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WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE: UNLOCKING UZBEKISTAN'S PRODUCTIVITY POTENTIAL

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Abstract. One of the main economic and social wealth of Uzbekistan is its people. Although policymaker pay the special attention at the gender equality in almost every aspect of our lives, we still have gender bias in our labor market. The current study empirically investigated the relationship between female labor force participation and economic prosperity of the country. How women participation may increase productivity of the country is clearly explained in this article. Also it includes the challenges women are facing in today's modern life and how this issue may affect to the overall well-being of the economic activities in one particular country (Uzbekistan). Furthermore, this article gives some solutions for empowering female participation in economic activities.

Key words: labor force, productivity, women participation, economics.

MEHNAT BOZORIDA AYOLLAR: O'ZBEKISTON MEHNAT UNIMDORLIGI POTENSIALINI OCHISH

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Annotatsiya. Oʻzbekistonning asosiy iqtisodiy va ijtimoiy boyliklaridan biri bu uning xalqidir. Garchi siyosatchilar hayotimizning deyarli barcha jabhalarida gender tengligiga alohida e'tibor qaratayotgan boʻlsa-da, bizning mehnat bozorida hali ham gender tarafkashligi mavjud. Joriy tadqiqot ayollarning ishchi kuchi ishtiroki va mamlakatning iqtisodiy farovonligi oʻrtasidagi bogʻliqlikni empirik tarzda oʻrganib chiqdi. Ayollarning ishtiroki mamlakat unumdorligini qanday oshirishi ushbu maqolada aniq tushuntirilgan. Shuningdek, u ayollarning bugungi zamonaviy hayotida duch kelayotgan muammolari va bu muammo muayyan mamlakatda (Oʻzbekiston) iqtisodiy faoliyatning umumiy farovonligiga qanday ta'sir qilishi mumkinligini oʻz ichiga oladi. Bundan tashqari, ushbu maqola ayollarning iqtisodiy faoliyatdagi ishtirokini kuchaytirish uchun ba'zi yechimlarni beradi.

Kalit soʻzlar: ishchi kuchi, samaradorlik, ayollar ishtiroki, iqtisodiyot

ЖЕНЩИНЫ НА РЫНКЕ ТРУДА: РАСКРЫТИЕ ПРОИЗВОДСТВЕННОГО ПОТЕНЦИАЛА УЗБЕКИСТАНА Ганиев Бахтиёр Зульфикор угли

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Аннотация. Одним из главных экономических и социальных богатств Узбекистана являются его люди. Хотя политики уделяют особое внимание гендерному равенству практически в каждом аспекте нашей жизни, на нашем рынке труда все еще существует гендерная предвзятость. Текущее исследование эмпирически изучило связь между участием женщин в рабочей силе и экономическим процветанием страны. В этой статье четко объясняется, как участие повысить производительность страны. Также женщин может в ней рассматриваются проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются женщины в современной жизни, и то, как эта проблема может повлиять на общее благосостояние экономической деятельности в одной конкретной стране (Узбекистан). Кроме того, в этой статье приводятся некоторые решения для расширения прав и возможностей участия женщин в экономической деятельности.

Ключевые слова: рабочая сила, производительность, участие женщин, экономика

Introduction

There is growing evidence that the low participation of women in the formal labor market in developing countries hinders economic growth and poverty reduction. Women in different fields of life are a growing market force, serving as an important source of innovation and job creation and driving economic growth. Rural women are the protagonists of development. They serve as catalysts for achieving the transformative economic, environmental and social changes necessary for sustainable development. However, limited access to credit, health care and education are among the many problems they face. Increasing women's participation in development is important for achieving social justice as well as reducing poverty. Global experience clearly shows that women's empowerment contributes to economic growth, improving the survival of children and the general health of the family, lowering fertility rates and slowing population growth. In short, investing in women is fundamental to sustainable development. Barriers start with relatively low investment in women's education and health, continue with limited access to services and resources, and empower women with legal and regulatory constraints.

Indeed, due to the cultural specifications, religious beliefs and social norms, women's participation in workforce was almost prohibited throughout the world. The situation began changing dramatically only during the nineteenth century. And Uzbekistan was not the exception, after the colonization of our country by the Soviet invaders Uzbek women began somehow participating in economic life of the country, which was after 1920's. It is frequently assumed that employment of women took them out of the households to the industry creating the same economic opportunities for them. But in fact, if to look at the jobs that women started entering in the nineteenth century, we can see that there has not been a revolutionary alteration. Because females were mostly busy in the spheres highly related to their domestic routine work, meaning that women do less qualified and less paid jobs. This leads to unprecedented wage gaps between men and women, according to the UN (2020), females earn 77% of males' income. This results in a lifetime of income inequality between men and women and more women are retiring into poverty. There is numerous social, political, and other boundaries for female participation in the labor market in Uzbekistan. This problem grows to the decrease of potential income earners for the GDP of the country.

Literature review

Research indicates that increasing women's participation in the workforce can significantly boost economic growth and productivity. Despite progress, women remain underutilized in many labor markets globally (Novta & Wong, 2017). In Latin America and the Caribbean, female labor force participation has increased substantially, narrowing the gap with men (Novta & Wong, 2017) However, women are often concentrated in low-productivity sectors, limiting their economic potential (Raveendran, 2010). Investing in women's employment can enhance business performance and al.. competitiveness (Hegewisch et 2013). То maximize women's contributions, policies should focus on improving productivity in femaledominated sectors, facilitating entry into high-productivity industries, and supporting unpaid work through infrastructure improvements (Raveendran, 2010). Additionally, addressing challenges throughout women's life course is crucial, including school-to-work transitions, childbearing, lifelong learning opportunities, and extending working lives for older women (Chlon-Dominczak et al., 2013). These efforts can help unlock women's full economic potential and drive sustainable growth.

Reviews of the relationship between women's activities and education

Recent studies showed and analyzed the change in the employment rate of women between 2013 and 2017 in some countries of Central and Eastern Europe. At the national level, empirical data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, demographic indicators and indicators of labor market conditions. The analysis of spatial self-correlation was performed to find out the strength of spatial relations between regions in terms of women's activities and the educational environment. In addition, based on spatial regression, the dependence of comprehensive indicators of women's activities and level of education was analyzed empirically. The survey found that the employment rate of women in the countries surveyed increased by an average of 6.5 percentage points. The economic activity of women is affected by demographic factors, including the level of education. The spatial regression analysis (from 2017) concludes that a 1% increase in the value of the composite indicator of the level of education of women increases the composite indicator of the level of activity in the region considered by almost 0.59% (assuming that other factors are constant) are maintained (Malinowski, M., & Jablonska-Porzuczek, L., 2020).

Review of the ABCs of the role of public transport in women's economic empowerment

Much evidence has been brought to bear in both developed and developing countries to demonstrate how gender inequities in transport access create worse employment outcomes for women than for men, even within the same. Women's and men's experiences with transport systems differ significantly, across all aspects of travel experience – this includes availability, affordability, spatial accessibility, safety, and acceptability (Dominguez Gonzalez et al., 2020). When adverse characteristics in transport systems are not well considered in planning, design, and operations, they especially affect women's and girls' mobility and employment. The International Labor Organization (ILO, 2017) estimates that in developing countries, limited access to and safety of transportation is the single greatest obstacle to women's participation in the labor market: it reduces their participation probability by as much as 16.5 percentage points. While transport systems have been shown to play a significant role in women's participation in the labor force globally, this topic has been little explored in the MNA region and is a key knowledge gap filled through this work.

Public transport can shape how, when and where women travel. Unreliable and infrequent public transport systems impose a disproportionately higher burden on women than on men, affecting their access to economic opportunities and basic services (Borker, 2022), (Muneeza Mehmood Alam Lisa Bagnoli Tamara Kerzhner, 2023)

Women remain significantly underrepresented in the transportation workforce, comprising only 17% of employees across 46 countries (Wei-Shiuen Ng & A.Acker, 2020) and 13% in the United States (Hanson & Murakami, 2010; Pinarowicz et al., 2011). This gender disparity is particularly evident in engineering positions, with only 10.4% of civil engineers being women (Hanson & Murakami, 2010; Pinarowicz et al., 2011). The industry faces challenges in both attracting and retaining female employees (Wei-Shiuen Ng & A. Acker, 2020), which is concerning given the projected staffing shortage workforce (Pinarowicz due to an aging et al., 2011). Recommendations to address this issue include connecting with young people, building relationships through networking, ensuring workplace flexibility, and mentoring (Hanson & Murakami, 2010). Additionally, understanding the factors influencing women's experiences in the industry is crucial for developing effective recruitment and retention strategies (Pinarowicz et al., 2011; Kermanshachi & Sadatsafavi, 2018).

Methodology

The rudimentary aim of the research is to define whether there is a relationship between women's participation and the productivity of the country, to reach this aim we will use quantitative method with secondary data. Which will be used to reach the first objective of this research. We will take the data on GDP, unemployment rates of women, fertility rates, higher education attainment of girls and women in business index of females of Uzbekistan by the years of 2017 to 2023. At first it was considered to take the data starting from 1990 however, it was defined that statistical committee of Uzbekistan possessed gap in data of higher education attainment which is considered as missing data and not desirable to build an econometric model. Because it may cause the misestimating of the results. Moreover, the data we obtained for empirical studies is time series and such type of data tends to be non-stationary.

Results and discussion

The percentage of women in labor force in Uzbekistan

The table 1 below shows the percentage of women in various sectors of economy. This information clearly shows that women's role in jobs which are physically hard is really low (construction, transportation and storage, electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning). This situation is natural and women usually do not do this kind of works. But if we look at the amount of women in STEM fields, it is also lower than men. In contrast to other sectors female participation in education and health care and social services is really high. This is because women tend to choose daily life related jobs rather than jobs that requires effort and time and dedication. Not only in Uzbekistan but also all over the world female participation in this type of physical labor is really low. For example, in the USA 9.4% of all miners are women, while 90.6% are men. The average miner age is 40 years old.

Table 1

Indicators	2017	2019	2021	2023
Total				
agriculture, forestry and fisheries	43.2	43.2	42.4	43.2
mining and quarrying	29	29.6	26.5	8.8
manufacturing industry	47.6	47	45.8	46.8
electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning	12.9	12.3	12.3	12.4
water supply; sewerage, collection and disposal of waste	19.4	18.9	19.1	19.4
Construction	5.8	6.2	6.3	7.9
transportation and storage	7.2	7.2	49	49.2
information and communication	32.7	32.3	35	35
financial and insurance activities	38.2	34.8	37.6	34.6
Education	75.6	75.7	73.8	71.1
health care and social services	75.6	76.8	77.3	74.8
art, entertainment and recreation	45.5	45.3	45.3	44.9

Share of women in total employment by type of economic activity, %

The relationship between living standards and productivity

Productivity itself is the quantity of goods and services produced from each unit of labor input. In nations where workers can produce a large quantity of goods and services per hour, most people enjoy a high standard of living; in nations where workers are less productive, most people endure a more meager existence. Similarly, the growth rate of a nation's productivity determines the growth rate of its average income. The relationship between productivity and living standards is simple, but its implications are farreaching. If productivity is the main determinant of living standards, other explanations must be less important. For example, it might be tempting to credit generous employers or vigorous labor unions for the rising incomes of Uzbek workers over the past century. Yet the real hero of Uzbek workers is their rising productivity. The relationship between productivity and living standards has profound implications for public policy. When thinking about how any policy will affect living standards, the key question is how it will affect the economy's ability to produce goods and services. To boost living standards, policymakers need to raise productivity by ensuring that workers are well trained, have the tools they need to produce goods and services, and have access to the best available technology.

Problems choosing a job

Women are doing jobs that are typically easy and highly related to the daily life. Meaning that they will have more time to spend to do house chores, child care and so on. However, lack of adequate opportunities often translates women limiting themselves to job opportunities closer to home, unemployment, and the inability to access health or childcare services. If women had full equality with men in choosing the career, they would have more control over their life choices. Enhancing women's mobility could also have a transformative impact on the global economy through increased labor force participation.

Women also face more difficulties getting jobs and climbing the career ladder in the economy, especially in transport sector. They comprise less than 20 percent of the global workforce in transport and storage. The roles that women take are mainly concentrated in administration, sales, and catering, which tend to be the lowest-paid positions. There are fewer females than males employed as engineers, drivers, and managers in the sector. Poor working conditions, such as lack of access to sanitary and break facilities, lack of flexible work shifts, and violence, harassment, and discrimination, are some of the many barriers that women face to entering and staying in the sector. As a result, the planning, design, and operations of transport infrastructure and services often do not reflect women's voices.

We may see this kind of problems on other sectors as well. And we need to take into account cultural and religious views of people. Female representatives usually fight against their male counterparts twice harder as believe and accessibilities are more in men. Women do the same job with men in office, for a same period. But they have more responsibilities on home as well including child care, cooking, and cleaning. But there is no country in the world that understands it and helps to the females to get what they deserve. Instead there has been always easy to keep in flow in their careers for men!

How women's participation improves productivity of Uzbekistan?

If we look at the factors of productivity we may see: Physical capital, human capital, technological knowledge, and natural resources. And women's participation may enhance economy by human capital and technological knowledge. Here we need to look at the amount of women in secondary and higher education. Over the past 10 years the amount of female students in undergraduate and master has significantly increase. For example, in 2014-2015 academic year percentage of women admitted to higher education institution was 37.4. By the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic year this figure went to 52.5 which is higher than male percentage.

Now we need to think if there are this much women in higher education why female participation in overall labor force of Uzbekistan is lower? Labor force, female (% of total labor force) in Uzbekistan was reported at 35.48% in 2023, according to the World Bank collection of development indicators, compiled from officially recognized sources. However, in 2018-2019 academic year 49.2% of the overall admitted student to higher education were women. And 47.7% of them graduated higher education in 2023. Of course not all of them worked from the same year they have graduated, but if we compare it with male counterpart we will see huge difference.

Women participation creates better competition among women themselves and men as well. And enhanced human capital leads to higher productivity. Women can stay at home and do house chores while men are working for better life style and higher economic growth. But women also have potential to work better than men and make dramatic changes in economic and social life of Uzbekistan. By creating more job opportunities specifically for women, authorities can get great outcomes in terms of GDP and living standards. It needs pointing out that, if women work they will make more money and their savings and expenditures will increase. It leads better living standards which is correlated with productivity.

When considering the public transport system there are special seats now available for pregnant women and women with specific needs. However, these seats are often misunderstood or misused by other passengers. This can create discomfort and discourage women—especially expectant mothers from using public transport, which may even impact their ability to work and pursue careers.

Unfortunately, not everyone is aware of the purpose of these designated seats. It's important that we all stay informed and respectful of such thoughtful measures, which are designed to support women in delicate or challenging situations. A little awareness and empathy can go a long way in creating a more inclusive and considerate public space.

Conclusion

Creating more special opportunities for females

After examining the obtained data, it can be concluded that women face challenges to go for a job they want and societies loose potential inventions and quality human capital. Women need extra opportunities to work better and make significance in the economic life of Uzbekistan. Achieving these goals requires a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy that increases opportunities by people's and complementing choices supply-side interventions with demand-side measures aimed at creating fair and conservative jobs. Aggressive measures for women's economic empowerment should be at the heart of political dialogues aimed at increasing inclusion and reducing poverty and inequality. Gender inequality is one of the negative topics discussed in society, and men in particular ignore the reduction of women's rights as a human right. Surveys show that most men do not perceive or experience gender bias in everyday life. But women are. In this case societies should support women by creating new social norms. And government should build mother and child centers in every and each of the office and working buildings.

Transportation availability

The quality and structure of public transportation systems—particularly in terms of accessibility, availability, and safety—can play a significant role in shaping women's participation in the labor market. When transport infrastructure is well-developed and sensitive to gender-specific needs, it can reduce barriers to employment, especially for women living in areas with limited mobility options. However, experiences and impacts may vary across cities due to differing social norms, urban planning, and transport policies. Therefore, it is important to include interaction terms between transport indicators and city-level variables to capture this heterogeneity in empirical analysis. Addressing this issue by supporting and encouraging women to enter the transportation workforce—such as becoming drivers themselves could not only expand women's employment opportunities but also create a more inclusive and comfortable transport environment for female passengers. Such policy measures may ultimately contribute to greater gender equity in both the labor market and public mobility systems.

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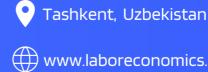
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