

Research Note

Empowerment Level of Employed Women in Decision Making

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment of women has been recognized as a central issue in determining the status of women. The role of employed women has changed throughout the country and the world due to economic conditions and social demands. Employed women have tremendous pressure to develop their career as robust as their male counterparts while sustaining active engagement in personal life. Economic empowerment is the capacity of women to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth process in ways which recognise the value of their contribution, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Employment empowers women by providing financial independence, alternative source of social identity and exposure to power structures. In the economic sphere, paid employment is seen as essential to women's empowerment which focuses on access to employment opportunities and working conditions at work place and at community level, and on a woman's decision making power freedom of movement, control over resources and contribution to total family earnings in the household. This paper is an attempt to know the extent of empowerment of employed women. It was measured by four indicators of women empowerment. It was found that empowerment of employed women was in medium level under empowerment index. It concluded that there are number of structural barriers which limit the extent of empowerment.

Keywords: Employment, Empowerment, Economic empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Women are generally denied the ownership of property and control over assets, the ability to earn outside income can become an important instrument for the transformation of gender relations and challenge many traditional modes of social and economic relations (UNESCAP Report, 1999). Empowerment of women has been recognized as a central issue in determining the status of women. Empowerment covers aspects such as women's control over material and intellectual resources. Empowerment is a process, not an event, which challenges traditional power equations and relations. Abolition of gender-based discrimination in all institutions and structures of the society and participation of women in policy and decision-making processes at domestic and public levels are few dimensions of women

empowerment. Empowerment of women is a two-way process in which we empower and get empowered in turn. This may be broadly defined as control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. Women's empowerment in India principally aims at enhancing their social functioning by a quantitative and qualitative change, particularly in the field of educating health and employment. Redistribution of social power and a change in the control of resources in favour of women in any society is not possible unless they are healthy, educated and provided with some gainful employment opportunities (Goswami, 2013). Empowerment of women consist of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives, or to have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and free from shocks imposed on them by custom, belief and

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practice (GU, 2005). Research on women's status in developing countries reports widespread inequality between the genders. Inequality between women and men takes the form of economic inequality as well as differentials in education, health care, rights and access to a number of essential resources and differences in power in all spheres of life. Women's empowerment in terms of the ability to exercise control over their lives, control over their labor, freedom to move and interact, access to leadership position and control over reproduction (Rajagopalan, 2002).

Employment can be an important source of empowerment for women, particularly for cash and in the formal sector. Employment empowers women by providing financial independence, alternative source of social identity and exposure to power structures. It makes one confident in mastering the job situation and increases competence, i.e. better skill in performing a given task or a number of tasks. It makes one independent because confidence, competence and awareness makes one to decide on one's judgment, and finally, it makes one critical, to ask and raise questions, able to make differences between what is right and what is not wrong. Economic empowerment of women is the key to gender equality and well being of a nation. This would not only enhance women's capacity of decision making but also lead to reduction in corruption, armed conflict and violence against females in the long run (Blumberg, 2005). Women's household decision-making and freedom of movement are often used as indicators of women's empowerment. The ability to make decisions that affect one's life and the ability to move beyond the sphere of the home freely exemplify autonomy and were quickly adopted as basics to empowerment. Other aspects of women's lives have become important to empowerment as the concept has expanded to encompass power in a number of spheres and forms. When there are positive impacts on empowerment and market activity affects women's ability to influence resource allocation and domestic decision-making (Acharya *et al.*, 1983), drastic changes in women's empowerment as a result of employment are limited. It is argued that simply being employed is probably not enough to ensure women's empowerment because working does not necessarily

allow women to challenge the power structures that prevent their agency and full participation in society.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Sabour block of Bhagalpur district in Bihar during 2017. The selection of this particular block was made purposively due to the availability of five types of respondents; Assistant Professor, Doctors, Nurses, Teachers, Bankers and then five types of respondent were employed in agriculture colleges, schools, banks, hospitals in Sabour block. The random sampling procedure was adopted to select the respondents for the study. A sampling frame of married employed women was prepared for the study by visiting the different government sectors (*i.e.* Schools, colleges, banks and a hospital) of employed women. A sample of 100 married employed women was selected randomly. Since the focus of the study was to find out the empowerment of the employed women, the study includes only the married women with the assumption that they face more problems than unmarried employed women. Empowerment of employed women was measured by four indicators i.e. decision making, freedom of movement, control over resources and views on violence against women.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To explore the changes in decision making pattern of women due to employment responses of the respondents were obtained under three categories: independently, jointly with husband, husband only. The results in Table 1 indicates that majority of respondents were taking independent decision regarding purchasing for self (62.00%) and purchasing daily household items (57.00%). Whereas decision regarding obtaining health care (82.00%), staying with family (91.00%), going for outings (83.00%), purchasing for children (65.00%), children education (57.00%), children marriage (95.00%), household expenditure (61.00%), house repair and construction (56.00%), and equal treatments for girls and boys in the family were taken jointly with husband. The present findings were in line with the findings of Hillenbrand (2012), who observed that two-thirds of women (65.00%) said that husbands alone made decisions about women's health care and 32.00 per cent alone made

Table 1: Decision making pattern of employed women

S.No.	Aspects	Independent (%)	Jointly with husband (%)	Husband only (%)
1.	Obtaining health care	17	82	1
2.	Staying with family	9	91	0
3.	Going for outings	17	83	0
4.	Purchasing for children	35	65	0
5.	Purchasing for self	62	37	1
6.	Purchasing daily household items	57	39	4
7.	Children's education	34	57	9
8.	Children's marriage	4	95	1
9.	Household expenditure	39	61	0
10.	House repair and construction	6	56	38
11.	Equal treatment for girls and boys in the family	8	92	0

Table 2: Categorization according to Level of decision making pattern of the respondents (n= 100)

S.No.	Category	Per cent
1.	Low (<21.65)	13
2.	Medium (21.65-27.02)	81
3.	High (> 27.02)	6
Mean = 24.34 S.D = 2.68		

decisions about the child health care. Just 5.00 per cent of women said that they could solely control their own earnings and 5.00 per cent also said that they had independent say over other household decisions. Further it was found that women had least autonomy when it comes to make household purchases with less than 1.00 per cent of women claimed that they could make such decisions on their own.

Level of decision making pattern of the respondents was categories into low, medium, high on the basis of Mean \pm S.D. The data depicted in Table 2 revealed that 81.00 per cent of respondents were found in the medium level of decision making followed by 13.00 per cent respondents were found in the low level of decision making and only 6.00 per cent respondents were found in high level of decision making. Haque *et al.* (2011) found the level of women empowerment in decision making (both economic and household) as satisfactory but the empowerment in physical movement was very low and overall empowerment level of women in Bangladesh was the least.

CONCLUSION

The level of decision making of the employed women was found medium (81.00%) it means there is still need of employed women to empower. It is clearly evident from the result that employment is important to empowerment and that women who work have a greater likelihood of higher empowerment than those women that do not, but that the strength of the relationship varies by empowerment indicator. We cannot forget that empowerment a state of being as well as state of mind and before full empowerment can be realized, women need to not only act differently, but to think differently, to value themselves more, and to really believe that they are equal .In order for employment to be more empowering the structural barriers to women's rights and equality must be addressed in the household, the community, the state, the nation and around the globe.

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