

# Role of Religion and Social Norms on Female Decision Making for Labour Force Participation in Afghanistan

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## Abstract

*Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP) is considered to be an important tool for economic development, progress and poverty reduction of a country. The present study aims to validate female decision making for the labour force participation model in Afghanistan. The present study attempts to find out the association among religion, social norms, and the education qualification of female on their decision making for labour force participation in Afghanistan. A total number of 414 respondents was collected from females between the ages of 15-64 years old living in Afghanistan. The stratified technique of sampling was used in this study. It was found that social norms are the main barriers to females' entrance to the labour market. In contrast, education qualification had significantly positive relations with FLFP. But, women's religiosity had a positive impact on FLFP, but controlling all other factors, there was no association between religion and FLFP in this country. It was also found that the marital status of women is important for their employment. While their age does not play a significant role in their employment in Afghanistan.*

## INTRODUCTION

Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP) is a critical instrument for both economic progress and poverty reduction in a country (Yasmin et al., 2013). It also helps us for proper understanding the "productive and reproductive" role of the population (Chaudhry et al., 1987).

The vast literature shows that factors that influence FLFP are complex. However, the education level of women, household factors, religious beliefs, cultural factors and economic factors are among the most powerful factors influencing female decision making for labour force participation (LFP) (see for example Koyuncu and Özen, 2007; Faridi et al., 2009; Atasoy, 2016; Sutradhar et al., 2017; Shaheen et al., 2011; Diwan and Vartanova, 2017; Fraker and Özdemir, 2011; and Chaudhary and Verick, 2014).

Social norms, patriarchal values, and gender role attitudes are the most important cultural factors that influence FLFP. For instance, Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits (2008) argued that patriarchy is the most important factor affecting FLFP in Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries. Atasoy (2016) also found the importance of cultural norms,

### Keywords:

*Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP), Religion, Social Norms*

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religiosity, and social protections in FLFP in Turkey. Culture prevents women from participating to the labour force not only in Turkey and Middle East, but it influences in other parts of the world, Pakistan, for instance. Chaudhary and Verick (2014) found that cultural factors prevent females from entering the labour force in this country.

The education qualification of women was another major factor affecting FLFP. It is considered to be the "cornerstone" of women's empowerment (Aromolaran, 2004). Education is an investment in human capital "once, it has been achieved, can be sold" (Faridi et al., 2009). It plays a crucial role in raising the "welfare" and "well-being" of the society and it increases the "productivity" of the women themselves, and it raises the education profile of children (Faridi et al., 2009). That is why researchers found the crucial role of education in FLFP (see for example Koyuncu and Özen, 2017; Atasoy, 2016; Andlib and Khan, 2018; Yasmin et al., 2013; Elhaj and Pawar, 2019; and Chaudhary and Verick, 2014).

Literature shows the influence of social norms, religion, and education qualification of women on their decision making for labour force participation, but the question is up to what extent do culture, religion, and education affect? And what is the effect of religion, social norms and education level on FLFP in Afghanistan? The present study attempts to find out the impact of religion, social norms and education on FLFP in Afghanistan.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

In the last two decades (2001-2021) Afghanistan experienced a remarkable change in all sectors, especially for women's rights. Women's participation in all sectors increased remarkably. For instance, in the education sector, in this period the pupil's population reached to ten million which was around one million before. The number of girls in primary schools was almost zero in 2001, which was more than 2.5 million in 2020, which is equal to almost 40% of total primary school students (MoWA, 2020), however, in 2021 female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) in this country was below the international and region average rate.

Women in Afghanistan contain almost half (more than 49%) of the population, but their share in the education sector is much lower than their male counterparts. Only 34% of school teachers and 13% of university lecturers were females (MoWA, 2020). In the civil service, females contained just 25% of the civil service employees, and even their share in the

decision-making positions was worst. Only (10%) of women were working in decision making positions (NSIA, 2021; MoWA, 2020).

Afghanistan owns one of the world's youngest population. Approximately 50% of the population in 2020 was working age (15-64), 47% were below the working age and only 2.7% of the population was above 64 years old (NSIA, 2021). This country also had a high level of population growth. From 2015 to 2020, the population's annual growth rate was 2.145 and the annual overall fertility rate was 4.14%, that is above the world average rate (1.09 and 2.47%) and the region's average rate (1.20% and 2.40) for population annual growth and total fertility rate respectively (NSIA, 2021).

FLFP in Afghanistan was just 14.85% in 2021, which is lower than both the world average rate (50%) (World Bank, 2022) and the South Asian standard (23.6%) (World Bank, 2020). In 2021 this country was ranked 41 out of 47 in Asia and 177 out of 181 (5th from the bottom) in the world ranking (The Global Economy, 2021). In these years, Afghanistan had the lowest FLFPR (14.85) among the SAARC countries. Nepal had the highest position in the region (78.69), followed by Bhutan (51.63), Bangladesh (34.87), Maldives (34.33), Sri Lanka (30.9), Pakistan (20.73), and India (19.23) from second to seventh respectively (The Global Economy, 2021b).

The FLFPR in Afghanistan was lower than in many of its neighbouring countries (except Iran). For instance, in 2021 the FLFPR was 61.61 in China, 44.9 in Uzbekistan, 36.54 in Turkmenistan, and 30.21 in Tajikistan, but this rate was only 13.84 in Iran which is the only country in the region where FLFPR is below than Afghanistan (The Global Economy, 2021b).

The literacy rate in Afghanistan was just 43% (UNESCO, 2020), far below the international average (84.2) as well as the South Asia average (73.65) rates (World Bank, 2022). There was a huge gap between the literacy rate of men (55%) and women (29.8%) (UNESCO, 2020). Since August 2021, over one million girls (grades 7-12) barred from school (UNICEF, 2022) and in December 2022, the girls were banned from universities and higher education institutions as well.

The present paper attempts to examine the role of religion, social norms and education qualifications on female decision making for labour force participation in Afghanistan. This paper has five segments. The Introduction is the first section, the second section is Literature Review and then Methodology, Results of the Study, Discussion, and Conclusion.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Female labour force participation has been studied by many researchers in different corners of the world. Many factors were recognized to influence FLFP by researchers. Education qualification of women, education qualification of household members, social norms, religion, political, and economic factors are some of the main elements that influence female choices about joining the workforce.

FLFP is defined by Andlib and Khan (2018) as those females who are "working for pay, profit or family gain during last week, at least for one hour on any day or if she was looking for work in the reference period."

Andlib and Khan (2018) considered those women in the labour force, who were somehow involved in economic activities, which included both working and looking for work, but some researchers like Cheng et al. (2019) considered women as participating in the labour those, who were working in the last seven days on the survey time or were actively looking for a job in the last 4 weeks.

Religion is considered one of the important factors affecting females entering the labour market. It affects females' decision making at least at the "ecological" level Bayanpourtehrani and Sylwester (2012).

Akyol and Ökten (2019) stated that religion and social norms are the two main factors determining the formation of culture in a society. Religious identity act as the basis of social norms, then the social norms serve as a mechanism by which religious believes are expressed in economic behaviour.

Fraker and Özdemir (2011) examined the economic, demographic, educational, and religious factors behind the low FLFP rate in Turkey. They stated that only one-quarter of Turkish women are participating in the labour force. Religion is having a significantly negative impact (especially in Muslim countries) on FLFP, but Turkey experienced low pressure of religion on FLFP compared to other Muslim countries.

Koyuncu and Özen (2007) investigated the effect of variety in language, ethnicity, religion, and culture on FLFP in 109 countries in the period 2000 to 2009. Their findings reveal that religion has a highly statistically significant positive impact on FLFP. Female participation increased by an increase in religious fractionalization. However, Atasoy (2016) shows that religion plays a negative role in women's LFP decisions. Women who do not practice much their religious activities were more probably to join the workforce compared to those

women who regularly practice. Sackey (2005) also found that religion has a significant and negative impact on FLFL in both urban and rural areas in Ghana.

Moreover, Chaudhary and Verick (2014) argued that caste, religion, marital status, and sociocultural norms determine FLFP in India. The probability of LFP for Muslim women in India was low in both urban and rural areas, while Scheduled Tribe (ST) women were more likely to be self-employed in both rural and urban areas.

Bayanpourtehrani and Sylwester (2012) investigated the effect of religion (no major religion, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, and Catholic) on FLFP. Their findings revealed that the FLFPR coefficient upon Muslims was significantly large, greater in Protestant and nonreligious, and low among Hindus. The relationship between Muslims women and their participation in the labour force are greatly weakened when geographical restrictions were included, but outside the MENA countries, relations between Islam and FLFP are largely non-existent. It means that there is no association between religion and FLFP, but when geographical controls are included, the association get weakened. It can be argued that the culture of the world region has a strong association with FLFP rather than religion. Moreover, Kooli and Al Muftah (2020) also found that Islam religion is not a "constraint", but is a "lever" for FLFP. Hence, they did not find a direct link between the Islamic religion and the FLFP rate.

Göksel (2013) examined the role of conservatism in the FLFP decision in Turkey. It was argued that religion and social norms are important for economic development because they are contributing to the formation of a country's culture. Religion is measured through the importance of religion on the "choice of wife, choice of friend, attitude to clothing, voting, relationships with neighbours, and nutrition."

Wearing a headscarf or burqa is also another tool to measure FLFP in a society. Some papers (such as Ugur, 2018; and Shah et al., 1986) reported that in Turkey and Pakistan, women wearing headscarves were found to be less likely to enter the workforce.

Education qualification is probably the most important factor that affects women's employment status. As Aromolaran (2004) stated, it is considered the cornerstone of women's empowerment. His finding in Nigeria shows a positive relation between women's education level and FLFP. He found a relationship that is not linear between these two variables. The likelihood of LFP for females with a lower



education qualification was less than females with a higher education qualification.

Elhaj and Pawar's (2019) findings also show women's education level has no impact or little impact on LFP in the short term, but over the long term, their employment positively affect significantly by their education level.

In contrast, some researchers like Shaheen et al. (2011) reported the negative effect of (primary, middle, and madrasa) education on FLFP in Pakistan. However, Bozzano's (2016) findings show that there was no significant relation between women empowerment and their education qualification and income in Italy. Moreover, some researchers like Widarti (1998) reported that FLFP is affected by education through an intermediate variable like age and fertility.

Diwan and Vartanova (2017) noted that the correlation between women's education level and their LFP varies from country to country. In some countries like Egypt, LFP among uneducated women was low, but raise fast with education, but in some other countries like Sweden, the LFP among uneducated women was high, but it only raises a bit more with their education.

Mollet (2011) investigated the connection between Turkey's FLFP, economic expansion, and women's educational qualification. His findings demonstrated that there was a significant association between FLFP, economic growth and the education level of women.

Vlasblom and Schippers (2004) reported the importance of women's education on decision making for entering to the workforce in six European countries (the Netherlands, France, Italy, West Germany, United Kingdom, and Spain). They also argued that females with higher education qualifications would have better chance of staying in the workforce compared to women with lower level of education.

Majbouri (2019) examined the effect of the number of children and women's education level on FLFP of Iran. He found that the relationship between college and above education level and FLFP in this country was strong, while there was no association between primary education and high school with FLFP.

Robertson et al. (2020) examined the relationship between violence and female labour force participation in four South Asian countries: India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Violence was measured by the number of terrorist attacks in these countries. Their results revealed that the number of

attacks had a significantly negative relationship with FLFP. Specifically, FLFP decreased by 0.008 percentage points for each additional attack, while these attacks did not have a significant effect on male labour force participation.

Marjanović et al. (2024) examined the determinants of FLFP in European Union countries. The researchers conducted a panel data regression analysis covering the period from 2000 to 2021. They tested factors such as the presence of anti-discrimination laws, total fertility rate, GDP per capita, women's education levels, retirement age with full pension benefits, annual net earnings, and equal opportunities laws. The results revealed that women's education levels, equal retirement age for both genders, GDP per capita, annual net earnings, and total fertility rate are among the main factors influencing female employment in European countries.

Sharifi and Sira (2023) investigated the association between patriarchal values, generalized self-efficacy (GSE), and female labour market participation in Afghanistan. Their findings indicated that GSE and patriarchal values are significant factors influencing female employment in the country. GSE had a significantly positive relationship with female labour force participation, whereas patriarchal values had a significantly negative impact on women's decision-making regarding labour force participation.

Afridi et al. (2024) explored the role of social norms and home productivity in shaping the labour force participation of men and women in relation to women's educational qualifications in India. They identified a U-shaped association between women's educational qualifications and their labour supply in the country. Additionally, the study found that home productivity and social norms regarding the allocation of domestic tasks between couples play a crucial role in influencing women's participation in the labour force in developing countries.

## RESEARCH GAP

A vast body of literature shows that many factors, such as social norms, religion, and education qualification of women influence their decision-making regarding labour force participation. However, there is a significant gap in understanding these dynamics in the context of Afghanistan, a country with unique sociocultural and religious characteristics. The present study aims to fill this gap and provide valuable insight into the factors affecting female decision making for participation in the labour force.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Three competing theories regarding the relationship between FLFP and economic development exist: the emancipation hypothesis, the constancy hypothesis, and the U-shaped hypothesis.

The emancipation hypothesis describes how industrialization promotes new ways of thinking and collapses patriarchal values (Idowu and Owoeye, 2019). This theory emphasizes the direct relationship between FLFPR and the level of modernity, which is usually evaluated in terms of economic development. Modernization increases the demand for labour with social acceptance of the employment of women, higher education, and lower fertility rates, ultimately benefiting women (Nam, 1991).

In contrast, the constancy hypothesis suggests that women work during industrialization, but most of their activities are either uncounted or ignored.

The U-shaped theory focuses on the relationship between economic development and female labour supply in a country. Female labour supply is typically high at the beginning of the economic development stage, as women can combine household activities and responsibilities with work outside the family. However, as a country becomes more industrialized and shifts from an informal economy (like agriculture) to a formal economy, female labour force participation may decline due to lack of skills and technical know-how, low education qualifications, and high fertility rates. This stage represents the lower side of the U-shape. As the country industrializes, women's participation in the labour force starts to increase due to improvements in education levels, completion of the fertility period, and availability of childcare facilities (Idowu and Owoeye, 2019).

This study adopts the U-shaped hypothesis, hypothesizing that female labour force participation correlates with a country's economic status. Additionally, the study draws from modernization theory, hypothesizing that modernization positively influences FLFP. As societies develop, many aspects of social norms evolve, enabling greater participation of women in the labour force.

## OBJECTIVES

I. To determine the role of social norms in female decision making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.

II. To determine the role of religion in female decision making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.

III. To assess the relationship between education qualification and female decision making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.

## HYPOTHESIS

H1: Religion has negative associations with female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.

H2: Social norms have negative relationship with female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.

H3: Female's education level has positive association with female decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.

H4: Female's marital status has an important role on the decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.

H5: Female's age has an important role on their decision-making for labour force participation in Afghanistan

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Sample

A total number of 414 responses were collected for this study. The respondents were all females from Afghanistan between 15-64 years old. The respondents' ages were divided into five categories: 15-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, and 55-64. In which 171, (33.9%) were in the first category, 211 (41.9%) in the second category, 73, (14.5%) in the third category, 31, (6.2%) in the fourth category, and 18, (3.6%) in the fifth category.

The education level of the respondents was categorized into five groups (illiterate/primary education, high school, bachelor, master, and PhD). Bachelor's education level among the respondents had the highest percentage (190, 37.7%), which is followed by high school (124, 24.6%), master's (109, 21.6%), illiterate/primary education (70, 13.9%), and PhD (11, 2.2%) from second to five respectively.

The marital status of the respondents was categorized into single, married, and widowed/divorce/divorced. Around 234 (46.4%) of the respondents were single, 238 (47.2%) married, and 32 (6.3%) selected being widowed/ divorced/ divorced.

### Research Instrument

The data for this study was collected using a self-responder questionnaire. Females who were doing any activity that

generates money were considered participating in the labour. A dummy variable was created which takes 1 for those females who were doing any activity that generates money or actively searching a job were considered participating in the labour force, and 0 otherwise.

The Social Norms factor was measured using the following five statements: "the main job of women is housework", "Working women are against our tradition.", "Work environment is not safe for women", "Children of working women suffer", and "Paid job exhausts women" These statements adopted from Atasoy (2016)

The religion factor was measured through six statements which are as follows: "Religion is important in the decision process of choosing wife.", "Religion is important in the decision process of choosing a friend.", "Religion is important in the attitude to clothing.", "Religion is important in the voting.", "Religion is important in the relationship with

neighbor.", and "Religion is important in the nutrition." Adopted from Göksel (2013) and Akyol and Ökten (2019).

All the above scales were translated into Persian-Dari and verified by two persons who had PhD in Persian literature and good knowledge of English.

## Pilot Test and Data Collection

Before the collection of final data, a pilot study was conducted using 52 responses. A stratified sampling technique employed in the study. The pilot study has an alpha score of 0.827 and a KMO score of 0.690.

## Results

The present study results presented in three parts. The first part is demographic information of the respondents, then explanatory factor analysis (EFA) using SPSS version 26, and the relationship between the variables.

**Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents**

Descriptive Statistics								
	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Age	414	4	1.96	.924	1.276	.120	1.964	.239
Edu_Level	414	4	2.99	.969	-.276	.120	-.255	.239
Marital_Status	414	1	1.51	.501	-.029	.120	-2.009	.239

Table1 shows the descriptive analysis of the data. For age, (M=1.96, SD=.924), education level (M=2.99, SD=.969), and for marital status, (M=1.51, SD=.501).

**Table 2: Rotation Component Matrix**

Rotated Component Matrix <sup>a</sup>		
	Component	
	1	2
SN1		.743
SN2		.683
SN3		.668
SN4		.627
SN5		.804
SN6		.774
SN7		.536
Religion_1	.822	
Religion_2	.858	
Religion_3	.884	

Religion_4	.896	
Religion_5	.867	
Religion_6	.845	
<b>Alpha</b>	<b>.937</b>	<b>.817</b>
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.		
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.		

Table 2 indicates two factors named Social Norms and Religion, with factor loading between .536 and .896. The alpha value was .937, and .817 for Religion and Social Norms respectively.

## Regression Analysis and Model Fit

In situations where the dependent variables or regressand are nominal, or indicator, categorical, qualitative, or dummy variables, for example, the decision for participating in the

labour force or not, which is yes and no type, the dummy will get yes if the individual participates in the labour force and no otherwise, in these situations, for the estimation of regression models ordinary least squares (OLS) can be run (Gujarati et al., 2017). Considering this, binary logistic regression was tested in the study.

The omnibus test of model coefficients is used to assess the model's fit. A significant result indicates that the model provides a significant better fit than the null model.

**Table 3: Omnibus tests Model Coefficients**

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients				
		Chi-square	df	Sig.
	Step	92.370	11	.000
	Block	92.370	11	.000
	Model	92.370	11	.000

The Omnibus for the current study was significant ( $p=0.000$ ) which indicates a well-fitting model.

The classification table illustrates how accuracy of the classification result for binary logistic regression method,

indicating how well the model performs in correctly predicting outcomes. (Wulandari, 2022). The classification result of this study presented in below table.

**Table 4: Classification Table of the Regression**

Classification Table <sup>a</sup>					
			Predicted		
			LFP		
			No	Yes	
		No	24	48	33.3
		Yes	14	328	95.9
		Overall Percentage			
a. The cut value is .500					

The above table indicates that, 24 respondents believe that they are not doing any activity that generates money or they are not actively searching for a paid job, and a total of 72 respondents are predicted, giving a classification accuracy of 33.3%. On the other hand, 328 respondents believe that they

are doing any activity that generates money or they are actively searching for a paid job, and a total of 342 respondents predicted this, giving a classification accuracy of 95.9%. The overall accuracy rate of the classification table was 85%.

**Table 5: Model Summary**

Model Summary			
Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	290.197 <sup>a</sup>	.200	.332
a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.			

As can be seen from the table 5, the Cox and Snell R<sup>2</sup> indicated that the logistic model explained 20% variation of the dependent variable. Nagelkerk's R<sup>2</sup> indicates that 33.2% of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the logit model. As indicated by the Cox & Snell R-square usually

underestimates (Leech et al., 2005), the Nagelkerk's R-square is more accurate because it has a variance between 0 and 1. Based on the Tranmer and Elliot (2008) analysis, it can be said that the model explains between 20% and 33.2% of the variation in turnout.

**Table 6: Variables in the Equation**

Variables in the Equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
	SNRs	-.105	.036	8.274	1	.004	.900
	RLGN	.069	.032	4.560	1	.033	1.071
	Age			7.357	4	.118	
	Age(1)	-.349	.456	.588	1	.443	.705
	Age(2)	-.102	.648	.025	1	.876	.903
	Age(3)	2.803	1.228	5.211	1	.022	16.489
	Age(4)	-.058	.853	.005	1	.946	.944
	Edu_Level			54.039	4	.000	
	Edu_Level(1)	1.192	.520	5.251	1	.022	3.293
	Edu_Level(2)	3.144	.518	36.852	1	.000	23.206
	Edu_Level(3)	3.424	.602	32.385	1	.000	30.684
	Edu_Level(4)	3.739	1.151	10.555	1	.001	42.058
	Marital_Status(1)	-.575	.391	2.158	1	.142	.563
	Constant	-.327	.931	.123	1	.726	.721
a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: SNRs, RLGN, Age, Edu_Level, Marital_Status.							



The variables Equation table (table 6) shows the association between the predictors and outcomes. Moreover, the equation table shows that both social norms (Beta=-.105, P=.004) and religion (Beta=.069, P=0.033) had significant impacts on FLFP. The study failed to reject the first hypothesis. It can be interpreted that religion has positive relation with female decision making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.

However, this impact was significantly negative for social norms and significantly positive for religion. It can be interpreted that social norms have significantly negative relationship with female decision making of labour participation. Women with higher level of conservative (who believe more in social norms) are less likely to enter the labour force than those with a lower level of conservative. Therefore H2 is accepted.

**Table 7: Variables in the Equation for Religion and Social Norms**

Variables in the Equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
	SNRs	-.105	.030	12.632	1	.000	.900
	RLGN	.013	.027	.216	1	.642	1.013
	Constant	2.622	.576	20.745	1	.000	13.764
a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: SNRs, RLGN.							

All other variables were controlled and only the effect of social norms and religion was tested. The result shown in table 7 the result shows that when other factors (except social norms) controlled, the religion does not have association with FLFP.

We also tested the impact of religion on FLFP controlling all other variables, this time the result was changed remarkably. As we see in table 8 religion (Beta=-.013, P=.589) does not have any relationship with FLFP.

**Table 8: Shows Variables in the Equation for Religion**

Variables in the Equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
	RLGN	-.013	.025	.291	1	.589	.987
	Constant	1.821	.507	12.901	1	.000	6.178
a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: RLGN.							

It can be interpreted that religion does not have any association with female decision making for entering to the labour market, however, considering other factors (especially social norms), the relationship between religion and FLFP was significantly positive. Females with higher lower level of conservatism and more religiosity religiosity are more likely to enter the workforce than those female with lower level of conservatism and lower level of religiosity.

Among the demographic factors, only education level had a significant influence with P. value of 0.000, and the remaining three (age, marital status, and employment) were insignificant. A series of logit regressions were conducted in an attempt to find out the difference between different categories of age groups, education levels and marital status of the respondents.

**Table 9: Variables in Equation for Different Education Level**

Variables in the Equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
	High School	1.239	.427	8.436	1	.004	3.452

	Bachelor	2.847	.437	42.441	1	.000	17.240
	Master	3.052	.507	36.187	1	.000	21.154
	PhD	3.234	1.090	8.797	1	.003	25.385
	Bachelor	1.608	.358	20.168	1	.000	4.994
	Master	1.813	.441	16.886	1	.000	6.127
	PhD	1.995	1.061	3.534	1	.060	7.353
	Master	.205	.451	.206	1	.650	1.227
	PhD	.387	1.066	.132	1	.717	1.472
Master	PhD	.182	1.096	.028	1	.868	1.200

Females with a high school education level were more likely to participate the workforce compared to those who are illiterate or have primary education. However, females with a high school degree enter to the labour market less frequently compared to those with bachelor, master and PhD degrees.

Similarly, females with a bachelor degree were more likely enter to the labour force compare to those with illiterate, primary and high schoold education, while the result was insignificant for master's and PhD levels. This means having bachelor, master and PhD degrees does not make a significantly different. There was significant difference between individuals with a bachelor and those with a high

school degree, as well as between illiterate individuals and those with primary education.

Females with higher education level (bachelor, master, PhD) are highly interested to enter the labour force compared to those with lower level of education (illiterate, primary and high school). However, there is not much differences between bachelor, master, and PhD degrees.

This leads to the acceptance of hypthesis 3. Therefore, female with higher level of education (bachelor, master, and PhD) are more likely to enter the labour market than females with lower level of education.

**Table 10:** Variables in the Equation for Different Age Categories

Variables in the Equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
	Age=25-34	.032	.300	.012	1	.914	1.033
	Age=35-44	-.187	.439	.181	1	.671	.830
	Age=45-54	1.172	1.057	1.230	1	.267	3.229
	Age=55-64	-1.600	.623	6.601	1	.010	.202
	Age=35-44	-.219	.416	.277	1	.599	.803
	Age=45-54	1.140	1.048	1.184	1	.277	3.126
	Age=55-64	-1.633	.607	7.234	1	.007	.195
	Age=45-54	1.359	1.096	1.538	1	.215	3.892
	Age=55-64	-1.414	.687	4.239	1	.040	.243
Age=45-54	Age=55-64	-2.773	1.181	5.507	1	.019	.063
a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Age=15-24, Age=25-34, Age=35-44, Age=45-54.							

The above table 10 shows that females in the 55-64 age group are highly interested to join the market compared to other age groups. Similarly, those females belonging to the age category of 45-54 years old are less interested to join the workforce than females in the 35-44 age group. There was not significant difference between other age categories.

Age category of women does not have relationship with their employment in Afghanistan. However, only female between

the age of 15-24 years old are more likely to join the labour market than females between the age of 55-64 years old. There was no significant differences between other age categories.

The Study failed to reject hypothesis 5. Therefore, age of female does not play significant role on their decision making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.

**Table 11: Variables in the Equation for Marital Status**

<b>Variables in the Equation</b>							
		<b>B</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
	<b>Single</b>	.652	.268	5.919	1	.015	1.920
	<b>Constant</b>	1.271	.167	58.053	1	.000	3.565
<b>a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Single.</b>							

The difference in the marital status of the respondents was statistically significant. The above table shows that at  $p=0.015$ , married women were less likely to enter the labour force than single women. It leads to the acceptance of hypothesis 4. It can be interpreted that marital status of females plays an important role on their decision making for labour force participation. Single women are more likely to participation in the labour market than married women.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to analyze the impact of social norms and religion on females' decision making for labour force participation in Afghanistan. Female decision making for labour force participation was the dependent variable, and social norms and religion were the independent variables.

The findings show the importance of social norms in women's decision making for labour force participation in Afghanistan. It was found that social norms had a significantly negative impact on FLFP in Afghanistan.

Further, the findings also show the importance of religion in FLFP of Afghanistan. Religion had a significantly positive association on women's decision making for LFP. But, when all the other variables were controlled, the result shows no relationship between religion and FLFP.

Moreover, we also found that the education level of women plays a significantly positive role in their decision making for

labour force participation in Afghanistan. Females with higher level of education (bachelor, master, PhD) are more likely to participate more in the LM compared to individuals with lower level of education (illiterate, primary and high school). However, there is not much differences between bachelor, master, and PhD degrees.

It was also found that marital status of women plays important role on their LFP. Married women were less likely to enter the LF compared to single women in Afghanistan. Of their ages, it was found that females in the 55-64 age group are less likely to enter the work market than other age groups. Similarly, those females belonging to the age category of 45-54 years old are less likely to enter to the LM than females in the 35-44 age group. We found not significant difference between other age categories.

Our finding regarding the relationship between religion and FLFP does not support the finding of Atasoy (2016), who found a negative relationship between these two. He found that those females who practice their religious activities, they less likely to work outside their family than those who practice less. Similarly, our finding does not support Chaudhary and Verick's (2014) and Sackey's (2005) results which reported a negative relationship between religion and FLFP in India and Ghana respectively.

In contrast, our finding was similar to the findings of Bayanpourtehrani and Sylwester (2012) who reported that outside the MENA countries, relations between Islam and



FLFP are largely non-existent. They argued that there was no association between religion and FLFP, but when geographical controls are included, the association get weakened. The culture of the world region has a strong association with FLFP. Our finding also shows that there was a relation between religion and FLFP when other factors especially social norms considered, otherwise there we did not find any association between religion and FLFP.

Moreover, our finding was similar to the findings of Kooli and Al Muftah (2020) who reported that religious attachment does not play much role in women's LFP. They reported that FLFPR was high in Middle East countries, while religiosity is also highly prevalent in these countries. In contrast, in the North African countries, where the attachment to religion was less prevalent, FLFPR was also low.

We argue that religion does not play much roles in FLFP in Afghanistan, while social norms play a crucial role in female decision making for labour force participation. As Tavva *et al.* (2013) reported, Afghanistan is a country where men hold predominant social and cultural influence, and a high level of conservatism and patriarchal values exist in the society. FLFP in this country is affected by social norms. Men are the head of families and play a significant role in decision making within the household. For instance, only elderly widows without sons can go to the bazaar. The social restriction or stigma limits FLFP in the agriculture sector as well. Samar *et al.*, (2014) also reported that cultural barriers affect females' access to health services in this country. They found that neat about 10 per cent of women often lack knowledge about where to seek medical help, and around 16 percent do not receive permission to visit a healthcare facility. Additionally, about one-third of women stated that they do not go to the health center because there is no male family member available to accompany them.

As Afghanistan is predominantly Sunni Muslim, Manganaro and Alozie (2011) reported that Shi'a men have less conservative compared to Sunni men in this country. It can be argued that due to the existence of conservatism and patriarchal values, household male members (family head) do not allow females to enter the labour market.

Moreover, Manganaro and Alozie (2011) noted that in Afghanistan though women are less conservative than men, the traditional "core" values are not considered equality among genders. Women (especially in rural areas) do not claim their rights, such as ownership, to inherit shares from

their husband's property, because both men and women are knowledgeable about the fundamental laws [traditional norms] that provide rights to women in society Tavva *et al.*, (2013). Considering the abovementioned points, we argue that social norms are the most powerful barriers to FLFP in Afghanistan.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This study was conducted to analyze the impact of social norms and religion on females' decision making for labour force participation in Afghanistan.

It was found that social norms, religion, and education qualification of females were the most important factors determining female decision making for labour force participation in this country. We found that social norms had a significantly negative impact on FLFP in Afghanistan. Further, religion had a significantly positive association with women's decision making for LFP. But, when all the other variables were controlled, the result shows no relationship between religion and FLFP.

It was also found that the education level of women plays a significantly positive role in their decision making for labour force participation in Afghanistan. Females with higher level of education (bachelor, master, PhD) are more likely to participate more in the labour market compared to individuals with lower level of education (illiterate, primary and high school). However, there is not much differences between bachelor, master, and PhD degrees.

The finding this research will have significant implication for different stakeholders like policymakers, government, and international organizations working for women's empowerment and enhancing their labour force participation in Afghanistan. This study provides detailed insights into the determinants of female decision making for labour force participation. By identifying the push and pull factors, policymakers, governments, and international organizations will gain a better understanding of the situation, enabling them to focus more on the pull factors to promote gender equality in society.

Additionally, households can invest more in the education of women, as education is one of the key push factors for FLFP. Moreover, families can recognize and challenge the negative aspects of social norms, which remain a primary barrier to female employment in Afghanistan.



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