

Intrahousehold Personal Decision-making Power as a Measure of Women Empowerment and Its Effect on Children's Education- A Study of Rural India

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ABSTRACT

Empowering of women has been recognized as one of the important pathways of economic development of a country because the positive effects of women empowerment trickles down to various channels like improving future human capital, improving labor market outcomes etc. This study finds the determinants of women empowerment as measured by say in personal matters (Intrahousehold personal decision-making power) in rural areas of India, and also find the effect of the same on children's education through primary survey. Through the study we find that there is significant positive relation between mothers' education, encouragement from parents to study, house ownership of parents, increased self-esteem and self-efficacy of women and health care knowledge of women with their empowerment. Women empowerment has positive influence on their children as increase in women empowerment leads to increased test score of children. This indicates the importance of women empowerment as a determinant of child education.

Keywords: Developing economy; Intrahousehold personal decision-making power; women empowerment; children's education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The fifth Sustainable development goal, gender equality can be achieved through women empowerment. The inclusion of women empowerment among the sustainable development goals itself shows the importance of this topic (Maiorano *et al.*, 2021). Women empowerment in simple terms indicates the fact that women are given equal opportunities

in life which will help them to be independent and are free to express their opinions and have the capacity to make decisions regarding themselves. Empowerment can be defined as a process which converts power relation between individuals (Batliwala, 2007). Empowerment as a process helps women to attain knowledge and skill (Cornwall, 2016). It can also be noted that empowerment is both a process and outcome (Eerdewijk *et al.*, 2017).

Women empowerment implies women have equal earning opportunities, with equal political participation and access to education and health (Duflo, 2012). Empowerment leads to stronger decision-making power of women (Batliwala *et al.*, 1995; Kabeer, 2005) and also helps women to make decisions freely which helps them to lead a better life by removing the gender constraints (Agarwal, 2015; Gasper & Staveren, 2003; Kabeer, 1999; Kabeer, 2016). Access to productive resources is a crucial determinant of empowerment which ultimately helps to improve the bargaining status of women in the household (Selhausen, 2016; Sell & Minot, 2018). As per the definition of United Nations, women empowerment has three concepts: involvement in decision-making, access to productive resources, and extended choices of individual women (UNFPA, 2005; Malhotra & Schuler, 2005; Basu & Koolwal, 2005; Robinson *et al.*, 2017). In this paper, we are focusing on the personal decision-making aspect.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

From several studies on women empowerment, we can see that age, gender, marital status, nationality, social role, economic activity, intra-household distribution and health are some important factors which can affect empowerment (Sen, 1992; Sen 1999; Sen 2009; Kabeer, 1994; Trommlerova *et al.*, 2015, Banerjee *et al.*, 2019, Banerjee *et al.*, 2020). Access to and control over resources can also be an important determinant of empowerment when they are able to utilize these resources for their own needs (Malhotra *et al.*, 2002; Khan & Awan, 2011).

The term women empowerment has been a research topic since the late 1980s. In the early literature, empowerment was measured using proxy variables like education and asset ownership (Malhotra *et al.*, 2002). To overcome the limitations of proxy variable usage in the measurement of empowerment, recent studies have focused on direct measures of empowerment like the decision-making power of women (Maiorano *et al.*, 2021). Power is an important concept in empowerment. When people have been provided with decision-

making ability, if they recognize and claim this for themselves then they are empowered compared to those who have been just assigned the ability (O'Hara & Clement, 2018). Within households and communities' women can be decision-makers if they have an income of their own (Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2015).

The indicator used for intra-household bargaining power, one of the women empowerment components, is decision-making (Doss, 2013; Heckert & Fabric, 2013; Kabeer, 2001; Mason, 2005). The intra-household bargaining power of women can be achieved if they have access to assets (Pradhan *et al.*, 2019) and this asset ownership may help them in increasing their decision-making power but it is not sure whether they can have income generated from this particular asset (Theis *et al.*, 2018). In rural areas, the bargaining power of women can be increased with the possession of agricultural land (Agarwal, 1994). The decision-making power of women improves if land and house are jointly owned (Datta, 2006; Panda & Agarwal, 2005). Equal opportunities in education help in the creation of an inclusive society (Khatri and Raina, 2021). Women with better education than their partner increases the bargaining power of women compared to their earning (Koolwal, 2005; Orrefice & Bercea, 2007; Anderson *et al.*, 2017). Increasing ICT (information and communications technology) skills through adult education also increases empowerment (Widyastuti *et al.*, 2016). The age difference between partners can also determine the bargaining power of women (Friedberg & Webb, 2006). In several studies, the decision-making power of women in the household is determined by women's ownership of property, financial assets, and participation in the labor market (Antman, 2014; Attansio & Lechene, 2002; Bertocchi *et al.*, 2014; Doss, 2006; Doss, 2013; Doss *et al.*, 2014; Quisumbing, 2003; Quisumbing & Maluccio, 2003). In a study conducted in India, the major financial decisions are made by male household members in nuclear and joint families while women were given authority to decide on day-to-day expenses in nuclear families whereas the same was done by male members in joint families (Singh & Bhandari, 2012). In a household if women have more economic resources, they will be actively involvement in decision making within household (Buvinic & Furst-Nichols, 2016; Doss, 2013; Duflo, 2003; Thomas, 1994). The active participation of women in economic activities gives them income which enables them to make individual decisions (Doss, 2013; Sen, 1990; Briere *et al.*, 2003; Arthur-Holmes & Busia, 2020).

When women's decision-making power within the household increases their own situation and the health of child will be improved (Thomas *et al.*, 2002; Field, 2007; Majlesi,

2016) with better nutritional status of children (Carlson *et al.*, 2015, Kumar & Lakhtakia, 2021). As main caretakers of children, the decision-making power of women regarding this aspect will improve children's nutritional status and women's decision-making power can positively affect their own health and nutrition which benefits children during pregnancy, and, lastly women use their income on household needs compared to men (Smith *et al.*, 2003; Blumberg, 1989; Lele, 1986) and also on education expenditure and household nutrition (Anderson *et al.*, 2017) which eventually leads to better child outcome. Many studies have been done in order to find out the relation between intra-household bargaining power of women and maternal and child health care and these studies have shown an improved maternal and child health care outcome with the improved bargaining power of women within the household (Adhikari, 2016; Ganle *et al.*, 2015; Richards *et al.*, 2013; Tolhurst *et al.*, 2008; Kadengye, 2020). Women's decision-making power and autonomy are often related to high contraception usage (Peer, Morojele & London, 2013; Singh *et al.*, 2019) and family planning (Bose & Heymann, 2019) and the well-being of children (Bonis-Profumo *et al.*, 2021) and less child abuse (Parsiana *et al.*, 2019).

Women empowerment is related to sociological, economic, and psychological perspectives. The psychological aspect can be analyzed through the self-concepts like self-esteem and self-efficacy. Self-esteem and self-efficacy are correlated with each other and act as a crucial part of empowerment (Al-Qahtani, *et al.*, 2020; Reich *et al.*, 2017). Self-esteem simply means self-worth which is one's self-evaluation from negative to positive (Damon, 1983; Rosenberg, 1979; Rosenberg *et al.*, 1995). Individuals with high self-esteem view themselves in a positive way. On the other hand, self-efficacy is related to self-trust and self-worth which provides individuals with the belief that they can perform a certain task (Badura, 1997; Al-Qahtani, *et al.*, 2021; Kinsaul *et al.*, 2013). To attain women empowerment high self-esteem and self-efficacy is needed (Banerjee *et al.*, 2022; Spreitzer, 1995; Handy & Kassam, 2004; Rawlett, 2014; Batool & Batool, 2019). Only with the support of family and society alone women's empowerment cannot be achieved but it is also women themselves who can empower themselves through their increased self-esteem and self-efficacy (Batool & Batool, 2019). Self-esteem and self-efficacy are significant indicators of women's empowerment (Al-Qahtani *et al.*, 2021). Women in female-headed households have high self-esteem (Baig *et al.*, 2018; Maqsood *et al.*, 2015). Women's education, health, higher education of husbands, husbands' employment status, and the wealth of the household have a positive influence on the self-esteem of women (Soharwardi & Ahmad, 2020).

3. OBJECTIVE

The literature identifies various indicators of women's empowerment like decision-making, intra-household bargaining, access to resources, and freedom of movement. This study finds the determinants of women empowerment as measured by their say in personal matters (Intra-household personal decision-making power) like using birth control methods, deciding the number of children, and deciding about children's education in rural areas of India.

This study also finds the effect of women empowerment on children's education measured through test scores, where test score was measured through five questions related to addition, division, multiplication, logic with shapes, and missing numbers.

4. DATA & METHODOLOGY

4.1 Data

Our area of study focuses on rural Telangana women in India. In Telangana rural population sex ratio (females per 1000 males) is 999, and the ratio of the rural population to the total population is 61.12%. Here the rural female population is greater than the urban population. A survey was conducted among 700 women in rural areas of Southern India on women empowerment indicators, socio-economic demographics, their childhood conditions, and their children and if they had children in the age group of 11 to 15, they were surveyed too on their health, education, their daily life and a test on simple mathematics and logic was conducted among the children. After cleaning the data, data on 659 women were used for regression analysis, and out of 300 children surveyed, data on 291 were used for the analysis. A detailed literature review helped identify some questions with which focus group interviews and elicitation studies were done which further helped in designing the questionnaire. After the pilot survey to test the reliability of the questionnaire, the final survey was conducted. It was ensured that all participants voluntarily participated in the study. The data collected was further cleaned and coded.

4.2 Methodology

To find out the determinants of women empowerment, we have used the multiple regression model given by: $Women\ Empowerment = \beta_0 + \beta_i X_i$

where, Women Empowerment is an index based on three indicators discussed earlier. It ranges from zero to three, and X_i s are the independent variables related to the characteristics of the women, their parents, their partners, and their households.

Finally, to determine the effect of women empowerment on their children's test scores, we have again used the multiple regression model given by:

$$\text{Test Score} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{Women Empowerment}) + \beta_i X_i$$

where, Test Score is an index based on five questions discussed earlier. It ranges from zero to eleven. X_i s are the control variables related to the characteristics of a child's mother, father, household, and school.

We have checked for all the required assumptions of the regression model and have made necessary changes to ensure that all the required assumptions are satisfied.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Here using a multiple linear regression model, we try to find out the determinants of women's empowerment and also the impact of women's empowerment on children.

5.1 Determinants of Women's Empowerment

There is no multicollinearity in the dataset. Heteroscedasticity is present and we have used robust standard errors to correct it. The multiple regression results can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Regression Analysis: Determinants of Women Empowerment

Independent Variables	Coefficients (robust standard error)
Education of father of the women	0.0813 (0.117)
Education of mother of the women	0.347** (0.142)
Age of marriage 18-25 years (base less than 18 years)	0.163** (0.0713)
Age of marriage 25 years and above (base less than 18 years)	0.272 (0.377)
Self-esteem	0.125** (0.0543)
Self-efficacy	0.197*** (0.0579)
Woman's age 25-30 years (base 18-25 years)	-0.367*** (0.131)
Woman's age 31-40 years (base: 18-25 years)	-0.246* (0.143)

Woman's age- more than 40 years (base: 18-25 years)	-0.632*** (0.234)
Education of the woman	-0.0791 (0.0517)
Woman is employed with income (base: not employed)	0.0775* (0.0431)
Husband's age 31-40 years (base: 21-30 years)	0.100 (0.0883)
Husband's age above 40 years (base: 21-30 years)	-0.135 (0.113)
Education of husband of the women	0.0374 (0.0401)
Legal Index	0.0339 (0.0227)
Household assets	-0.00103 (0.00328)
Parents of the woman encouraged her to study (base: no)	0.177** (0.0813)
Parents of the woman owns a house (base: no)	0.335*** (0.0830)
Health care knowledge of the woman	0.180*** (0.0524)
Family type- Joint (base: nuclear)	-0.192** (0.0794)
Husband of the woman employed (base: no)	-0.154 (0.170)
Husband of the woman consumes alcohol (base: no)	-0.0444 (0.0844)
Constant	0.704* (0.375)
Observations	659
R-squared	0.246

Note: robust standard errors in parenthesis; ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

The results indicate that increasing mothers' education has a positive influence on women's empowerment as women's empowerment increases by 0.347 with an increase in the education of the women. If women's age of marriage is between 18-25 this increases

women's empowerment by 0.163 as compared to women who are married at the age of less than 18 years. We can see that the self-esteem and self-efficacy of women have a positive impact on women's empowerment. An increase in the self-esteem of women by one unit increases their empowerment by 0.125 and an increase in self-efficacy of women by one unit increases their empowerment by 0.197. When women are encouraged by their parents to study this increases their empowerment by 0.177. Women's empowerment increases by 0.335 if their parents own a house. An increase in the health care knowledge of women has a significant positive impact on their empowerment as this increases their empowerment by 0.180. From the above results, we can also see that some variables have a negative influence on women's empowerment. The empowerment of women in the joint family compared to the nuclear family reduces by -0.192. Also, the age of women has a negative influence on their empowerment. The empowerment of women belonging to the age group 25-30 is reduced by -0.367, age group 31-40 by -0.246 and for those in the age group more than 40 by -0.632 as compared to the age group 18-25.

5.2 Impact of women's empowerment on children

Here we try to find out the impact of women's empowerment on children by using the score of children in the test conducted. There is no multicollinearity and heteroscedasticity present in the dataset is corrected for. The regression results are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Regression Analysis: Impact of women's empowerment on children's scores in the test conducted

Independent Variables	Coefficients (robust standard error)
Women Empowerment (Mother's)	0.643*** (0.147)
Father's age 31-40 years (base: 21-30 years)	-0.786* (0.412)
Father's age above 40 years (base: 21-30 years)	-0.851* (0.474)
Education of father of the child	0.0954 (0.124)
Education of mother of the child	0.327** (0.134)

Household assets	0.0356*** (0.0115)
Infrastructure Index of the school	0.202* (0.115)
Child's gender- Female (base: male)	0.135 (0.261)
Type of school- Govt (base: private)	-0.846 (0.532)
Number of teachers in school	0.00507 (0.132)
Mother's age 25-30 years (base: 18-25 years)	-0.120 (0.726)
Mother's age above 30 years (base: 18-25 years)	0.0806 (0.746)
Presence of Midday meal (base: no)	0.721 (0.537)
Number of siblings	-0.172 (0.158)
Mother is employed with income (base: not employed)	0.687*** (0.155)
Father of the child employed (base: not employed)	-0.0483 (0.310)
Family type- Joint (base: nuclear)	-0.966*** (0.316)
Parents help in study at home (base: no)	0.164 (0.330)
Children help parents in their work (base: no)	0.247 (0.284)
Child's frequency of illness- high (base: low)	-0.360 (0.321)
Constant	3.125** (1.245)
Observations	291
R-squared	0.326

Note: standard errors in parenthesis; ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

From the above results, it is evident that women's empowerment has a positive influence on

their children as the increase in women's empowerment leads to increased test scores of children by 0.643. This shows the positive influence of mothers' empowerment on children. An increase in the level of education of mothers increases the test score of children by 0.327. Test scores are also higher for children with working mothers. An increase in household assets by one unit increases the test score of children by 0.0356. A higher infrastructure index of the school increases the test score of children by .202. An increase in mothers' income by one unit increases the test score of children by 0.687. Also belonging to a joint family reduces the test score of children by -0.966. The increase in fathers' age reduces the test score of students.

6. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Through the study we find that there is significant positive relation between mothers' education, encouragement from parents to study, house ownership of parents, increased self-esteem and self-efficacy of women, and health care knowledge of women with their empowerment. Employment with income makes women empowered to take personal decisions. In terms of age, the results show the marriage of women above 18 years helps them to have their own say in decisions compared to women who are married at ages less than 18. It is also seen that younger married women in the age group 18-25 years have more say in intra-household decision-making with their husbands as compared to older women. Also, women in the joint family seem to be less empowered.

The study also indicates that women's empowerment has a positive influence on their children as the increase in women's empowerment leads to increased test scores of children. This indicates the importance of women empowerment as a determinant of child education. Mothers' education, household assets, infrastructure index of the school, and mothers' income determine the test score of children. Children in nuclear families have better cognitive achievement. Also, it is seen that young fathers in the age group 21-30 years contribute more to children's test scores as compared to older fathers.

Developing countries like India need to focus more on education (may be adult education too) and employment opportunities for women. Education should also be provided on health care and its importance. This component of women's education has a trickle-down effect, i.e. as seen from the results, a woman is more empowered if her mother is educated. Also, an educated mother leads to better education for their children.

Women should not be married at young ages and policies should focus on increasing the labor force participation of women through which they can earn incomes leading to an increase in their say in households. Social and financial independence will lead to independence. These policies should not be just in name of ethics but due to functional reasons of increasing children's welfare (as seen in this study through cognitive achievement), economic growth, future human capital, etc (Basu and Basu, 1991).

Further, according to Bandura (1997, 2000), an individual's self-efficacy may improve because of experiencing success, being exposed to successful others with whom one could identify, as well as receiving verbal encouragement and support. Therefore, women's self-efficacy, thereby their empowerment, may be boosted by exposing them to successful female role models with similar socio-economic circumstances. Support and encouragement from significant others, such as family members or community leaders, would also prove beneficial to women's self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Apart from educated, empowered, and employed mothers affecting children's school outcomes positively, we see the importance of school infrastructure. Policies need to focus on increasing school infrastructure. With reference to this study, infrastructure in government schools in rural areas needs to be boosted.

The fifth Sustainable development goal, gender equality can be achieved through women's empowerment. The inclusion of women empowerment among the sustainable development goals itself shows the importance of this topic. Recent studies on women's empowerment have focused on direct measures of empowerment like the decision-making power of women. Our study adds to the literature as we are focusing especially on the determinants of women empowerment as measured by say in personal matters in rural areas and how the empowerment of women in these rural settings improves the condition of the education of their children. Also, this study shows that through empowered women we can achieve improved child education and this plays an important role in economic and social progress. India, being the second most populous country in the world with two-thirds of the population residing in rural areas, women empowerment of rural women becomes critical for economic development.

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