



Determinants of Women Empowerment : A Study of Ranchi Town

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Women empowerment may be viewed as a process of developing capabilities to strengthen their power to make choices and influence decision which affect women's lives. It is a complex phenomena having multiple dimensions and domains. Women empowerment at the household level will gradually lead to their empowerment at the macro level, thereby enabling women, who constitute nearly 50% of the population, to be actively engaged in the development process. With the help of primary data collected from 200 women across various socio-religious groups of Ranchi town, the empowerment status of the respondents has been measured. Realizing the importance of high level of women empowerment the study identifies seven determinants of women empowerment on the basis of available literature. The statistically significant multiple linear regression analysis ($F=28.355$; $R^2 = 0.5429$) attempts to examine the association between women empowerment (Y) and the explanatory variables (Xs) found age, type of family, education and work status to be statistically significant (t-test at 5% level of significance and d.f. “). The first two being demographic characteristics and not capable of change, the main focus on ensuring a high level of women empowerment shall thus lie on imparting appropriate education that enhances employability - self or wage.

Key words : Women Empowerment, Education, Employment.

Introduction

Increasing realization of women's contribution to sustainable development of an economy in recent decades and the importance of women empowerment as a policy measure to achieve growth with gender equality, has necessitated the identification of the determinants of women empowerment. This article is an effort in this direction. It firstly conceptualizes women empowerment and establishes the rationale for it. In this context it also deals with the views on women empowerment regarding its status as a dependent as well as an explanatory variable. There after, considering it as a dependant variable, it identifies the factors influencing women empowerment and explores the relative contribution of each of the determinant on women empowerment. The study identifies seven explanatory variable on the basis of past studies and with the help of empirical analysis the study finds education the most influential one. Women empowerment status in the study area has been computed across the socio-religious groups with the help of suitably designed indices. The results of the econometric study based on data collected from Ranchi town through two - stage stratified random sampling, may be useful to academicians and policy makers alike in their strife to bring a more egalitarian society where women are expected to play an active role in all spheres.

Women Empowerment - A Complex and Multifaceted Concept

‘Empowerment’ refers to the process by which power is gained, developed, seized, facilitated or given. ‘Women Empowerment’ implies equipping women with power to enable them to enhance their capabilities, enlarge their choices, and thus contribute to and benefit from the process of development and thereby reduce the glaring disparities prevalent in all

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spheres of life in all regions of the world. Women Empowerment has been viewed as a process in which women gain greater share of control over all types of resources - physical, intellectual, social and economical, control over ideology, beliefs, values and attitudes, as well as control over decision making in home community, society and nation. In other words women empowerment implies a situation where women have more control over their lives to improve their personal, social economic, and political conditions so as to command greater respect in family and society.

Quantification of women empowerment is an important but challenging task considering the complex nature of the phenomenon. Gender inequality, which is at the root of women's disempowerment (or powerlessness) is inherently complex and spread across different spheres namely economic, social, legal, political, physiological etc. Hence, a single indicator is insufficient and incomplete to measure women empowerment, which rightly considered as a multi-domain and multi-dimensional concept.

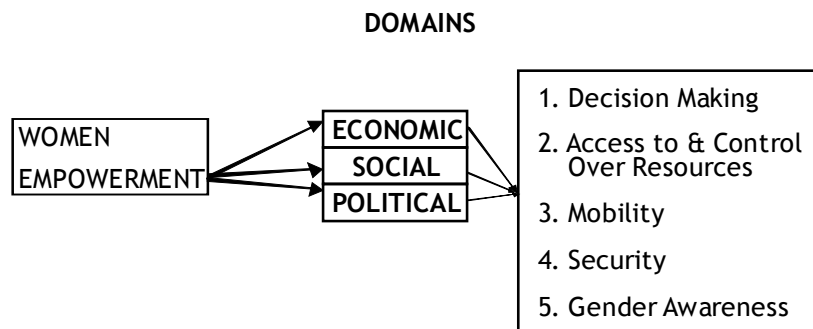
The domains refer to the multiple areas of life in which a person may exercise his or her choice and control. Mason (1986) has pointed out that men and women are typically unequal in various ways and the nature and extent of inequality also varies across the social setting and stages in life cycle. A number of studies since then have shown that a women may be empowered in some areas of life but not in others (Hashemi, et al, 1996, Malhotra and Mather, 1997, Kishor, 1995) and thus advocated measuring empowerment in multiple domains. The socio cultural factors influence women's life to a great extent as cultures some time give women greater domestic power in certain areas but at the same time, may deny them power in public sphere. Moreover, extent of power women enjoy is not necessarily the same for women belonging to different socio-religious group. The three important domains - economic, social and political, are considered to be equally important for measuring women empowerment and in this study these have been assigned equal weights. Women having a secured and enhanced life, having the capability to address social issues and promote the well being of the deprived and greater participation in governance represents economic, social and political empowerments respectively, and will enable women to patronize their needs and interests and hence create a conducive environment for overall development of self and community.

Each of the three domains of women empowerment economic, social and political may further be sub-divided into sub-domains or dimensions which relate to the various aspects of women's life along which a woman may feel empowered in that particular domain. From detailed study of available literature five important dimensions have been identified as mentioned below and have been selected for this study.

"Decision making" autonomy enables women to prioritize their needs as well as ensures equality in the allocation of resources among sons and daughters for education, health care etc., which in turn, will contribute to share the fruits of human development equally. "Access to and control over resources" as the second dimension, has been selected on the ground that women's status and respect as well as ability to exercise their choices is directly linked with this dimension. "Mobility dimension" has been selected on the ground that if women have the freedom of mobility, then this will broaden their horizon and promote women's agency in all other areas of life. "Security dimension" has been selected as a safeguard against vulnerability realizing that without security social, economical, political, there will be no empowerment in true sense. Finally "Gender awareness dimension" has

been selected on the ground that unless women are made aware about the existing gender discrimination and its consequences, they will not be able to challenge their deprivation and get control over their lives and disempowerment will be a perpetual phenomena for generations to come.

Each of the five dimensions are relevant in economic, social and political sphere of women's lives. Thus women empowerment is multi-domain and multi-dimensional which has been depicted in the following flow-diagram.



Rationale for Women Empowerment

In spite of growing concern on human wellbeing in the development process, majority of women and girl child are still deprived of adequate nutrition, healthcare and love, access to education, employment, social security and respect to name a few. Family, religion, media, law, cultural beliefs and practices, education, institutions, political system define and reinforce gender inequalities. Women are projected as being inferior to men and therefore have a secondary status in spite of being the hardest working member of the family and totally neglecting her reproductive role in perpetuating the family tree. It has been observed that almost in every sphere of human functioning, the roles defined for women are fewer and less emancipating than those that men have and the obligations women have are more limiting than those of men (Kishor and Gupta, 2003). Moreover, women face gender inequalities within the family which take many form like survival inequality, natality inequality, unequal facilities (access to nutrition, health and education), ownership inequality, unequal share of household, chores and childcare and domestic violence (Sen 2005). Hence, it is women, who must recognize the need for correcting gender disparity at household level which will enabling them to challenge the unequal gender norms and traditional practices that dispossess, devalue and disempower them. To quote Malhotra (2001) "empowerment implies women must have not only equal capabilities (such as education), access to opportunities and resources (such as employment and land) but they must have strategic choices and decisions". Empowerment of women is essential for women, as having more power is intrinsically valuable and at the same time empowerment has direct and indirect impact on other aspects of development. It has been observed that women are directly related with the factors that affect the quality of life. For example, age at marriage, childbearing and rearing, health and nutrition, fertility and mortality (infant & maternal), education, employment, socio-cultural life, politics and several other facets of life directly involve women. Therefore, it is women, who matter most, because if one woman is empowered through education, health, information, skills etc., then a whole family benefits in terms of improved child wellbeing, less income poverty, reduced mortality and fertility, less insecurity, more skills and productivity and overall betterment of the family (Govindasamy and Ramesh,

1996; Murthi et al, 1995; Sen, 1999; Cochrane, 1979). These benefits are spread gradually over the whole society.

It is, therefore, urgently required that women must come forward to take the challenge to overcome the prevailing (man made or culturally imposed) disparities in the societal structure in order to enable them to enhance the conditions of their lives and the lives of their families and wider communities, which in turn will facilitate to built strong foundations for inclusive growth. Hence, the relevance of empowering women at household level, in order to enable women to take control over the circumstances of their lives, rests on the assumption that their empowerment will produce a powerful impact on the wellbeing of the family, society and ultimately on economic development.

Women Empowerment - A Dependent as well as Explanatory Variable.

There are various views on measurement issue of women empowerment which necessitates its identification a a dependent or independent variable. One view considers empowerment as an independent variable and has emphasized on proxy measures in which variables like age, education empowerment, income, employment status, etc. are used as proxies to women empowerment. On these lines, a number of studies carried out in Asia, Africa, Middle East, Latin America and Caribbean countries, considers women empowerment as an independent variable and impact of women empowerment on demographic and socio-economic outcomes have been studied.

But this view is not holistic as women empowerment is about transforming power relation, so it can not be measured through proxies. As possession of assets or resources, having education or engaged in paid job, do not merely translate itself into power to control or give freedom of choice of action. Hence, there has been increasing efforts among researchers to measure empowerment through direct measures. To quote Kabeer (1999) "the assessment of empowerment process is not only quantitative, but subjective as well and measurement must be in terms of women's participation, interpretation and validated by women themselves". Literature review suggests that several efforts have been made to develop comprehensive framework describing various dimensions on which women can be empowered (Malhotra et al, 2002), like decision making, access to and control over resources, freedom of movement and so on.

Considering it as an independent variable, another view point considers the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) as the indicator of women empowerment. It measures the extent to which a woman has influence in decision making in politics, in professional life and in organizations. This measure has been used widely in advocating the empowerment of women. But with the GEM, the difficulty lies in the fact that the indicators used in the index were supposed to reflect the extent of women's economic and political power only.

Hence, for the purpose of the present study Gender Empowerment Measure approach is inappropriate. Also, as it is a macro concept and does not capture the multi-dimensionality of women empowerment.

The other view on measurement of empowerment considers women empowerment as the dependent variable. The present study is based on this approach. Through extensive survey of literature it seeks to identify the important determinants and thereafter, with the help

of primary data and appropriate econometric tools, it attempts to examine the relative importance of each determinants on women empowerment in the study area.

Determinants of Women Empowerment

Literature review suggests that there are multiple factors influencing women empowerment. These factors (or variables) are the determinants of women empowerment. Studies by Sather et al (2000) in Pakistan used age at marriage, education and work participation as determinants of women empowerment. According to them, these proxy measures are extremely context dependent and do not translate higher age at marriage, higher education attainment or paid job into empowerment. Whereas positive influence of 'age of woman' on her empowerment status has been discussed by Mason (1986), and spousal age difference has been discussed by Kishor (2004) in explaining the status of women empowerment. Family structure (nuclear family), marital advantage, financial autonomy, freedom of movement and employment have, positive impact on women's empowerment is discussed by Kabeer (1999). Among all these variables, education and employment have been repeatedly used by researchers to explain women employment (Malhotra and Mather, 1997).

On the other hand, Mason and Smith (2000) argued that women's household empowerment is better predicted by cultural concepts than women's personal, socio-economic and demographic traits. This point is also established in Jejeebhoy and Sather's study (2001) regarding comparison of empowerment in Pakistan and two other Indian states.

On basis of literature on women empowerment, the present study identifies seven independent variables that determine empowerment of women, which have been grouped under four heads :

- ♦ Demographic characteristics such as age, age at marriage, and spousal age gap.
- ♦ Household characteristics such as structure and size of household
- ♦ Women's educational attainment.
- ♦ Work status of women (whether engaged in paid work or not)

Theoretically, age of women plays an important role in influencing empowerment status, as with increase of age, experience increases, respect in close relations improves and women feel more empowered. Conceptually, women who marry at a later age have more self confidence and more autonomy than those who marry at an earlier age. Larger spousal age difference leads to more male dominance and greater inequality between husband and wife in various domains and dimensions. Impact of women living in nuclear family on their empowerment status is normally positive. In a nuclear family structure, a women is likely to have more autonomy in household decision making, control over money matters and other important decision making than in a joint family structure. Size of family has a negative association with women's empowerment status, as women discharge more family responsibilities and they get less leisure time for exercising their choices.

Methodology for Sampling Design and Data Collection

This work is based on primary data collected during the period of December 2010 to February 2011 from 200 households selecting the eldest married women between 18 - 60 years as the unit of the study. Two stage stratified random sampling has been used for this study. Considering the ethenic composition of population in Ranchi town, the first stratification is based on social groups (tribal and non-tribal) and the second stratification on basis of religious communities (Christian and non-Christian among Tribals and Hindu, Muslim and

others among Non-tribals). To make the sample more representative of the heterogeneous population, proportionate random sampling technique has been used. The sampling design was framed on the basis of secondary data obtained from Census of India (2001) and Ranchi Municipal Corporation ward-list - 2001.

Data for this study was collected through personal interview of the sampled women with the assistance of a pre-framed questionnaire. Data on the seven identified explanatory variables were recorded and tabulated. Empowerment status of each respondent was computed through the responses recorded in the forty questions covering all the 3 domains and 5 dimensions selected for this study. Respondent's answer to each question was assessed by coding the responses into a four-point measurement scale - 4,3,2,1, in decreasing order of power. Thereafter the scores were converted into a dichotomized form, 1 for full power (merging scores 4 & 3) and 0 for no power (merging scores 1 & 2). The domain and dimension indices for each respondent was computed by dividing her scores by the total number of questions in the respective sphere. By using method of simple averages, the composite women empowerment index was obtained for each of the 200 respondents (Dasgupta & Srivastava, 2012).

Relative Contributions of Various Determinants on Women Empowerment

The following section aims at exploring the impact of each explanatory variables (X's) on women empowerment Y (the dependent variable) and seeks to identify the most significant variable in determining women empowerment in Ranchi town, the study area.

A descriptive analysis (mean values) of determinants of women empowerment of 200 respondents across the two social groups (tribal and non-tribal) on the basis of information gathered through the questionnaire is presented in table below to reveal the distinguishing characteristics.:

Table : 1
Mean Value of the Determinants of Women's
Empowerment -Across Soci-Religious Groups in Ranchi Town

| Determinants | Tribal | Non Tribal | Overall |
|---|---------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. Average Age in years (X_1) | 41.07 | 42.01 | 41.8 |
| 2. Average Age at Marriage (X_2) | 21.36 | 20.58 | 20.76 |
| 3. Average Spousal Age Difference (X_3) | 6 | 6.49 | 6.38 |
| 4. Average Family Type (Nuclear) in percent (X_4) | 75 | 73 | 73.5 |
| 5. Average Size of Family in Nos. of family members (X_5) | 4.98 | 4.93 | 4.94 |
| 6. Average Year of Education in years (X_6) | 8.66 | 11.97 | 11.24 |
| 7. Average Work Status in % of those working (X_7) | 61 | 35 | 41 |

Source : Computed from Primary Data

Descriptive data analysis of respondent's profile portrays :

- ♦ Tribal women are more in the younger age cohort than the non-tribal women. In the sampled households, about 20.5% of tribal women are below 30 years (9 out of 44) compared to 10.9% (17 out of 156) of non-tribal women.
- ♦ Average age at marriage of tribal women is more (21.4 years) than that of the average of non-tribal women (20.6 years). However, there is a negligible difference regarding

average spousal age gap (6 years for tribals and 6.5 years for non-tribals) across the two social groups.

- ♦ 75% of tribal women live in nuclear family, whereas a slightly lower percentage (73%) of women belonging to non-tribal group live in a nuclear family.
- ♦ Regarding average size of household, no significant difference has been noticed across the two groups.
- ♦ A significant gap has been noticed in educational attainment level between tribal and non-tribal women in the study area.
- ♦ 20.5% (9 out of 44) of tribal women are illiterate compared to 8.9% (14 out of 156) non-tribal women. Non-tribal women on average have nearly 12 years of education, while tribal women have less than 9 years of education on average in the study area.
- ♦ A larger proportion of tribal women (61%) are engaged in paid work as compared to the non-tribal women (35%) in Ranchi town.

Women empowerment indices were computed for each of the respondent, which itself was a composite index (simple average of domain/dimension indices). The present article based on the study seeks to explore the relative contributions of each of the determinants of women empowerment on the empowerment status of women with the help of statistical tool of regression analysis. Since, women empowerment is influenced by a simultaneous working of many factors (or determinants), the relative contribution of each of the factors in explaining empowerment of women cannot be assessed correctly unless they are examined together. Hence, multiple regression analysis has been used to estimate the amount of variance in women empowerment by each of the independent variables collectively.

To examine the relative contribution of each explanatory variable on women empowerment, multiple regression equation of Y on X ($X = X_1, X_2, \dots, X_7$ taken collectively) has been formulated in linear form, which has been found to be most appropriate.

The fitted multiple regression model is

$$Y = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5 + b_6X_6 + b_7X_7$$

Where: Y is the dependent variable (women empowerment) b_0 is the intercept, b_1, \dots, b_7 are the slope co-efficient X_1, X_2, \dots, X_7 are the explanatory variables representing age (X_1); age at marriage (X_2); spousal age gap (X_3); type of family (X_4); size of family (X_5); education (X_6) and work status (X_7) respectively.

The estimated model on basis of available data and summary output of multiple regression model is presented below:

$$Y = 0.1127 + 0.0041X_1 + 0.0037X_2 - 0.0030X_3 + 0.0581X_4 + 0.0063X_5 + 0.0144X_6 + 0.1477X_7$$

F = 28.355 $R^2 = 0.5429$

The Results indicate that :

1. Multiple regression equation is overall significant (F= 28.355)
2. All explanatory variables except (X_3) Spousal age gap have positive association with women empowerment.
3. The explanatory power of the model is quite good as depicted by R^2 (0.5429) i.e. 54.29% variation in women empowerment is due to variation in the seven selected explanatory variable.

4. t-test statistics indicate that among the seven explanatory variables, age (X_1), type of family (X_4), education (X_6) and work status (X_7) are statistically significant at 5% level of significance with degree of freedom =:.
5. Size of slope coefficients (b's) indicate impact of work status (X_7) on women empowerment is largest ($b=0.1477$), followed by type of family (X_4) and education (X_6), while impact of age (X_1) is least on women empowerment among the 4 significant explanatory variables.
6. Although impact of work status ($b=0.1477$) on women empowerment is greatest, but considering the reliability of X_6 and X_7 in influencing women empowerment, education (X_6) emerges as the more influential variable as the size of standard error is least (0.0020).
7. Of the four significant explanatory variables, age at marriage (X_1) and type of family (X_4) are demographic variables determined by socio-cultural norms and do not have much scope for intervention.
8. Education (X_6) and work status (X_7) are socio-economic variables which may be influenced by policy interventions.

Table - 2
Summary Output of Multiple Regression of Women Empowerment
(Y) on Various Determinants (Xs) in the Study Area

| Sl. No. | Explanatory Variable (x's) | Estimated value of coefficient(b) | Std. error of coefficient | t-value of coefficient |
|---------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Age (X_1) | 0.0041 | 0.0011 | 3.6345 |
| 2 | Age at marriage (X_2) | 0.0037 | 0.0027 | 1.3644 |
| 3 | Spousal age gap (X_3) | 0.0030 | 0.0029 | -1.0246 |
| 4 | Type of family (X_4) | 0.0581 | 0.0277 | 2.1001 |
| 5 | Size of family (X_5) | 0.0063 | 0.0049 | 1.2799 |
| 6 | Education (X_6) | 0.0144 | 0.0020 | 7.0992 |
| 7 | Work Status (X_7) | 0.1477 | 0.0188 | 7.8724 |

Source : Own compilation from primary data

Work status is largely influenced by educational status hence education may be claimed to be the most significant explanatory variable influencing women empowerment. Theoretical education deserves special attention since it largely conditions the quality of women's lives and is highly responsive to policy interventions. Education is also the first step towards the women empowerment because it enables women to respond to challenges, to confront the traditional rules and have greater control over their lives. Moreover, education equips women with knowledge, skills, self-confidence, self-respect and freedom to participate, sustain and excel in all spheres. It also enables them to understand the social and legal rights, become economically independent and have a voice in the affairs of family and community. Thus education confers a host of benefits-social, economic and political, all of which taken together make a woman empowered.

As education and work status have been established as the most significant variable capable of being influenced by appropriate measures, the paper serves as an eye-opener to policy makers. There is urgent need to enhance the educational status of women and at the same time ensure their larger participation in the work force. Moreover, the type of education

being imparted to women needs special attention, ensuring that it provides them avenues for greater employment opportunities - self or hired. Vocational education, entrepreneurship development, financial assistance etc. have an important role to play in this regard. The ultimate aim however, is to ensure largest possible expansion of the significant explanatory variables, which have a positive impact on women empowerment, which itself holds an important place in the well being of family and society and overall development of an economy.

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