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A Study on the Status of Women's Empowerment in urban Bangalore, India

By Sangeetha Menon¹, Ranjitha M², Shweta Sharma³

Abstract

The urge to empower is a human quality and a multidimensional phenomenon. It allows individuals or groups to participate and prosper in households, communities, and countries through political or development processes. Numerous studies have associated empowerment with many developmental outcomes. In the past decades, significant advances have been made among women in many fields like health, education, and employment. However, increasing incidence of violence against women, under-representation of women in decision-making, discriminatory laws governing marriage, land, property, and inheritance hinder women's empowerment. It is further blocked by new challenges that have emerged over the last decade, such as tackling HIV/AIDS and dealing with trafficking of women and young girls. The present study is an attempt to measure to what extent women in urban Bangalore feel empowered in critical areas such as educational achievement, economic opportunity, health and well-being, decision-making, and autonomy in all matters. The research methodology involved the study of a sample population of women in urban areas of Bangalore City, India. Different women's empowerment indicators were analyzed using a structured questionnaire which was distributed randomly to the female population in urban Bangalore. The main emphasis was on indicators such as women's decision-making power in household affairs, financial autonomy, freedom of movement and access to education. Data analysis revealed that decision-making power in households and freedom of movement of women vary considerably with age, education, and employment. Very few women had the final say on how their earnings were spent. Control over cash earnings increased with age and education. The study also indicates that educational qualifications and access to employment are the essential factors that promote women's empowerment, but the degree of achievement of the goal depends mostly on the attitude of the general population towards gender equality.

Keywords: empowerment, education, decision-making, women's autonomy, autonomy, Bangalore, India, women in India

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Introduction

Empowerment can be represented variously from superficial empowerment (Rosenthal *et al.*, 1997) to a high level of genuine involvement and devolution of power. However, as Ford and Fottler (1995) have suggested, genuine empowerment will probably incorporate decision-making authority over job content and job context.

Empowering women has always been an issue of concern throughout the world. Urbanization has led to a change in the lifestyle of women in the modern world. Still, women need to break all the hindrances to emerge out of their shell and prove themselves in all fields. Human civilization has changed radically and has had a significant impact on society all over the world. It is a fallacy that urban women are empowered to suit the needs of modernization and globalization.

Empowerment means transforming oneself from a position of enforced powerlessness to a position of power (Batliwala, 1994). Empowerment of people means to authorize people to have control over their lives. Empowerment of women is important for them to control their lives for the improvement of their socio-economic and political status. Empowerment is the expansion of humans' potential to make decisions in life in a context that was formerly denied to them (Kabeer, 2001).

Women's empowerment means women gaining a more significant share of control over resources such as material things, human and intellectual aspects like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money, access and control over decision-making in the home, community, society, nation, and to gain power (Bisnath and Elson, 1999).

Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender (2002) emphasized that researchers should concentrate on the process by which empowerment occurs. Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is a composite measure of gender inequality in three key areas: political participation and decision-making, economic participation and decision-making, and power over economic resources (HDR, 2003). GEM is an aggregate index for a population and does not capture a multidimensional view of women's empowerment. Nevertheless, it is not clear if development interventions promote women's empowerment along a particular dimension.

Review of Literature

Topics related to women's rights and problems have always been a serious concern to academicians and policymakers. From pastoral society to the contemporary information period, the role of women has changed radically across the globe. Women have efficiently fulfilled the role of dutiful wives catering to all the requirements of the house that include the upbringing of children and various sub-roles as daughter, daughter-in-law, wife, mother, aunt and so on. The continuity of adjustments in socio-monetary and psycho-cultural factors of human dwelling have influenced the position of women. With industrialization, modernization, and globalization displaying their profound effects on human society globally, the function and duties of women have attained new definitions and perspectives. Women's issues have received tremendous interest inside the planning circle and numerous high-level discussions on national and global platforms are taking place. However, the current lacuna in the formulation and execution of the policies has not changed the grassroots situation greatly. On an encouraging note, within the South Asian nations, there was noticeably growing monetary participation in the past decade.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are human rights that are imperative to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Despite the progress, 60% of world's poorest

people are still women, less than 16% of the world's parliamentarians are women, two-thirds of children shut outside the school gates are girls and, women are the victims of abuse both in times of armed conflict and within the home (UNDP, 2009).

Education is empowerment in an urban context, but breaking traditional barriers is a question of significant concern. The participation of women in socio-economic developmental activities encourages female independence, health, and well-being. Still, even after urbanization, there is exploitation, although statistically, the rate of literacy among women has increased in terms of workloads at the workplace. Despite this, there are marital conflicts, domestic violence, and salary differences.

In the contemporary era, higher education has enabled women's entry into employment, helping them to achieve economic and social independence and bring about social change. Science and technology have further emerged as a catalyst for this. The attitude of society towards the woman and her role in numerous activities has undergone a radical revolution. Women are shouldering responsibilities in every field instead of hiding behind social inhibitions.

Moreover, academic and occupational patterns have been additionally modified and widened with women entering into the domains which were considered to be dominated by men, a decade earlier. Furthermore, there has been an encouraging rise in the percentage of women joining the service sector, especially Banking and Information Technology. Amidst this massive transformation, the core issue of women's rights and empowerment remains unanswered. Thus, women's empowerment needs some essential ingredients which include fearlessness (implying absence of crimes against women), freedom from the drudgery of laborious domestic chores, economic earning and productivity, ability to travel, the authority to make a decision, sharing power and property with men and a liberalizing education that can prepare grounds for the above (Batliwala, 1995).

Financial independence is a critical parameter for the empowerment of women. A study conducted on the various schemes offered for uplifting women in developing nations found that women in urban regions have higher social, political, and economic empowerment. Although treated with respect, they face more mental pressure and depression than the rural women (Bhatia and Singh, 2019).

Titus *et al.* (2017) infer that though women are empowered in urban areas, final decisions in households are taken after seeking approval from husbands or parents. Lee and Koh (2001) distinguished empowerment further by considering the characteristics of inferior and superior traits. Anu Singh *et al.* (2009) suggested that women should be made aware of their existence right from birth. Her role should not be subdued in society, and alteration in upbringing is needed.

Prasad (2014) examined the role of female leaders as mayors, chairpersons, and counselors and concluded that they are very successful as these leaders have served as catalysts in social development and the development of girl child. He also recommends increasing the number of women leaders to have an impact on awareness, policymaking, training, and engagement in urban-based governance issues. Though the urban milieu provides exposure to education, there are many hurdles to be tackled to pursue and excel in it. Women must multitask and have the assistance of a support system. Studies indicate that young, urban girls enjoy more chances for employment than rural girls but the majority are engaged in occupations such as hairdressing, cleaning which is not a promising long tenure earning preference (Chant and McIlwaine, 2016)

As the situation is changing slowly, working women are gaining acceptance and are being accepted by society in urban areas. In rural areas, even if women are earning, they are

typically controlled by their partners and family members (Evans, 2015). Pozarny (2016) highlights that in urban Nigeria, where women are considered inferior, it is necessary to address the cultural barriers and involve women in decision-making in the household. Much attention has been focused on the fact that urban women have access to more opportunities and services and face fewer restrictions due to social and cultural norms. Urban women are less submissive as they are aware of the opportunities and rights of women.

Although several studies have focused on women's empowerment and related issues, most of them mainly concentrated on conceptual and measurement issues and the constraints to women's empowerment. Therefore, the present study analyzes the status of women's empowerment in Bangalore, India, by considering various dimensions such as women's household decision-making power, financial autonomy, freedom of movement, political participation, gender equality based on structured questionnaires which have not been analyzed earlier.

Research Methodology

A survey was conducted in the urban areas of Bangalore, India, to study the status of empowerment among women. The level of women's empowerment was assessed using a structured questionnaire. The details like age, marital status, family members, education, employment status, organization, designation, work experience, city of residence were collected and assessed with five-point Likert scale (through 30 statements). The questionnaire was administered on a sample of 100 women associated with various institutions, organizations, and email groups. The response rate was 44%, as 44 women respondents returned fully filled, usable questionnaires. Data collected for the study were analyzed using factor analysis by Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation in IBM SPSS 19 statistical software.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The respondents in the survey are women from different age groups, with different educational backgrounds and work experience. They are variously employed in the government sector, private sector, in industry and academics, and are all working in Bangalore, India. Table 1 gives the demographic profile of the survey participants. 52.3% of the women are in the age group of 20-35 years, while 40.9% belong to the age group of 36-50 years. Only 6.8% of women are above 51 years of age. The women's marital status shows that 79.5% are married, while 20.5% are single. The majority of the participants (59.1%) are working in the private sector, while 2.3% are in government jobs, and 9.1% are entrepreneurs. 29.5% are unemployed. 65.9% of the respondents work in academia (at school, college, and university levels), while 20.5% work in industry across various sectors. 2.2% of the respondents are working with NGOs, whereas 11.4% are housewives.

Table 1: Demographic profile of Respondents

	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age	20-35years	23	52.3
	36-50years	18	40.9
	Above 51 years	03	06.8
Marital Status	Single	09	20.5
	Married	35	79.5
	Divorced/ Separated	0	0
No. of Family members	1-2	06	13.6
	3-4	31	70.5
	5-6	06	13.6
	7-8	01	02.3
Educational Qualification	Secondary	0	0
	Senior Secondary	01	2.3
	Graduate	07	15.9
	Postgraduate	21	47.7
	Doctorate	15	34.1
Employment Status	Unemployed	13	29.5
	Government sector	01	02.3
	Private Sector	26	59.1
	Entrepreneur	04	09.1
Field of work	Academia	29	65.9
	Industry	09	20.5
	NGO	01	02.2
	Homemaker	05	11.4
Work Experience	0-10years	28	63.6
	11-20years	12	27.3
	21-30years	04	09.1
	31-40years	0	0
	41-50 years	0	0

Factor Analysis was conducted on the data collected with 30 statements. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) method was used with varimax rotation to extract the components. PCA method gave an optimal linear combination of the given variables and made it into a group that has maximum relationship among them. The correlations between factors and the different items expressed through the factorial loads are significant. The rotated matrix identified ten components that have an eigenvalue of more than 1 (Table 2). The researcher found different results in the factor analysis, like commonalities, the component matrix, and the scree plot, and all the results showed a positive signal to pursue the test further.

Using the option of suppressing factor loadings (less than 0.4), only six components were found to have reasonable item loadings, and the Rotated Factor values are presented in Table 3. The first factor had seven items loaded and thus was identified as Freedom of choice/ Movement. The second and third factor each had four items loaded in it and thus was identified as Gender equality at work and Access to Employment, respectively. The fourth, fifth, and sixth factor each

had a loading of three items and thus was identified as Political and Religious Participation, Personal Welfare and Freedom, and Decision-making power at home, respectively. Twenty-four statements were found to have high factor loading. The responses on these statements were retained under these six factors.

**Table 2: Factor Analysis with Principal Component Method and Varimax Rotation
Rotated Component Matrix**

	Component									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Respondent can go to any place they like	.904									
Respondent can participate in all community activities as per their wishes	.903									
Respondent can spend earnings at their discretion	.817									
Respondent can speak to and meet people outside their home	.713			.399						
Respondent can change jobs whenever they want	.677				.348					
Respondent cast votes as per their will	.657							.339		.349
In the decision-making process at home, respondent is involved	.527				-.494					
Respondent is given equal promotion opportunities at work in comparison to male co-workers.		.859								
Respondent is treated fairly in comparison to male colleagues.		.829								
Compensation is on par with male counterparts		.818								
Respondent is treated with respect by colleagues	.437	.489					-.302		.369	
Respondent receives appreciation for good work done			.826							
If respondent takes a break from work due to familial obligations, it will allow them to rejoin.			.744							
Respondent have had access to pursue an education in the field of choice.			.616				.463			
The organization gives the option to work from home.			.602							.403
Respondent can make decisions regarding political decisions.				.813						

Respondent can access the judicial system to redress the grievance			.750						
Respondent can make decisions regarding religious beliefs	.337		.635	.456					
In deciding the job, Respondent has a complete choice.		.322		.658					
Respondent makes decisions regarding savings.				.564					
Respondent has an utterly high degree of control over decisions regarding welfare, health, and body				.514				-.337	
Respondent can make their decisions regarding household expenditures.						.787			
Respondent can make decisions regarding children's health.						.733			
In the decision-making process at home, respondent has a choice.	.360		-.311	.505					.448
Read newspapers?							.857		
Interest in political affairs?							.696		
Respondent can make decisions regarding children's education.								.894	
Respondent take leave from work during emergencies at home.			-.302						.816
Respondent does not feel harassed at work due to gender.			.547						.635
Respondent can make decisions regarding marriage choices.									-.825

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 12 iterations.

**Table 3: Factors Identified through Factor Analysis
Rotated Component Matrix**

	Component									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Freedom of Choice/Movement										
Respondent can go to any place they like	.904									
Respondent can participate in all community activities as per their wish	.903									
Respondent can spend earnings at their discretion	.817									

Respondent can speak to and meet people outside the home	.713		.399				
Respondent can change job whenever they want	.677		.348				
Respondent cast a vote as per their will	.657				.339		.349
In the decision-making process at home, respondent is involved	.527		-.494				
Gender Equality at Work							
Respondent is given equal promotion opportunities at work in comparison to male co-workers.		.859					
Respondent is treated fairly in comparison to male colleagues.		.829					
Compensation is on par with male counterparts.		.818					
Respondent is treated with respect by colleagues	.437	.489		-.302		.369	
Access to Employment							
Respondent receives appreciation for good work done.		.826					
If respondents take a break from work due to familial obligations, organization will allow them to rejoin.		.744					
Respondents have had access to pursue an education in the field of choice.		.616			.463		
The organization gives the option to work from home.		.602					.403
Political and Religious participations							
Respondents can make decisions regarding political decisions.			.813				
Respondent can access the judicial system to redress grievances.			.750				
Respondents can make their decisions regarding religious beliefs	.337		.635	.456			
Personal Welfare and Freedom							
In deciding occupation, Respondent has a complete choice.		.322		.658			
Respondents make decisions regarding savings.				.564			

have full control over their earnings. Few women have the final say on the ways to spend their income. Control over cash earnings increases with age and residence in city areas, and education does not vary extensively with family structure. In the face of global competition, traditional financial occupations of women have withered. Distinctly, the empowerment of women is one of the important aspects in developing nations all around the world, not just in India alone. These issues of gender equality are an area of discussion in National and International Conferences, research studies, various forums which have led to the establishment of special departments for women's welfare. In spite of so many efforts undertaken by government and NGOs the picture at present is not satisfactory. Mere access to education and employment can only accelerate the process of empowerment. However, achievement of this goal depends more on attitude. Unless the attitude towards the tacit acceptance of unequal gender roles by society and even among women themselves changes, women will be denied the opportunities for empowerment provided to them through constitutional provisions, law etc. Until this aim is achieved, one cannot say that women are empowered in India in any real sense.

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