



## Reading The Literature on Female Labor Force Participation Rates with Content Analysis<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the literature on female labor force participation rates (FLFP) through content analysis. Data samples include international scientific research articles from the Scopus database (2000-2023). Data were collected by transferring the articles to the MAXQDA 2020 software and coding the themes with the software. Expert review was used to ensure the reliability of the research. The study allowed us to see the changing dimensions of the subject in the reviewed articles. The focal points of the literature reviewed are; the research method used in the publications, the theoretical framework, the increase in FLFP (female labor force participation) and its reasons, the reasons for the decrease, the direction and magnitude of the variables affecting FLFP, and how it changes over time starting from the date of publication. In the reviewed literature, the main reasons for the increase in FLFP and the main reasons for the decrease in FLFP come to the fore.

The reasons for the increase in FLFP are; education, increasing childcare opportunities, age factor, adaptation to home technologies, women being married and wages being effective, respectively. Accordingly, the "wage factor" is not that important in the increase in FLFP.

The reasons for the decrease in FLFP are fertility, alcohol consumption and transportation problems. These obstacles are generally gender-related, psychological and economic. An important finding of the study is that these three factors - gender-related, psychological and economic - should be supported in increasing FLFP. This result, which is especially important for policy makers, reveals the factors that should be taken into consideration in increasing FLFP. When the samples of the articles in the reviewed literature are examined, it is seen that there are detailed analyses covering countries such as European and Central Asian countries, OECD countries, Tokyo, Korea, Australia, USA, Chile and Turkey. In this respect, the content analysis conducted has allowed us to see which aspects of the FLFP issue are prominent in different countries around the world.

Increasing female labor force participation (FLFP) is an important potential to stimulate economies and promote growth. However, due to the weak global growth outlook and some other reasons, many countries cannot fully utilize this potential. In countries where flfp is low, the potential to increase FLFP is high. In this respect, it is hoped that this article will contribute to the literature in terms of enabling us to see the aspects of the reasons of the weak FLFP and how to increase it.

**Keywords:** *Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP), Gender Economics, Content Analysis*

**JEL Codes:** *J16, B21*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Studies on female labour force participation (FLFP) rates began in the 1960s, recognizing the importance of women's participation in social life. The increasing interest in this subject has continued in every period. The most important reason for this is the contribution of the female workforce to economic growth and development. In addition, reducing women's poverty is the basis for reducing poverty. In order to provide a more equitable balance in society in general, it is essential to understand and support the female workforce in every aspect of gender equality. From innovation and entrepreneurship to wage policies, home and private life balance and many other topics constitute the field of research.

There are many macroeconomic, sociological, cultural, ethnic and psychological constraints behind female employment. It is essential to examine these constraints in terms of why the issue is so crucial. In this way, the structural correction of the mentioned constraints and the implementation of developmental policies can be provided. Although there have been many developments in this regard to date, there are still some inequalities and difficulties. Providing a more self-confident female workforce is a development that will contribute to society in many ways.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The issue of women's participation in the workforce has progressed with the neoclassical economic theory and methods taken from labour economics. According to the labour-leisure preference theory, the labor force participation rate is considered together with the expected market wage and the value women give to the time they spend on housework. According to the neoclassical theory, labour supply depends on the choice between work and leisure and is an increasing function of the real wage. Labour demand is a function of the real wage. Studies in the field of women's participation in the workforce, which is also of interest to fields such as sociology, feminism and social policies in addition to economics, can be examined in three groups;

The labour-leisure preference model is a model in which the first group of studies are included. Studies in this group are (Mincer, 1962; Becker 1985). Both studies analyzed the process of women choosing between housework and the market. In his famous article, Mincer (1962) estimated a labour supply function for the USA. Mincer's work contributed in two ways. First, it stated that the choice was not just a two-way but a three-way choice. He stated that there was a triple choice between leisure and paid work but between leisure, paid work and unpaid housework or family work. The result of this triple choice would be a family decision. This family decision depends on the husband's income, the wife's earnings, market goods, household goods and their relative desires for leisure. One example is the substitutability of market goods with household goods (such as

whether a woman can buy a washing machine or pay a commercial laundromat to undertake this part of the housework). Secondly, Mincer used Milton Friedman's theory of consumption and stated that consumption expenditure changes according to current income (absolute income hypothesis). Usually, a family where the head of the family earns \$10,000 yearly, for example, tends to spend \$8,000 per year on consumption. Suppose the head of the household's regular income temporarily drops to \$5,000. In that case, the family will continue to spend \$8,000 because they have adjusted their spending and living habits to the long-term income. The Becker Model (1985) examined women's time on housework and participation in labour. He stated that due to childcare and housework responsibilities, the hourly earnings of married women are lower than those of married men in the same market. In another study, according to the 1971 Canadian census data, it was determined that women who are more educated and live in cities have fewer children than other women and provide more labour to the market. Non-labour income and the husband's wages do not significantly affect fertility, but the husband's wages reduce women's labour supply (Carliner et al., 1980).

The second group of studies is various labour force participation models. These studies, in which factors such as education, income level, and child care come to the forefront, are widespread. The prominent labour force participation models are the neoclassical, labour force supply, and human capital models. In the neoclassical model, the individual's utility maximization and labour market conditions are the main arguments for women's labour force participation. This model explains women's labour force participation by factors such as education level, income expectations, and childcare costs. Humphries & Sarasúa (2012) conceptualizes the trend in women's labour force participation in Europe using a U-shaped model. It is stated that supply-side factors such as marital status, number and age of children are the main determinants of modern women's decision to enter the labour force. The labour force supply model focuses on women's desire to work and the labour market equivalent of this desire. In this model, wages, non-labour income, and childcare costs come to the forefront. The human capital model focuses on women's level of education, skill acquisition, and the economic return of these skills. According to this model, education and skills are crucial for FLFP.

The third group of studies (Blau Kahn, 2017; Kunze, 2018) examines the issue of gender wage inequality. The models of neoclassical economics based on the individual emphasize being rational, autonomous, self-interested, and maximizing profit or benefit under external constraints. Feminist economics, on the other hand, argues that features such as abundance and altruism, as well as the concepts of scarcity and competition, are ignored. For this reason, women's labour needs to be discussed correctly and adequately as an argument. The data collection and analysis standards of neoclassical economics have some difficulties in analyzing the feminist economics side. One of the essential reasons for this is the difficulty of investigating and measuring issues such as power relations at home and the subtle processes that create the glass ceiling in the business

world. Therefore, in feminist theory, as in economic literature, the causes of gender wage gaps and policies aimed at reducing these gaps have been examined.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section covers the articles that constitute the subject of this study and the broader literature. Studies that address similar variables are grouped in the same paragraph. Accordingly, the popular u-curve is one of the notable titles in the development and growth literature. There are many studies supporting the literature on the U-curve that the labour force participation rates of married women first decrease and then increase during the development and growth process (Goldin, 1994; Tansel, 2002; Tsani et al., 2013; et al., 2021; Besamusca et al., 2015). The U-curve emerges both in the economic development process and in the past of current developed economies. However, the income effect weakens at some point, and the substitution effect strengthens. According to the study by Tunalı, Kırdar and Dayıođlu (2021), the Female Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in Turkey has reached the turning point of the U-shaped pattern found elsewhere and has been rising since 2008. In reaching this turning point, the effect of the "culture" factor has weakened.

Women's labour force participation is affected by many variables, starting from the level of education, services received for housework, non-wage benefits worked, relative prices of goods and services, household members and age (Taymaz, 2010, p. 10). Another similar study examines women's labour force participation by year according to education, marital status and age groups (Korkmaz and Korkut, 2012). Accordingly, if women's employment is increased, the labour force participation rate will also increase. Çatalbaş (2020) examined the data of 12 regions at the IBSS-1 level for the period 2008-2013 with panel data analysis to analyze the factors affecting women's labour force participation rate in Turkey. As a result, it was found that the fertility rate, divorce rate, unregistered employment, economic crises and education are the most critical factors affecting the female labour force.

It has been observed that there is extensive literature on the decrease and increase of FLFP. According to Tansel (2002), there are three main reasons for the low FLFP: younger societies have more extended education periods. Increases in schooling rates delay entry into the labour force. Second, the labour force shift from the agricultural sector to the non-agricultural sector is a reason. Participation rates in the agricultural sector are higher than in the non-agricultural sector. The third reason for the decline is the early retirement plan. Over the last decade, Lassassi and Tansel's (2020) study examines female labour force participation (FLFP) behaviour in five MENA countries, namely Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, and Tunisia. As in other MENA countries, low FLFP rates in these countries are well documented. The analysis includes a breakdown by rural/urban regional disparity, marital status, and level of education. Possible government policies to increase FLFP rates are discussed accordingly.

According to Dođrul (2002), being single increases the probability of women participating in the labour force, while being married decreases it. In the study conducted with data obtained from the TÜİK 2003 Household Budget Survey, it was stated that women become more willing to participate in the labour force as their level of education increases. Women's roles as mothers at home do not negatively affect their participation in the labour force. The reason for this can be shown as increasing family expenses with the number of children, which can increase the need for money.

According to Evans and Kelly (2008), increasing female education and decreasing fertility significantly increase women's labour force participation and working hours. According to the study's findings, education significantly increases women's labour force participation, while the variable of being married does not have a very significant effect. While women having young children decreases participation, family-related effects do not change much over time, and it has been found that women over the age of 55 tend to work less on average. According to the posterior estimation made with cross-sectional data for 2019 in the study of Beceren and İzgi (2021), it has been found that the human capital index increases the FLFP of young women between the ages of 15-24 with a coefficient of 2.47. It has also been found that gender discrimination has a negative significant effect on young women's labour force participation rates.

Women in rural areas, where the expectation of participating in the labour market is high, are also likely to migrate, which causes a decrease in women's labour force participation rate. Dayıođlu and Kırdar (2010) examined the demographic and economic factors of women's labour force participation with the help of the Household Labor Force Survey of the Turkish Statistical Institute in 2000. The authors determined that the geographical change in the share of the rural population may be partially effective in the decrease in women's labour force participation. The authors drew attention to the unemployment variable. According to the study of İlkkaracan (2012), the supply-side constraints arising from the widespread informal sector employment and the lack of paid work-family reconciliation measures are also a factor that reduces the female labour force participation rate. The increase in the burying rate in society also reduces female labour force participation (McManus & Johnson:2020). The increase in crime can explain and exacerbate the existing gender inequalities in labour force participation. Mishra et al. (2021) investigate the possible asymmetric impact of crime on labour force participation rates of women and men in India. The paper finds that, on average, a 1% increase in total crime reduces women's participation by 0.015%, while it increases men's participation in activities away from home by 0.012%. Therefore, crime may be one of the factors contributing to the worsening of the gender gap in labour force participation rates observed during the period this study was conducted. The increasing gender gap in labour force participation rates may further worsen gender inequality in India at this critical point in economic development. Another possible explanation for the decline in participation rates in rural areas is the

decline in agricultural wages due to deteriorating agricultural conditions. When examining the trade between agriculture and manufacturing, it is found that the deterioration in agricultural terms of trade after 2000 partially explains the decline in participation rates in rural areas after 2000. In addition, low-skilled women's labour force participation rate ranged between 10.9 and 11.8% during 2000-2006. These are considerably low rates compared to low-skilled men, who ranged between 67.1 and 68.8% during the same period. Comparing the wages of the two groups to explain this significant difference between the participation rates of low-skilled men and women, Dayıoğlu and Kırdar (2010) found that although there was an improvement in women's wages compared to men's, women's wages were still very low, with more than 75% of women earning less than the minimum wage. These low market wages, resulting from the large household sector in Turkey, high reservation wages and very long working hours, probably explain why so few of them participate in the labour force.

Yenilmez and Işıklı (2010) compared Turkey's female labor force participation rate with that of other countries in the world. They stated that religion, as well as social values, have an important effect on women.

By analyzing the local government, Kawabata and Abe (2018) found intra-metropolitan disparities in FLFP, regular employment, and part-time employment rates. Investigating the intra-metropolitan spatial patterns of FLFP and their relationship to commuting times in Tokyo, the study finds that they vary significantly by marital status and the presence of children. For married mothers, the spatial clusters of low participation and regular employment rates were very large in inner suburbs, many overlapping with spatial clusters where men have longer commutes. The spatial regression results show that for married mothers, longer commute times were significantly associated with lower participation and regular employment rates, while for unmarried and childless married women, these relationships are mostly insignificant.

To understand the effects of reproductive activities on women's paid work, it is necessary to consider whether the tasks assigned to the woman in question are supported by other family members (Dedeoğlu, 2000: 151).

According to Ulutaş (2009), over time, as social solutions and organized resistance strategies have given way to poverty aid and local strategies, women have tried to meet the vital needs of the family by taking the largest share possible to access all of the poverty aid. This situation results in women's impoverishment and has also become a method of coping with poverty for poor women.

Increasing and supporting FLFP leads to a higher level of welfare. İzgi (2022) investigates the effects of foreign trade, unemployment and political stability on FLFP rates with panel data using FE, RE, and Driscoll-Kraay standard and CCE standard errors. The sample consists of nine Black Sea Cooperation (BSEC) member countries for the period (1999-2021). The findings of the three models applied: 1) FGLS (heteroskedastic), 2) FGLS (homoskedastic) AR(1) and no autocorrelation and 3) Prais Winsten results are consistent with each



other. The findings show that exports have a positive effect. According to Taşseven et al. (2016), the panel logit model examined female labour force participation in OECD countries (1990-2013). According to the model, the unemployment rate, gross domestic product per capita, and fertility rate positively and significantly affect the FLFP.

Lasassi and Tansel's (2020) study examines female labour force participation (FLFP) behaviour in five MENA countries, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, and Tunisia, over the last decade. Low FLFP rates in these countries, as in other MENA countries, are well documented. Using the age-period-cohort (APC) methodology, the study separates the PFP into age, period, and cohort effects. It discusses the implications of the results for possible government policies to increase FLFP rates.

Women's participation in the workforce is affected by the stages of the life course. It is possible that extended paid parental leave and part-time work rights may encourage women who would otherwise have a stronger commitment to part-time jobs or lower-level positions. On the employer side, such policies may lead employers to statistically discriminate against women for jobs leading to higher-level positions if employers need to know which women will take advantage of these options and which will not. Therefore, the possibility of women being considered for higher-level positions decreases (Blau & Kahn, 2013:255).

According to Özer and Biçerli (2003), who investigated the factors affecting the FLFP in Turkey (1988-2001), restricted least squares regression with fixed effects and random effects models with unit-specific fixed terms were used using panel data for all of Turkey, rural and urban areas. While no significant results were obtained from the many macro variables tested in the models, significant results were obtained from the variables of the rate of homemakers in the female active population, the rate of unpaid family workers in the employed female labour force and the rate of total retirees in the population aged 12+. This situation was expressed as an indicator that women were not integrated into the labour markets for the period in question, and emphasis was placed on examining its sociological aspect. Güçlü (2017) analyzed spatial panel regression models for the period 2008-2013 with (macro) data from 26 regions at the NUTS-2 Ö level in order to examine the factors determining the regional labour force participation of women in Turkey. Accordingly, it was concluded that the factors determining women's regional labour force participation are education, marital status, the ratio of dependent children to parents, migration and unemployment. In addition to these results, it was determined that there is a spatial dependency between the regions and indirect effects (spillover effects) of the factors determining regional labour force participation. Therefore, the effects of the factors determining women's labour force participation in a region on the participation rates of that region and neighbouring regions were determined separately.

According to Göksel (2013), three indices that can affect FLFP were determined: religion, social norms and

conservatism. The results are consistent with previous literature that shows that urbanization and education levels play an important role in FLFP. Another important innovation of this article is determining the effect of social norms and religion on rural and urban areas. While these factors negatively affect women's employment in urban areas, no significant effect is observed in rural areas. Özkaplan (2009) stated that gendered roles, expectations, and emotional labour create, feed and restructure the female/male work stratification and the wage gap. He stated that care work is seen as an exception for men in both home and work life, while it is seen as mandatory for women.

Karaoğlan and Ökten (2012) analyze the labour supply responses of married women to husbands losing their jobs (additional worker effect) and worsening unemployment conditions (discouraged worker effect). Using annual cross-sectional data from Turkey for the period 2000-2010, married women whose husbands are unemployed or underemployed are found to be more likely to participate in the labour force and work more hours. Women whose husbands lose their jobs are found to be more likely to increase their labour force participation. It is noted that worsening general unemployment conditions discourage women's labour supply response, and husbands tend to reduce their labour force participation when unemployment rates in their regions increase.

In recent studies, it is seen that there is a perspective that examines different topics on female labour force participation. So, there are changing lifestyles, psychology, and neurological disorders. For example, female employment in the USA has made a significant positive contribution to the adoption of technology at home. Bose et al. (2022), using factories and male mortality rates in World War II as a proxy for female labour force demand, found that the increase in female labour force participation between 1940 and 1950 increased average device ownership by 25 per cent. This result validates both panel and cross-section estimates and two different technologies. In another study, whether women's all-cause mortality risk changes according to different levels of alcohol consumption. The assumption is that working women are more likely to drink for various reasons (access, stress, male work culture) and that drinking increases their all-cause mortality risk (Wilsnack et al., 2009). Masum and Sparks (2022) show that alcohol consumption has a significant effect on all-cause mortality risk for adult women in the United States. Lifelong abstainers and former drinkers are at higher risk of all-cause mortality compared to other drinking groups, but they are generally concentrated in women in the oldest age categories and disproportionately among Hispanics and non-Hispanic blacks, which partially explains the cumulative mortality risk. Erten and Metzger (2019) find that undervalued exchange rates encourage female labour force participation, and the effects are more potent for developing countries. The study finds that a 10% undervaluation is associated with a 3.4 percentage point annual increase in FLFP, corresponding to a 7.1% increase relative to the mean outcome.



## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Research articles are one of the most important materials academics and students use in scientific literature. Women's participation in the workforce has been one of the research topics examined since the early 1960s. Although prevalent in every period, this topic, where the main themes change depending on the conjuncture and many different factors, also affects many economic, sociological and psychological factors. In this study, scientific articles published in 2000 and later examining FLFP were examined using the content analysis method.

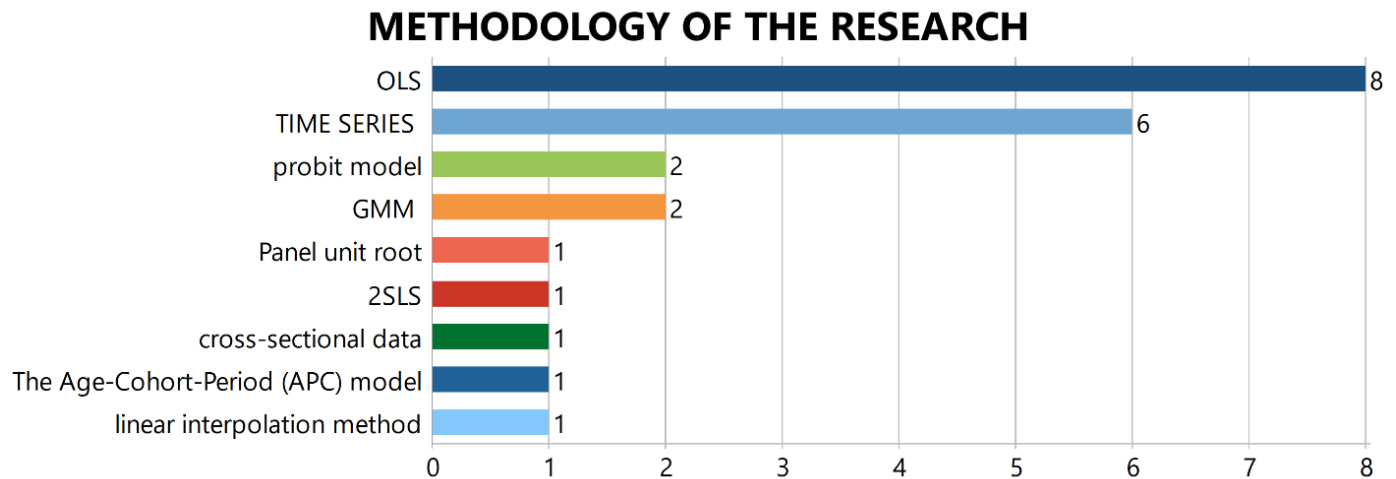
Qualitative content analysis includes a set of techniques for systematic analysis of texts and media. This method helps interpret hidden meanings in texts and images (Drisco & Maschi, 2016). Qualitative content analysis goes beyond word counting and quantitative content analysis and reveals the meanings hidden in words. The research questions (RQs) of this study are as follows:

From what perspectives were the articles examined regarding female labour force participation?

- How does the content of the articles explain the issue of female labor force participation?
- Do the articles address the causes and consequences of female labour force participation, and if so, how?
- What types of research methods were used in the articles?

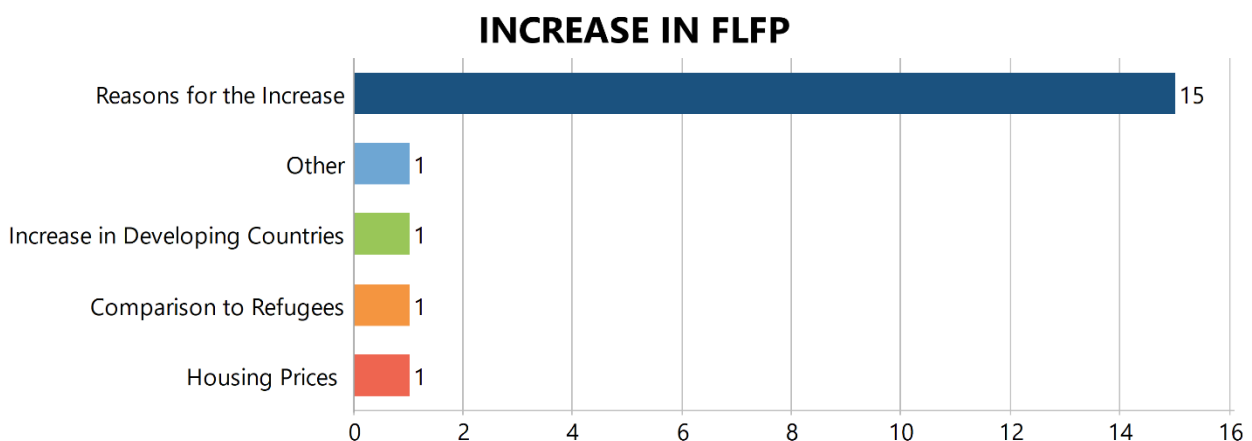
In order to make a comprehensive analysis of the literature, 18 articles from 2000 to the present were examined. The articles on the subject were examined in terms of the publication date, research method, reasons for the increase in the female labour force participation rate, reasons for the decrease and theories on the subject. The relevant literature material was taken into the Maxqda program and grouped in sub-code groups. It was determined that 3 of the 18 articles analyzed within the scope of this research were published in 2014. In addition, 2 publications were made in 2008, 2021 and 2022. It was seen that the other articles were one each in 2000, 2002, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Secondly the reviewed literature was grouped according to the methodology they used. The figure 1 shows the related subcodes.



**Figure 1: Statistics of Subcodes Related to the Research Method**

The scope of the articles were grouped in figure 2. According to the figure 2, 6 of the 18 articles analyzed used time series analysis, and 8 were carried out with the least squares (OLS) method. It was observed that 2 articles used the GMM (generalized method of moments), and 2 used the probit method. The other articles were one each of cross-section data analysis, Oaxaca-random two-stage method, age-group-period model (APC), linear interpolation method (LIM), recursive models, 2-stage least squares, overlapping generations, and secondary data analysis. 15 of the 18 articles examined the reasons for the increase in female labour force participation, while the other three articles focused on the increase in developing countries, comparison with refugees, housing prices, and other issues.



**Figure 2: Increase in Female Labor Force Participation Rates by Subject**

In the 18 articles examined, the reasons for the increase in female labour force participation were the education issue in 9 of them, the increase in child care opportunities in 7 of them, the age factor in 7 of them, the adaptation to home technologies in 5 of them, the married status of the woman in 4 of them, and the wage



followed by development, family, economics, employment, education, and married.

## **CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION**

Qualitative content analysis is a powerful tool for examining the literature in detail. This analysis examines the literature on female labour force participation rates. This approach reveals the information hidden in the texts and analyses in detail. With this research method, it has been possible to see different aspects of female labour force participation in different countries. Researchers and policymakers interested in this subject can use the results of this content analysis. According to the findings of this study, which examined the articles that were mainly from the field of economics, it was seen that the articles mostly used regression analysis and that the effects of the transition to the digital economy started to enter the literature when examined according to their subjects in the last 20 years.

Regarding gender roles, one of the most frequently mentioned topics in the literature is women's labour force participation rates. This study aimed to examine the literature on women's labour force participation rates between 2000-2023 using the Scopus database. According to the findings, when the publication dates are examined, it is seen that the number of publications made in 2008, 2014, and recent years is higher. While 15 of the 18 articles examined examine the reasons for the increase in women's labour force participation, one examines the increase in women's labour force participation rates in developing countries, one examines the situation of refugees, one investigates the effect of housing prices on participation, and one investigates other topics. In addition, for the reasons for the increase in FLFP, the factors such as education, increased childcare opportunities, age factor, adaptation to home technologies, women being married, and wages are the most effective, respectively. The following conclusion can be drawn from this: the "wage factor" is not as prominent in the increase in women's labour force participation as thought. When the reasons for the decrease in women's labour force participation are examined, it is seen that there are fertility, alcohol consumption, and transportation problems. These obstacles are seen to be gender-related, psychological and economic. Therefore, it can be easily stated as a significant finding of this study that gender-related, psychological and economic factors need to be improved to increase women's participation in the workforce.

This study, once again revealing that women's participation in the workforce has many different aspects, also reveals the need for good management of change over time. To ensure that individuals can express their social realities, it is necessary to overcome the difficulties of working in harmony with differences. On the one hand, it is important to prevent women's poverty and, on the other hand, to develop changes in social and economic life by considering the family.

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