economic Sensitivity of Non-Working Females for Wage Differential Compensation: Empirical Evidence from Sri Lanka

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Abstract— The pathway towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth can be built by women empowerment. This study addresses the problem of inadequate female labour force participation in South Asia. As such, following a mixed methodological approach, both the qualitative and quantitative analyses were triangulated to achieve the objective of the study. Women's Wage Compensation Sensitivity Index (WWCSI) is constructed as the ultimate output of the quantitative analysis using a sample of 112 respondents (non-working females) from Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The findings of that analysis suggested that compensating wage differentials can economically empower non-working females in South Asia. However, wage differential compensation is likely to be more productive among rural females and then among urban females, and it will be more successful among less educated females. According to the newly recognized backward bending nature of WWCS curve, wage differential compensation should be offered for females in prime working age (25-45 years) instead of mothers with infants or elder children. Further, governments should come up with temporary subsidization programmes especially for urban females in order to turn housewives into own account worker because the interest of females to earn at home is high. The follow-up qualitative analysis involved an in-depth inquiry on empirical evidence of wage differential compensation sensitivity of non-working females through a case study in Sri Lanka. Therein, motherhood and children's age, co-habitation of grandparents, male supremacy in traditionally patriarchal families, intergenerational education and learning, voluntary child labour, human trafficking for women labour exploitation and growth needs and domestic financial requirements were explored as the determinants of women's wage differential compensation sensitivity.

Keywords— *female labour force participation, women economic empowerment, women's wage differential compensation sensitivity*

I. INTRODUCTION

Direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth can be built by women empowerment. But recently, fast GDP growth has not translated into fast labour force participation growth in South Asian region. Only 28% of South Asian females have a job or are seeking for one, compared to 79% of men. This is the second lowest in the world, after the Middle East and North Africa region which is at 21% (Doss, 1996). According to these statistics, at least half of the working age female population in most of South Asian countries do not belong to the labour force (World Development Indicator, 2018). Accordingly, one of current serious economic issues in South Asia is "Inadequacy of women's labour force participation". Most of the South Asian countries show significant lack in female labour force participation when compared to males. As per World Development Indicator (WDI), countries namely India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh show lowest female labour force participation in South Asian region. However, women participation in the labor force in poorer countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan is higher than other countries in South Asia.

A. *Research Problem and Justification:*

In South Asia, there is much evidence on the substantial burden on women's time due to maternity, **childcare & family-oriented policies**, violence and discriminations against women. Therefore, the opportunity cost of work of women is relatively higher (Banu, 2016). This research mainly involves in testing following research question.

“Can compensating wage differentials, economically empower non-working females?”

This question can be subjected to debates in development research because the income factor is the central dimension for women’s empowerment in this research question. However, this research paper focused on labour income which was surprisingly not included by other empirical studies as women’s empowerment tool and that has not previously been studied for the entire South Asian region.

B. Objectives of the Study:

Primary objective: To investigate the impact of compensating wage differentials on women’s economic empowerment in the South Asian Region at the micro level.

C. Secondary objective:

1. To examine the responsiveness of South Asian non-working females to wage increment at the macro level and determine the relationship between wages and female labour force participation. (objective of macro level quantitative analysis)
2. To identify the non-wage factors which determine the women's economic empowerment in South Asian region. (objective of micro level quantitative analysis)
3. To find the determinants of women’s wage differential compensation sensitivity in Sri Lanka and causes for Sri Lanka's regional disparity of wage differential compensation sensitivity (objective of qualitative analysis)

II. METHODOLOGY

This study used mixed method approach called follow-up explanations model of explanatory design in which initial quantitative phase is followed by a qualitative phase to expand the quantitative results.

A. Methodology of Quantitative Study

1) Macro level study:

This study has employed the deductive approach to empirically validate the relationship between “Wage” and “Female Labour Force Participation”.

Deductive approach generally starts with a theory and then test its implications with data. This study uses a panel data model (longitudinal) of four sample South Asian countries over the period of 17 years from 2000-2017. India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan are selected as the subjects of the sample because those were the four South Asian countries who have showed the lowest female labour force participation rate in 2018 (World Development Indicator, 2018). This study uses multiple regression analysis to explain the relationship between wage and female labour force participation. The female labour force participation rate is taken as the dependent variable in the model and it is used as the proxy variable for women’s economic empowerment. Independent variables of model are the determinants of female labour force participation namely; wage, education level, health and working poverty. Stationarity of variables is checked using “Levin Lin and Chu” (LLC) test. Multicollinearity is checked by the “Variance Inflation Factor” (VIF). The empirical investigation is based on the following regression equation:

Female labour force participation= f (wage, educational level, health, working poverty) (1)

The study intends to test following hypothesis by using the model explained above.

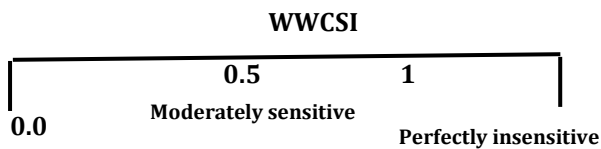
- ❖ Null Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between wage and female labour force participation rate.
- ❖ Alternative Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between wage and female labour force participation rate.

2) Micro Level Study:

The micro level analysis of the quantitative study involved in identifying the economic empowerment-based responsiveness or sensitivity of South Asian non-working females for wage differential compensation. For this purpose, an index called Women’s Wage Compensation Sensitivity Index (WWCSI) is constructed as the ultimate output of this analysis with use of the sample of 112 respondents (non-working females) from same four countries. This is the index which shows how sensitive South Asian women are to wage differential compensation in terms of economic empowerment. This index can be used to determine whether paying additional wage or subsidy as a compensation to cover the extra

opportunity cost of female workers is a successful tool to economically empower South Asian women. WWCSI is constructed by following Human Development Index (HDI) made by the United Nations Development Program using the formula below (Haque *et al.*, 2011):

$$\text{Dimension Index} = \frac{\text{Actual Score} - \text{Minimum Score}}{\text{Maximum Score} - \text{Minimum Score}} \quad (2)$$



Perfectly Perfectly sensitive

Women's economic empowerment was measured by using two major dimensions namely "Economic Advancement" and "Power and Agency". According to International Centre for Research on Women, World Bank and UNDP access to credit, livelihood, involvement in training, women's economic participation and access to new market are the sub indicators used to measure "Economic Advancement". And "Power & Agency" is measured by five indicators namely financial independence, control on household resources, domestic activity outsourcing ability, workplace decision making ability and bargaining power.

B. Methodology of Qualitative Study

Quantitative results were followed up with an in-depth qualitative study to explain why these results emerged. For this in-depth analysis, the researcher has done a narrative analysis in Sri Lanka. Snowball sampling technique is used to select subjects to the sample and it is consisted with twelve (12) participants (non-working females) from all the three clusters namely urban, rural and estate sectorial clusters (4 per each). 90 minutes physical interviews were conducted to collect data. This study has adopted the reflexive thematic analysis approach introduced by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (Braun and Clarke, 2006) which is an approach to narrative analysis.

III. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

A. Quantitative Analysis

The micro level analytical model was tested for both random effect and fixed effect. Table 2, column 01 gives the Random Effect model, column 02 gives the Fixed Effect model. The Hausman test recommended the suitability of Fixed Effect model. Hence, it was adjusted for heteroskedasticity. Column 03 shows Fixed Effect model adjusted to be robust.

Table 2: Results of model employed in micro level quantitative analysis

Variables	(1) Random Effect	(2) Fixed Effect	(3) Fixed Effect, Robust
Educational Level	-0.0837 (-0.421)	0.428 (0.846)	0.428 (0.863)
Health	-0.199*** (-9.061)	0.144 (1.282)	0.144 (0.681)
Wage	0.00310 (0.0329)	0.516*** (3.490)	0.516* (3.580)
Working Poverty	0.298*** (4.396)	-0.267 (-1.001)	-0.267 (-0.532)
Constant	52.12*** (5.104)	-29.34 (-1.162)	-29.34 (-1.240)
Observations	45	45	45
R-squared	0.9073	0.6499	0.6499
Number of country ID	4	4	4

Note: t-statistics are given in parentheses and *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Source: Results extracted from the STATA

There is a positive significant relationship between wage and female labour force participation rate. Based on the results of the macro level analysis, we fail to reject the hypothesis.

Table 3 presents the comparative result of women wage compensation sensitivity by mean values of WWCSI indicators of sample countries. Economic advancement index value in overall South Asia is 0.844 while power and agency index value are 0.794. This means, women wage differential

Table 3: WWCSI and its sub-indices in Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh

INDICATORS OF WWCSI													
	Economic advancement (mean value)						Power and agency (mean value)						W W C S I
	Women part. Index	Training index	Access to mkt. Index	Livelihood index	Access to credit index	Economic Advancement Index	Household ctrl. Index	Fin. Ind. Index	Bargaining index	Dec.ma. Index	Outsourcing index	Power and agency index	
Sri Lanka	0.783	0.866	0.82	0.849	0.872	0.838	0.814	0.883	0.67	0.7	0.82	0.777	0.807
India	0.817	0.865	0.837	0.872	0.851	0.848	0.853	0.881	0.625	0.745	0.83	0.787	0.817
Pakistan	0.810	0.9	0.837	1	0.9	0.846	0.842	0.895	0.747	0.742	0.824	0.81	0.828
Bangladesh	0.812	0.864	0.838	0.87	0.848	0.846	0.830	1	0.7	0.745	0.827	0.804	0.825
South Asia	0.813	0.866	0.839	0.873	0.85	0.844	0.848	0.882	0.721	0.743	0.824	0.794	0.819

Source: Results generated by WWCSI calculation in the study

Table 4: WWCSI based on residence and educational level

Criteria	Category	Indicators of WWCSI		WWCSI
		Economic advancement index (Mean value)	Power and agency index (Mean value)	
Residence	Rural	0.850	0.809	0.829
	Urban	0.847	0.802	0.825
	Estate	0.707	0.666	0.687
Education level	10 year or less	0.851	0.816	0.834
	10-14 years	0.850	0.809	0.829
	14 year or more	0.746	0.700	0.723

Source: Results produced by WWCSI calculation in the study

can contribute for economic advancement of females than for the rise of women's power and agency. Mean value of those two major indices is calculated as women's wage compensation sensitivity index (WWCSI). Overall South Asia's WWCSI value is recorded as 0.819. This value is

closer to perfect sensitivity in WWCSI index range. Table 4 presents the results of WWCSI and its sub-indices based on residence and educational level of South Asian women. According to the results, highest sensitivity for wage differential compensation is showed by rural female while urban females are showing slightly less sensitivity than rural women. Moreover, with reference to the table 4, WWCSI value is lesser among highly educated females than the less educated females. This indicates that, females with low level of education are more likely to empower economically than women with high level of education if wage differential compensation is paid. Based on results of the micro level analysis, we fail to reject the hypothesis.

B. Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis of qualitative study found seven (7) determinants of women's wage differential compensation sensitivity (WWCS) namely motherhood and child age, co-habitation of grandparents, male supremacy in traditionally patriarchal families, intergenerational education & learning, voluntary child labour, human trafficking for women labour exploitation and growth needs & domestic financial requirements.

Extreme male supremacy, negative impact of parental less education on children's school dropouts at early age, high voluntary child labour, oppressive human trafficking for the exploitation of female labor, less growth needs have been identified as the main reasons why estate women are less sensitive to wage differential compensation.

Financial deprivation prevailing among rural females to meet their needs including growth needs is the key reason for relatively high wage differential compensation sensitivity of rural females. Less education is identified as a major reason behind the financial deprivation. Urban females are also showing relatively high WWCS mainly because of their rising growth needs. Further, it found backward bending WWCS curve which shows the relationship between child age and WWCS.

Seven major themes which were identified as determinants of women's wage differential compensation sensitivity (WWCS) in Sri Lanka are presented as follows. When presenting extractions under each theme, fake names are given to participants by the author to protect their personal identity.

1) *Motherhood and Child Age*

According to the findings, majority of the females have done at least one job before they reach to motherhood. Childbearing push their steps back to house from the workplace. Women who live alone are more likely to be in the workforce than women who live with kids under a complete family. Therefore, sensitivity shown by females for financial motive like wage differential compensation is relatively low among mothers than single female in working age.

"I'm super talented in tailoring since my childhood. So, I entered to a garment factory as a tailor in my home village when I was 18-year girl. I learnt lots about tailoring techniques at there. After one year, I joined with a garment factory in Colombo area, because I wanted to earn more through my skills in my young age. Later I got married when I was in 21 year of age. However, I have resigned from my job after bearing my first baby in 1996. After that, I was not in a situation to rejoin with a job even though my factory asked me to join as a team supervisor under

increased basic salary" (Shanthi, Rural Female, 45 years)

This statement indirectly says that, single female with no family responsibilities or child care burden can be easily be motivated to do jobs through financial incentive like wage differential compensation. But the main root cause for Shanthi's resignation from job is the birth of her elder child.

2) *Co-habitation of grand parents*

This study found that, females who are living together with grandparents in same household are showing greater sensitivity for wage differential compensation than females who are living separately from grandparents.

"When I was working in a garment factory, my mother did all the chores like bringing son to school, washing son's uniforms, preparing lunch packet for him etc. and I would not be able to go to the factory to earn if my mother was not there to look after my son." (Mari Amma, Estate Female, 34 years)

An estate female named Mari Amma has gone to garment factory by assigning child care chores to her mother and she still believes that her mother's support was a critical factor affected for her earning decision. Therefore, estate females will highly sensitive to wage differential compensation if grandparents are living together in the same household.

3) *Male Supremacy in traditionally patriarchal families*

According to findings, absence of paid job for females further weaken the domestic autonomy of themselves because women who are unemployed and don't earn money have a weaker say in domestic decision making than women who have a job or do work for money. The male supremacy was clearly observed in this qualitative analysis as the sample consisted of non-working females

"What the hell is this.....(Aggressively). Don't you have any other questions to ask from my wife. Are you going to create new problems in my family? My wife will not take decisions according to you. She is my wife, not your wife. Get out from the house...." (Thramakumari's husband, Estate male, 31 years)

Above statement shows the reply given by Thramakumari's husband when researcher ask the

questions regarding impact of earning cash through a job for her bargain power and domestic autonomy in the family. This husband's aggressive behavior is a good proof for negative impact of male supremacy on employment decisions of females.

4) *Intergenerational education & learning*

Impact of parents' education on their children's school success can have a significant impact on the level of sensitivity that women show for wage differential compensation.

"My mom was a teacher and dad were a post master. Since they know the value of education a lot, they wanted me also to study till university level to do a good job. Thanks to them, finally I ended with bachelor degree in a local university. I had a good income since the beginning in my Accountant job what I did after university." (Nadee, Urban Female, 44 years)

5) *Voluntary Child Labour*

This research found that, still there are unrecorded voluntary child labour among poor families in Sri Lanka. It has impacted on women's' wage differential compensation sensitivity of females in estate sector. Since most of the families are poor in estate sector, voluntary child labour was a common phenomenon observed in estate sector. Rajeswari also said that, her mother had gradually reduced intention to work for pay as result of entrance of herself (voluntary child labour) to workforce.

6) *Human trafficking for women labour exploitation*

Human trafficking for women labour exploitation can reduce the sensitivity of estate females for wage differential compensation.

"One day, I raised my voice against strict working conditions. For that reason, Kankanam Mahaththaya (Plantation Superintendent) reduces the weight of the plucked leaves and increases it for those who like him or for women who are silent even under the harsh background of work" (Rani, Estate Female, 49 years)

Since the payment of extra wages or subsidization could not have such positive impact on the reversal of slavery and slavery pressure, the sensitivity for wage differential compensation among women in the sectors like estates who have

to work with human trafficking for the labour exploitation was relatively low.

7) *Growth Needs and Domestic financial requirements*

According to research findings, women with such growth needs are having high level of financial requirements to achieve those growth needs. Such set of women show relatively high sensitivity for wage differential compensation.

Although this growth needs of herself motivate her to join the labor force, rural women in general did not have high-paying jobs opportunities, possibly due to poor education. With rising financial requirements to meet growth needs, she eventually ended up going abroad for a job, mainly to earn higher salary. This clearly showed that, sensitivity shown by rural females is relatively high because of presence of growth needs and high financial requirements.

IV. CONCLUSION

According to the results of macro level analysis of quantitative study, women's wage increment can influence the rise of female labour force participation and economic empowerment of women. Similar result is followed by S.Garikipati (Garikipati, 2006), O.Weber & A.Ahmad (Weber and Ahmad, 2014), F.W.Bayissa, J. Smits and R.Ruben (Bayissa, Smits and Ruben, 2017). Results in micro level analysis, show that WWCSI value of all the sample countries is greater than 0.5, which means South Asian non-working females are relatively highly sensitive for wage differential compensation in terms of economic empowerment. Further, results show that WWCSI is highest in rural sectors compared to other sectors. This is mainly because high financial requirements and big growth expectations among rural people. The lowest WWCSI value is observed in estate sector. Human trafficking of female labour, lack of growth needs, male supremacy, weaker educational backgrounds were identified as the causes which discourage estate females to join the labour force even though they receive an additional wage as a compensation.

Moreover, there is a negative relationship between female education level and WWCSI value. Accordingly, sensitivity for wage differential

compensation is relatively high among lower educated females and relatively low among high educated females. This finding implies that, priority given by educated females for non-wage factors is greater than the that for wage compensation when taking decisions related to economic empowerment. This is because they can already earn a decent salary with their higher education level. Therefore, absence of wage differential compensation is not a significant factor affects for low economic empowerment among educated females. But less educated women are more sensitive to wage differential compensation because they have fewer "higher paying jobs opportunities" for their education level.

"I want to see my son entering a local university. So, I wanted to teach him very well somehow. We sent him to tuition classes in town too. With the elderring of children, money requirement increased gradually. So, I decided to do a job. But No one gave me job for enough. I finally went abroad as a female attendant to earn money for my children and I do not regret that decision as my eldest child was selected for the University of Colombo in 2017" (Kamala, Rural female, 52 years)

This research also identified relatively low wage differential compensation sensitivity in terms of power and agency with compared to economic advancement. This is mainly because of relatively low value in bargaining power index and workplace decision making index. According to Doss, labour income can influence only for little rise in bargaining power with compared to non-labour income because income that is not related to labour decisions does not affect the relative prices of home-produced goods and purchased goods (Doss, 1996). Further thematic analysis of the qualitative study revealed that the strength of the emotional relationship between husband and wife also affects the bargaining power of women. It found that wives with weak emotional ties with their husbands had a higher level of positive impact of wage differential compensation on bargaining power than wives with strong emotional ties. As per to Becker relatively low workplace decision making power can be there, because of gender based invidious and non-invidious discrimination and attitude of considering women as less important labour factor than men by both men and women (Becker, 1986). However, domestic work outsourcing index is relatively high in all four

countries, which means additional wage is required for married women to fulfill domestic tasks like child care, household chores from the market.

Seven determinants of women's wage differential compensation sensitivity identified in the of thematic analysis of qualitative study were also highlighted in previous literatures. Motherhood and child age is the key determinant of women's wage differential compensation in Sri Lanka. Similar result is followed by the analysis done by International Labour Organization (ILO)(Azcona *et al.*, 2020). Some scholars identified positive relationship between grandparents' childcare on maternal labor force participation (Posadas and Vidal-Fernandez, 2013) Male Supremacy in traditionally patriarchal families was explained in terms of women's empowerment by Sri Lankan scholars too (Senarath and Nalika Gunawardena, 2009). Gail Weinstein also identified the early home experiences and parents' education (similar to Intergenerational education & learning) as critical determinants of children's school achievements(Gail Weinstein, 1998). This study further recognized patriarchy & hierarchical labor regimes as the causes for human trafficking for the exploitation of women labor. Similar finding were followed by Kurian and Jayawardena (Kurian and Jayawardena, 2013). Impact of growth needs on women's economic empowerment was also emphasized by Kanti, an Indian scholar (Kanti, 2012).

In overall view, compensating wage differentials can definitely economically empower non-working females in South Asian region. However, wage differential compensation is likely to be more productive among rural females and then among urban females. And it will be more successful among less educated females. This could be due to the opportunity cost of care being greater in more isolated rural settings, often necessitating paying to replace the 'care' even though prevailing salaries are lower due to less educated nature. According to the backward bending nature of WWCS curve, wage differential compensation should be offered for females in prime working age (25-45 years) instead of mothers with infants or elder children. Since lack of education is the root cause for many barriers for women empowerment, Sri Lanka should design a national long-term project to get

more rural and estate girls educated especially for STEM. Further, government should reduce oppressive women labour exploitation and voluntary child labour, especially in estate and rural sectors by strengthening existing labour laws under continuous supervision programme. Moreover, they should come up with temporary subsidization programme especially for urban females in order to turn housewives into own account worker because interest of females to earn at home is high.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND SPECIFIC SYMBOLS

VARIABLE	DEFINITION
Female Labour force Participation	Labour force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate)
Wage	Labour income share as a percent of GDP (%)
Educational Level	Primary education, pupils (% female)
Health	Mortality rate, adult, female (per 1,000 female adults)
Working Poverty	Working poverty rate (percentage of employed living below US\$1.90 PPP) (%)

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