

Social Sanctions & Sexual Harassment

Why Women may Choose not to Work Outside the Home

FINDINGS FROM KENYA

Women’s Labour Force Participation Is Declining Globally: What Role does Social Sanctions and Sexual Harassment at Workplace Play in Women’s Decision to Work?

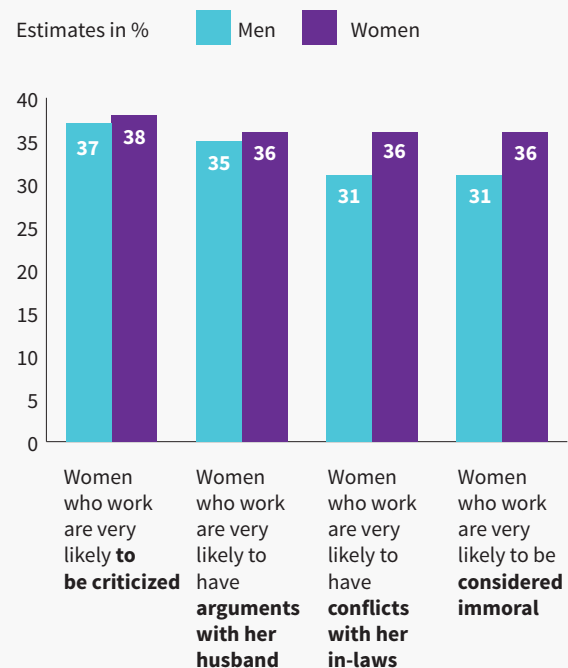
Globally, the progress on achieving gender equality with regards to paid work has been slow.¹ In most nations, women continue to be paid significantly lower than men, face discrimination based on their gender, and are overrepresented in labour-intensive sectors.² While most efforts to improve women’s economic participation have focused on skill building and financial inclusion, and family leave and care policies such as paid parental leave,³ there is limited understanding of the role played by social sanctions against women’s paid work — e.g., disapproval from family or community, family conflict, and sexual harassment, in women’s ability to join the workforce.

The Situation in Kenya

Unlike most other places globally, Kenya reports a decline in the gender gap for labour force participation, for workers in senior positions, and in earned income.¹ This is encouraging progress on achieving gender equality. Nonetheless, women continue to earn less than men, and are less likely to be in high earning industries such as engineering and technology.¹ The treatment of women in the workplace may be an important factor affecting women’s participation in the labour force, which was approximately 63% in 2019, compared to 73% for men in the same year.⁴ Since then, most likely these employment rates have declined.

In 2020, the World Values Survey (WVS), a population-based survey on social attitudes and behaviors conducted across over 120 countries,⁵ collaborated

Figure 1 | Social sanctions for women who work



with the Evidence-based Measures of Empowerment for Research on Gender Equality (EMERGE) gender measurement project to collect data on social sanctions against women’s paid work and sexual harassment of women at public spaces or workplaces, as potential norms that may affect women’s labour force participation. Utilizing a nationally representative sample of N=1266 adults (637 men and 622 women), these are the first estimates of the indicators for Kenya.

Social Sanctions Persist Against Women in the Workplace

Approximately one-third of adults in Kenya, regardless of sex, report that a woman working outside of her home for money would be very likely to be criticized, to have arguments with her husband, to have conflicts with her in-laws, and to be considered immoral in the community. (See Figure 1.)

Traditional Beliefs Regarding Roles of Women and Men

Approximately 42%–45% of respondents, regardless of sex, believe that while gainful employment is good, what women really want is a home and a family, and that it is a man’s job to earn money, and a woman’s job to take care of home and family. (See Figure 2.)

Sexual Harassment of Women in Public Spaces is Common

Half of the respondents, male and female, report seeing sexual harassment of women on the streets (men and boys making unwanted sexual comments and gestures towards women and girls) in their neighborhoods.

Sexual Harassment of Women at Work is Less Common

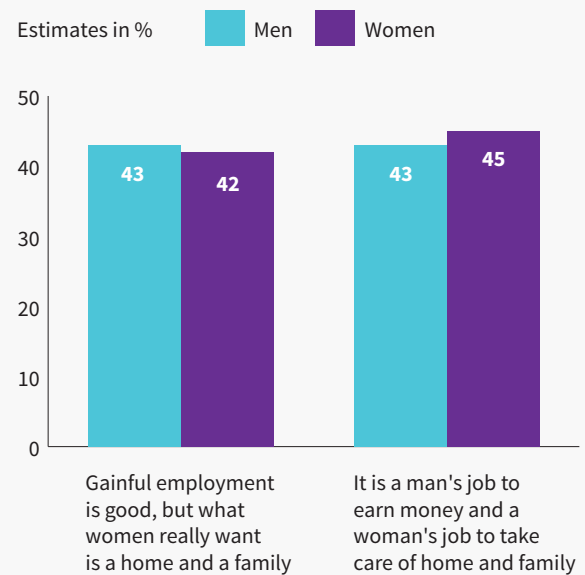
For the subsample of those working outside the home (n=718; 403 men and 315 women), we found that 17% of women and 12% of men believe that women at their workplace experienced sexual harassment either daily or frequently. This is much lower than in other countries such as Zimbabwe, and possibly related to a higher proportion of women working outside of the home (based on analysis of data from similar WVS survey in Zimbabwe).

What do These Findings Mean for Kenya?

Based on our findings, we recommend the following efforts to improve gender parity in labour force participation in Kenya:

- **Intervene on social norms related to morality sanctions.** These sanctions limit women’s role to their homes, and as care providers for their families, while asserting men’s role as the provider. The freedom, and the ability, to work in an environment of safety and dignity is a human right. Yet, these social sanctions

Figure 2 | Beliefs regarding traditional gender roles



prohibit women from full social and economic participation, sexualizing and threatening those who are non-adherent to traditional gender roles.⁶ There is also a need for increased research efforts to better understand these sanctions in relation to women's work, in particular after the COVID-19 pandemic where significantly more low-income women lost their jobs.⁷ Studies can consider examining differences in norms and sanctions between households with and without a woman in formal employment. Domestic violence is also likely to be more prevalent in households where women try to change their traditional roles as housekeepers and take up employment outside their homes.⁸

- **Tackle sexual harassment of women in public spaces and the workplace via enforcement of policies** that already exist in Kenya.⁹ Clearly these policies are not sufficient to create change when one in every six Kenyan women who work outside the home report that sexual harassment of women occurs frequently at their workplace. Sexual harassment trainings and standards of respect at workplaces are also needed.
- **Communicate the importance of women's choice and agency regarding gender roles and the right to work.** Policies should secure this right with equal protections for employment under the law, and economic and welfare supports for those who cannot work.

References

- 1 WEF. Global Gender Gap Report 2022: Insight Report, July 2022.
- 2 International Labour O. Women at work: trends 2016: ILO Geneva; 2016.
- 3 WEF. 15 strategies helping to close the gender gap around the world. March 2022. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/03/gender-gap-strategies-parity-diversity/>.
- 4 The World Bank. Labor force participation rate (% of population). 2019. <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/indicators/sl-tlf-acti-zs/?estimate=National&gender=total>.
- 5 Inglehart R, Haerpfer C, Moreno A, et al. World values survey: Round six-country-pooled datafile version. Madrid: JD systems institute 2014; 12.
- 6 Fulu E, Warner X, Miedema S, Jewkes R, Roselli T, Lang J. Why do some men use violence against women and how can we prevent it. *Quantitative Findings from the United Nations Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific Bankok: United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Women and United Nations Volunteers* 2013.
- 7 Gates Foundation. After low-income women lose their jobs in the COVID-19 economy, what happens to them? ; 2020.
- 8 Kotsadam A, Villanger E. Jobs and intimate partner violence-evidence from a field experiment in Ethiopia. 2020.
- 9 Kenya Law Reports. The Sexual Offences Act: No 3 of 2006. National Council for Law Reporting; 2009.



This work was funded through the generous support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (OPP1163682/ INV-010695; PI: Raj)

Suggested Citation: Dehingia N, Raj A, Muhtadi M, Lundgren R, Ekström AM, Puranen B, and the EMERGE Team. (April 2022). Social sanctions and sexual harassment: Why women may choose not to work outside the home. Findings from Ethiopia. Evidence-based Measures of Empowerment for Research on Gender Equality [EMERGE]. Center on Gender Equity and Health (GEH) University of California San Diego. San Diego