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**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**An Enabling Environment for
the Workforce**

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AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR THE WORKFORCE

Context

- The recent tragic deaths of two young **female workers** underscore the importance of addressing workplace stress and toxicity. These incidents highlight the urgent need to create an environment that prioritises employee well-being.

About the Women Workforce in India

- The participation of women in the workforce is a critical indicator of a nation's economic health and social progress.
- In India, the female labour force has been a subject of extensive research and policy discussions.
- According to the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)** conducted by the **National Statistical Office (NSO)**, the estimated **Worker Population Ratio (WPR)** for women **aged 15 years and above** was 28.7% in 2019-20.
- However, the **latest PLFS report** shows an **increasing trend** in the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for women, which was **32.8% in 2021-22**.
 - ◆ However, this **rate is still lower than the global average** of 47% and significantly lower than countries like China, which has a female LFPR of 60%. It remains **lower than some of its neighbours** in South Asia such as Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Key Data and Facts

- According to the **5th round of India's National Family Health Survey (2019-2021)**, 24% of men and 21% of women aged 15 years or above had **hypertension**.
 - ◆ The respective figures were **19% and 17% in the 4th round of the survey (2015-16)**. More worrisome is the fact that only 23% of those with hypertension had it under control.
- More than a million people in India's working-age population die every year due to **cardiovascular diseases (CVDs)**. India accounted for 22% of global CVD deaths due to air pollution in 2021, with 35% of CVD deaths in the country attributable to air pollution (Global Burden of Disease/GBD).
- **India has been the world's largest contributor to CVD deaths** in the 15-49 age group since 1997 (GBD).
 - ◆ **Hypertension** was the leading cause of cardiovascular morbidity and mortality in India in 2021.
 - ◆ **Air pollution was the second leading cause** as far as cardiovascular morbidity is concerned, and third for cardiovascular mortality.
 - ◆ The third and second positions were held by dietary risks — low consumption of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts and seeds, Omega-3 and -6, etc. as well as high consumption of sodium and trans fats (GBD).
- The **WHO** defines health as '*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*'.

Opportunities For Women in the Job Market

- The career opportunities for women in India are on the rise.
- India's female labour force participation rate has been on a downtrend, declining from 32.0% in 2005 to 19.2% as of 2021.
 - ◆ However, the potential for women in the job market in India is immense and largely untapped.
- **Emerging Opportunities:** The **gig and platform economy** offers flexibility and freelancing jobs. Women form a very large proportion of this segment.
- **Sectors with Potential:** According to **United Nations Women** estimates, women make up a significant proportion of all healthcare workers and more than 80% of nurses and midwives.

- ♦ Women also form a significant proportion of the workforce in the education sector in India, especially in primary education and early childhood care.
- **The Role of Education:** As women with higher education and professional qualifications in India tend to participate more in the labour market, it is argued by experts that greater women's education will raise their participation rate in the labour market.

Analysing Key Concerns

- **Health Concerns:** Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are a significant concern, with India being the world's largest contributor to CVD deaths in the 15-49 age group since 1997.
 - ♦ Hypertension, often linked to stress, remains a leading cause of cardiovascular morbidity and mortality in India.
- **Shifts in Employment Patterns:** NSSO reveals interesting trends. While agriculture still employs 44% of the workforce, it contributes only 16% to Gross Value Added (GVA).
 - ♦ In contrast, services, which employ 31% of the total workforce, provide over 54% of the GVA.
 - ♦ This gradual shift from agriculture to services is positive. It reflects rural workers seeking opportunities beyond traditional farming, leading to a more diversified economy.
- **Skill Development Gap:** India's formal skilled workforce constitutes a mere 4.69% of the total workforce.
 - ♦ In comparison, China stands at 24%, the US at 52%, and Germany at 75%.
 - ♦ Bridging this gap requires robust skill development initiatives. The '**Skill India**' mission aims to enhance vocational training and make our workforce globally competitive.
- **Gender Equality and Inclusion:** Empowering women in the workforce remains critical. Gender disparities persist, affecting pay, representation in leadership roles, and work-life balance.
 - ♦ Companies must actively promote diversity, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for all.
- **Technology and Automation:** The **Fourth Industrial Revolution** brings both opportunities and challenges. Automation may displace certain jobs but create new ones.
 - ♦ Upskilling and reskilling are essential to prepare the workforce for the digital age.
- **Informal Sector and Social Security:** A significant portion of India's workforce operates in the informal sector. Ensuring social security benefits for these workers is crucial.
 - ♦ Policies should address issues like gig economy workers, contract labour, and access to healthcare.

Other Challenges

- **Societal Norms and Expectations:** The root cause of many challenges faced by women in the job market is the **patriarchal society**, where men are considered to be the breadwinners and women are expected to be the homemakers.
 - ♦ **Patriarchy:** The root cause of low women's participation in the labour market in India is patriarchy, a social system marked by the supremacy of the father/man in the family, community, and society.
 - ♦ This societal construct often discourages women from entering the labour market and confines them to low productivity and inferior kind of work.
- **Lack of Equal Opportunities:** Women often face a lack of equal opportunities in the job market. It includes limited access to higher-paying jobs and leadership roles.
 - ♦ The gender pay gap is another significant issue, with women globally being paid about 20% less than men.
- **Career Gap and Rejoining the Workforce:** Women often find it difficult to overcome career gaps and rejoin the workforce.
 - ♦ This is particularly true for women who take a break from their careers for reasons such as childbirth or caregiving.
- **Barriers in Leadership:** Women face significant barriers in attaining leadership positions.

- ◆ These barriers can be attributed to unconscious gender stereotypes and biases that often favour men for leadership roles.
- **Work-Life Balance:** Achieving a work-life balance is another major challenge for women.
 - ◆ Women often carry the burden of being a caregiver, which leads to concerns around work-life balance.

Key Suggestions

UN Women's Enabling Environment Guidelines

- The UN recognises the significance of fostering an inclusive and respectful work environment. UN Women has developed the 'Enabling Environment Guidelines for the United Nations System', which focuses on **three key areas:**
- **Workplace Flexibility:** Flexible working arrangements allow employees to balance their professional and personal lives effectively. Whether it's remote work, flexible hours, or job-sharing, these practices enhance efficiency, reduce absenteeism, and promote overall well-being.
 - ◆ By accommodating diverse needs, organisations can create a more harmonious workplace.
- **Family-Friendly Policies:** Family-friendly policies benefit everyone, not just women. They address the changing expectations of both men and women, recognizing that caregiving responsibilities extend beyond gender boundaries.
 - ◆ Equal parental leave, support for childcare, and family-friendly work practices contribute to a healthier work-life balance.
- **Standards of Conduct:** Creating a safe and respectful environment is essential. Organisations must actively combat discrimination, harassment, and bias. These standards apply to all staff—from junior employees to senior leadership.
 - ◆ By adhering to principles of equality and non-discrimination, organisations can foster a culture where everyone has equal access to opportunities.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- Women's participation in the labour market can increase at all levels mainly by reducing their burden of unpaid domestic work and care, that can be achieved by **reducing the drudgery/strain of work** or improving productivity of women's work; by providing infrastructural support to reduce the burden of their work; by shifting a part of unpaid work to the mainstream economy.
 - ◆ It is believed that when women's participation rate, which is one of the lowest in Asia, increases, it will bring prosperity to the Indian economy.
- With concerted efforts and targeted strategies along with a change in attitudes, women can take advantage of these new labour market opportunities. Access to higher education, skill training, and digital technology are the three great enablers in helping India reap the potential of its female labour force.

Mains Practice Question

[Q] What are the key challenges faced by women in the Indian workforce, and how can organisations create an enabling environment to address these challenges and promote gender equality?

