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Economic Reforms, Growth and Time Poverty in India

Anupama Uppal

Harpreet Kaur

Most of the discussions on economic growth, income inequality and poverty are based on indicators of income or consumption. Even the studies based on multi-dimensional poverty indicators have not taken time deficit as a dimension, citing various reasons which no doubt satisfy the mathematical logic. The research on poverty and inequality has often concentrated on dual-earner households, often assumes that the intra-house distribution of income, consumption and the time allocated to work (both paid as well as the unpaid) are distributed equally among all the members but we know that women, who spend more of their time in extended SNA and non-SNA activities, often have limited access to productive resources which further leads to lower participation in the labour market and hence lower income. Thus, their time deficit often leads them to income deficit as well. Similarly, in the low income households, the females have to bear greater burden of the household tasks, due to inability to purchase the electronic/electric appliances their time spent on the same tasks increases as compared to the women in higher income groups. The women in low income households also travel on low cost low speed means of transportation. This increases their time cost or reduces their mobility. This further pushes them to accept low paid jobs near to the home. Thus, income and time deficit mutually reinforce each other.

In case of India, the waves of liberalisation after the 90s have led to massive privatisation of the economy which has led to increasing proportion of informal jobs. Now the women have fewer and fewer jobs with social security, job contract, paid leave, maternity leave etc. Thus, though the economy has grown by leaps and bounds after the reforms but the quality of jobs have deteriorated and it has taken a greater toll on women's employment. The female workers in the informal sector run round the clock to keep balance in their home and professional lives. Needless to say, the reforms have increased their time poverty. They have a tough choice between income deficit and time deficit. Hence, it is important to integrating the analysis of time and income to see who are missed by traditional poverty measures (for example, those who have to work long hours to keep their families above the poverty line), and some who are classified as time poor but who could reduce their work hours without risking income poverty. A better understanding of the joint operation of these constraints has implications across a wide range of policy areas, such as employment regulations and the work/life balance.

This study is based on the time use survey of Punjab, a north Indian state. A sample of 705 individuals has been drawn on basis of multi-stage random sampling method from rural as well as urban areas of the state. The database also includes disaggregation of time spent on paid and unpaid work by gender, age, caste, occupation, presence of children, rural-urban location and income for sub-samples of the selected districts. For analysis, first both income poverty and time poverty ratios (head counts ratios) have been calculated based on the pre-defined poverty lines. While the income poverty line is officially available, the time poverty is calculated for different categories of the households by using the method suggested by Antonopoulos et al. (2012)[Antonopoulos, R, T. Masterson and A. Zacharias (2012). The interlocking of time and income deficits: Revisiting poverty measurement, informing policy responses. United Nations Development Programme and Levy Economic Institute of Bard College, New York.]. This will lead us to see separately the head counts of those with income poverty, time poverty, income poor but not time poor (mostly the unemployed, sick and disabled), time poor but not income poor and both time and income poor. Further, we have tried to see if for the time poor households, the time deficit is poverty inducing or not by using the augmented poverty line which covers the income required to maintain a minimum standard and also the market value of the extra unpaid work time (i.e. the amount of time which may lead the individual to time deficit). This exercise enables us to identify the households as well as the individuals who are above the income poverty line but are not able to buy the marketable services (e.g. a paid care or a tutor for the children) to save them from the time poverty. It has been observed that the time deficits are not only higher for the households with children and elders who need care but also differ by type of jobs (formal or informal/regular or casual), distance between home and work place, asset ownership as well as caste. Time poverty aggravates when these categories overlap each other. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to ongoing discussion and debates over how to advance living conditions and social inclusion for all.