
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: ROLE OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Education is the key factor for women empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. Discrimination of women from womb to tomb is well known. There is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors and women oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walk of life. In order to fight against the socially constructed gender biases, women have to swim against the system that requires more strength. Such strength comes from the process of empowerment and empowerment will come from the education. And rural development will come from women empowerment. This paper aim to create the awareness among the women's about different empowerment and identifying the impact of education in women overall empowerment in Madurai district. Totally 455 women respondents between 20-50 age group were selected for the study. Findings of the study shows that educational qualification play significant role in women empowerment and it concludes that if women's empowerment is to be effected, it can be carried out only through the medium of education. Hence, it is of foremost importance to raise the level of education amongst women.

Key words: Women empowerment, education.

1. Introduction

There are always a number of components in the society which are underprivileged of their basic rights in every society, state and nation, but these components lack in the awareness of their rights. If we enlist such components from the society, then women would top this list. In fact, women are the most important factor of every society. Even though everybody is aware of this fact, yet nobody is ready to accept this fact. As a result, the importance which used to be given to women is declining in today's society. As a significance of this growing tendency of underestimating women such as to make them occupy a secondary position in society and to deny them of their basic rights, the need for empowering women was felt. Today we enjoy the benefits of being citizens of a free nation, but we really need to think whether each of the citizens of our country is really free or enjoying freedom, in the true sense of the term. If we consider our country, each Indian citizen is given certain basic rights. The Structure of our nation doesn't discriminate between men and women, but our society has destitute women of certain basic rights, which were bestowed upon them by our Constitution. Due to such current situation, it was needed to make women free from all the fetters and to empower them as well. This is nothing but empowerment of women.

Women's empowerment is not limited only for the Indian society. If we deliberate the global aspect in this regard, we see that women are being given equal treatment in developed nations. In fact, if we take a recollection of history, we come to know that women have always been given secondary position in society, but the difference between men and women created by the Nature is but natural. It is education through which we realize this fact. When American women realized this, they opposed this unfairness which was meted out to them by way of a huge movement, through which they asked for equal rights. For eliminating this injustice, the UNO (United Nations' Organization) framed an agreement which is called 'The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women' (CEDAW), which further led to the formation of Women's Commission.

Taking an account of this background, we come to know that women's empowerment has now become a topic of global discussion. Seeing all the aspects of this discussion, we will realize that education is the only means for empowerment of women. Therefore, literacy should spread amongst women. The literacy rate amongst the women in the post-

Independent Era is not as per the expectations. We, as a nation, dream of becoming a Super Power by 2020. For becoming a Super Power, each element of our society/ nation should contribute in the nation building process. But women, who are a major factor of this society, aren't literate then we can't expect to become a Super Power. Therefore, it is urgent for us to know the importance of women's education, which would, in turn, give a motivation to the process of women's empowerment. This paper aim to create the awareness among the women's about different empowerment and identifying the impact of education in women overall empowerment.

2. Literature review

The term “empowerment” has been overused, misused, and coopted (Stromquist, 2002; Stacki and Monkman, 2003). It is commonly deployed as a synonym for enabling, participating, and speaking out. The notion that education leads to women's empowerment has gained popularity, although we still have much to learn about how education actually empowers women (Stromquist, 2002; DaCosta, 2008; Murphy-Graham, 2008). Nevertheless, in the past 10 years, the goal of women's empowerment (often linked with women's education) has received serious attention, as well as funding by donors and international agencies (Unterhalter, 2007; Mosedale, 2005; Malhotra et al., 2002; Papart et al., 2002; Oxaal and Baden, 1997). Despite its widespread use and occasional abuse, there is some agreement (e.g. Kabeer, 1999; Malhotra et al., 2002; Mosedale, 2005) that empowerment:

- Is a multidimensional process of change from a condition of disempowerment?
- Cannot be bestowed by a third party, as individuals are active agents in this process.
- Is shaped by the context, and so indicators of empowerment must be sensitive to the context in which women live.

At the core of the word empowerment is “power.” Therefore in conceptualizing empowerment I draw on previous scholarship on the theme, as well as feminist scholarship that views power as capacity (Karlberg, 2005). Hartstock (1983), commenting on the feminist theory of power, describes how “women's stress on power not as domination but as capacity, on power as a capacity of the community as a whole, suggests that women's experience of connection and relation have more consequences for understandings of power and may hold

resources for a more laboratory understanding”. The idea of power as capacity is at the core of the conceptualization of empowerment in this article, where I view women’s empowerment as a process through which women come to recognize their inherent worth, their “power within” (Kabeer, 1994), and begin to participate on equal terms with men in efforts to dismantle patriarchy and promote social and economic development. Women’s empowerment is not an end in itself, but a pivotal step towards establishing gender equality. In part, gender equality is manifest through a just and equitable sharing of responsibilities by men and women. Gender equality is not synonymous with gender parity, and does not mean that men and women are the same or need to split work exactly in half. Rather, it characterizes social conditions and relationships in which a vision of mutuality and cooperation shapes interactions and enables men and women to reach their full potential (hooks, 2000).

3. Hypothesis of the study

H₀₁: There is no significant difference exist between educational qualifications with regards to different types of empowerments.

H₀₂: Different level of empowerments don’t play significant role in predicting overall empowerment.

4. Methods

An official Census 2011 detail of Madurai, a district of Tamil Nadu has been released by Directorate of Census Operations in Tamil Nadu. In 2011, Madurai had population of 3,038,252 of which male and female were 1,526,475 and 1,511,777 respectively. Average literacy rate of Madurai in 2011 were 83.45 compared to 77.82 of 2001. If things are looked out at gender wise, male and female literacy were 89.72 and 77.16 respectively. This study is basically descriptive in nature. Madurai district comprises thirteen revenue blocks, from those 455 women respondents between 20-50 age group were selected for the study. Researcher used convenient sampling method for data collection and well-structured questionnaire was used data collection tool. Using survey method researcher collects the questionnaires with help of well-trained research associates. Respondents were asked to select the options based

on their opinions in 5 point Likert scale (1-Strongly disagree to 5- Strongly agree). The research instrument includes questions related with different type of empowerment like personal empowerment, educational empowerment, economic empowerment, social empowerment, psychological empowerment, technical empowerment, political empowerment and demographic characteristics like age, educational qualification, family income, employment type and marital status.

5. Findings of the study

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic characteristics	Options	Frequency	%
Age	20-29 Years	251	55
	30-39 Years	109	24
	Above 40 Years	95	21
Educational Qualification	Arts & Science (UG)	206	45
	Arts & Science (PG)	75	16
	Professional (UG)	101	22
	Diploma	48	11
	Illiterates	25	5
Marital Status	Married	231	51
	Unmarried	185	41
	Widow	39	9
Employment type	House wife	243	53
	Employed	212	47
Monthly Income	Below Rs.20000	323	71
	Rs.20001-Rs.40000	96	21
	Rs.40001-Rs.60000	36	8
	Total	455	100

Table no 1 concludes that 55 percent respondents were between 20-29 years old, 45 percent responders were have under graduation level education qualification in the field of art and science. 51 percent respondents were married and 41 percent respondents were unmarried. 53

percent respondents were housewives and 47 percent respondents were employed in government, private industries. 71 percent respondents' monthly income was less than Rs.20000.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and Cronbach alpha coefficients

Different type of empowerment	Mean	SD	Cronbach alpha coefficients
Personal empowerment	3.26	0.94	0.763
Social empowerment	3.28	0.95	0.754
Economic empowerment	3.36	0.92	0.811
Educational empowerment	2.96	1.19	0.879
Psychological empowerment	3.07	1.13	0.759
Technical empowerment	3.18	1.00	0.915
Political empowerment	3.23	1.17	0.785
Overall empowerment	3.86	0.94	0.704

Table no 2 shows that “Economic empowerment” and “Social empowerment” are the top ranked empowerments with the mean value of 3.36 and 3.28. “Psychological empowerment” and “Educational empowerment” are the last ranked empowerments with the mean value of 3.07 and 2.96. Cronbach alpha coefficient ranges from 0.704 to 0.915; it shows that reliability coefficients for above factors are more than 0.60, which is an acceptable value (Malhotra, 2004). So, the items constituting each variable under study have reasonable internal consistency.

Table 3: Effects of educational qualifications on different types of empowerment

Different types of empowerment	F value	p value	Result
Personal empowerment	3.50	0.008**	H ₀ Rejected
Social empowerment	2.11	0.078*	H ₀ Rejected
Economic empowerment	6.26	0.000**	H ₀ Rejected
Educational empowerment	5.74	0.000**	H ₀ Rejected
Psychological empowerment	4.96	0.001**	H ₀ Rejected
Technical empowerment	5.05	0.001**	H ₀ Rejected

Political empowerment	4.13	0.003**	H ₀ Rejected
Overall empowerment	7.29	0.000**	H ₀ Rejected

** Significant at 1 percent

* Significant at 5 percent

Since p value for all type of empowerment is less than 0.05, hence null hypothesis is rejected and it concludes that there is significant difference exist between educational qualifications with regards to different types of empowerments.

Table 4: Impact of different empowerments on overall empowerment

Different empowerments	Beta	t	Sig.
Personal empowerment	0.12	1.62	0.105
Social empowerment	0.06	0.84	0.404
Economic empowerment	-0.16	-1.85	0.065
Educational empowerment	0.42	6.70	0.000**
Psychological empowerment	0.54	5.59	0.000**
Technical empowerment	0.10	1.30	0.195
Political empowerment	-0.33	-4.52	0.000**
Multiple R	0.773		
R ²	0.598		
Adjusted R ²	0.592		
F value	94.973		
P value	0.000**		

** Significant at 1 percent

From that above table, it was observed that the overall empowerment explained 60 percent of the variance for the criterion measure. It entailed that 40 percent of overall empowerment was explained by something other than above mentioned empowerment types. Summary of Regression Analysis shows that different types of empowerment were treating as predictors and overall empowerment as criterion variable. It was observed that the overall regression

model was significant ($F=94.973$, $p<0.000$). Hence null hypothesis is rejected; educational empowerment, psychological empowerment and political empowerment are the main and significant predictors for overall empowerment.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The above study was carried out in Madurai, from the state of Tamilnadu, one of the fast developing districts in the state. From the above findings, overall empowerment and other related empowerment types are also relatively influenced by the respondents' educational qualification. Regression analysis shows that educational empowerment, political and psychological empowerments were the significant predictors for overall empowerment. The process of empowering entails much more than awareness of alternative, women's rights and the nature of the requirements. With more education women have greater access to employment opportunities and increase the ability to secure their own economic resources. This study helps to create the awareness about empowering women among 13 revenue blocks of Madurai. During the data collection most the respondents don't have any awareness about empowerment, even though they are educated. Since education is the primary avenue for empowerment and there are other dimension that is also have impact on empowerment.

Present study suggest that General awareness programme should be taken among the women of rural area to sensitizes them about the modern development of science and technology so that they could give up superstitious believes and attitudes. Women of rural areas should be trained up in different vocational courses like handloom and textile, poultry farms, fish farming, piggery, dairy farm, food and nutrition, fashion and designing, beauty parlour etc. Women reservation policy should strictly be maintained in all aspects like appointment in govt. and semi govt. offices, admission in to the educational institutions, participating in the politics etc.

This study concludes that mostly gender barriers still continue particularly on rural area. Research area covers more number of rural areas. Due to current socio economic constrains in rural area, the potential of women have not been fully utilized and further pushed back into the social hierarchy. Most of the educated women feel that, they can able to achieve more than men. But inbuilt idea that women are capable of doing less work than men and less

efficient than men. The lack of education becomes the obstacles in getting empowerment. Taking an overview of all the above aspects, we come to know that the transformation is very much needed, accepting at the same time that its pace may be less than the desired pace. For giving this process a momentum, education is indispensable. Hence, if women's empowerment is to be effected, it can be carried out only through the medium of education. Hence, it is of foremost importance to raise the level of education amongst women.

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