

A STUDY OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The writers examined education in the context of its need for the women folk. *This study throws light on various components of empowerment related to women's life. For this we tried to find out some solutions and to help the women to understand their position in the society and to make them empowered. In this regard education can be considered as the most important tool for removing the barriers in the path of their empowerment. An educated woman always understands her role and position better in the society in comparison to an uneducated woman. The study is conducted on a sample of 700 women and 100 males selected using purposive sampling technique and representing illiterates and literates having qualification below matric to post graduation. The descriptive survey method is used for data collection using two tools i.e. QWE and ATWE. The study reported that physical harassment and domestic violence play negative role in women empowerment particularly in case of illiterate rather than their literate counterpart.*

KEYWORDS: Women Empowerment and Education.

INTRODUCTION:

Women are an integral part of every society. The status of women in the society is directly linked with social and cultural traditions, stages of economic development achieved, educational levels and political attainments for women in society.

Women play a vital role in matriarchal society. Women play a decisive role in most of the patriarchal societies also. The future of the children depends by and large upon the mothers who generally stay at home and take care of their children's health and education. This is particularly so in countries like India where society and life of the people are moulded by traditional and spiritual foundations in family.

Though women are the key factor in the process of change and development, yet in many countries they are underestimated. In the world over it is now recognized that the status of

women in society both in the developed and underdeveloped countries, continues to be inferior to men. Although women's role is crucial in the family and household economy, women have not been given equal rights in social, political as well as in economic fields. The necessity of the improvement of the status of women has now been recognized all over the world as an important aspect of national progress and development.

The women in India are still lagging far behind the men in respect of education. It is unfortunate that even after six decades of India's independence they are not having equal access to educational opportunities along with their counter parts. This backwardness of women in India that has obviously some social, economic, political and cultural implications. It is in view of the backwardness of women in India that recently much stress has been put on their empowerment.

Though women are the key factor in the process of change and development, yet in many countries they are underestimated. In the present progressive age, it is desirable that men and women hold the same status in the society. In the modern world, the role of women goes much beyond the home and the bringing up of children. She is now adopting a career for her own and sharing equally with men the responsibilities for the development of the society in all its aspect. This is the direction in which we shall have to move and therefore empowerment of women is considered most important issue. But, though empowerment is considered as an important aid to help the women to achieve equality with men yet there are some affecting factors, which create barriers in the path of women's empowerment.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To find out the awareness of women regarding importance of educational attainment.
2. To analyze the causes of low literacy among the rural women of Sonitpur district.
3. To find out the information's possessed by women on policies and programmes of Women Education.
4. To assess the health care services available for women in the district.
5. To find out health and hygiene awareness of women.
6. To find the impact of education on economic empowerment of women.

7. To find out the influence of traditional beliefs and practices on women education and empowerment.
8. To find the attitude of males and females towards women empowerment.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The study is designed to answer the following questions

1. What are the causes of low literacy among the rural women in Sonitpur district?
2. What type of measures can be taken to increase the literacy of women?
3. In what ways better health care and hygienic conditions contribute to the women empowerment?
4. How far women are aware about health and hygiene?
5. What are the different types of health care services available for women?
6. How does education empower women economically?
7. What are the different types of traditional beliefs and practices that influence women education and empowerment?
8. Is there a significant difference in the attitude of males and females towards women empowerment?

METHOD:

In educational research a systematic procedure could be adopted for achieving the expected results. That systematic procedure is termed as 'methodology' which may be varied according to the demand of the problem. The present study is a descriptive in nature. It is a humble attempt for studying the role of education in empowering women of Sonitpur District of Assam. For this study the descriptive survey method is adopted. The secondary information's are collected from government departments, schools and non-governmental organizations.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE:

Population of the present study constitutes all the women / girls who are in the group of 15 years and above. The study is conducted on a sample of 700 women / girls and 100 males. The males constituted of 50 illiterates (25 of 20-40 years, 25 of 40 years and above) and 50 literates (25

having qualification below matriculation and 25 graduates and above). The females constituted of 100 illiterates (50 of 20-40 years and 50 of 40 and above years), 300 literate married women, 100 each with below HSLC, secondary and graduation and above and 300 college going unmarried girls (150 each from rural and urban areas).

The sample of women represent house wives, SHGs, married and unmarried as well as with varied qualifications ranging from illiterate, below matriculation, secondary to graduation and above as well as college girls. The purposive sample technique is used for selecting the sample. Care has been taken to select a representative sample.

TOOLS USED:

Considering the problem, the investigator has constructed the following tools for data collection.

(i) Questionnaire on Women Empowerment (QWE)

A questionnaire is constructed to find out various dimensions of women empowerment in the context of Sonitpur district. The views of experts are incorporated while standardizing the questionnaire. The questionnaire is consisted of 47 items covering various dimensions such as literacy, health, economic status, traditional beliefs and practices and legal rights of women. The questionnaire is standardized on fairly large (N=100) sample of women in Assam.

(ii) Attitude Towards Women Empowerment (ATWE)

An attitude scale ATWE was constructed by the investigator himself to know the attitude of various groups of males and females towards women empowerment. The ATWE has 40 items comprised of 33 positive and 7 negative items as shown in following table:

Dimension	No. of items	Item number as given in the scale	Positive items	Negative items
Literacy & Education	15	1,2,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12, 13,14,15	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9, 10,11,13,14,15	12
Health	4	16,17,18,19	16,17,18,19	

Economic Status	6	20,21,22,23,24,25,	20,21,22,23,24, 25	
Social	8	26,27,28,29,30,31,32,33	28,29,32	26,27,30,31, 33
Political	7	34,35,36,37,38,39,40	34,36,37,38,39, 40	35

The scale has reliability of .79 and high content and face validity. The attitude scale is developed on a sample of 200 comprised of 50 males and 150 females belonging to illiterate, literate, college going girls and SHGs.

FINDINGS:

1. All categories of women are aware about the importance of educational attainment for playing their significant role in society as well as improving their status.
2. Except the old illiterate women, all the women groups' i.e. young married women (20-40 years) literate graduate and college girls showed keen desire for improving education.
3. Responses from whole sample of women revealed that there are educational institutions from schools to colleges in their vicinity but the poor conditions of parents is the main problem in pursuing their education. However, the college in the rural areas is located far away from their homes.
4. As far as comparison of illiterate married women are considered, it was found that women in the age group of 20-40 years with 52%, 12% and 36% had faced problem from parents, social and poverty respectively where as 16%, 12% and 72% respectively in case of 40 years and above women. This implies that there is reduction in problems from parents and social spheres but economic reason remained as the major cause for continuing their study.
5. Further it is found that 50% of illiterate married women of lower age group (20-40 years) and 76% of upper age group (40 years and above) are unaware about the educational rights given by the constitution of India . However, the literate married women and

college girls are found to be aware about these constitutional provisions and policies adopted for enhancement of their education.

6. It is also found that except the illiterate females of both the groups, all literate females and college girls are in favour of co-education. It is reported that married illiterate women (92%) had very little help and time for study at home as compared to the literate ones (65%). The graduate married women as well as the urban college going girls have better facilities than the rural college girls. The women/girls now realize that special educational facilities and provisions of free education at all levels will accelerate the process of empowerment in present social order. The educated women/girls are of the opinion that more women teachers should be recruited in educational institutions so that the girls feel the free academic environment for personality development.
7. Majority of the respondents pleaded for vocational education in place of theoretical one. This will empower them to become self-employed, self-dependant and self-reliant.
8. Good health of the women counts towards happiness of the whole family. Analysis of data shows that health centres and services are more available in urban areas than in rural areas. At the same time it is found that there is less awareness about health care among illiterate women. They hardly avail the medical services meant for them. It is found that all the women, i.e. illiterate, literate and college girls know the importance of sanitation and water supply and these facilities are found to be available in homes, workplaces and educational institutions.
9. It is reported that National Rural Health Mission (2005) has brought significant changes in accessibility of quality health care services for rural women and children through the intervention of ASHA. These volunteers reinforce rural married women to take care of the new born. The majority of married women take benefits of ASHA services. Of Course College unmarried girls have given poor response to this item as it is not the target group for ASHA workers.
10. The married illiterate and literate women are found to possess good knowledge of pre and post natal care. The response pattern shows that literate women are more concerned about

child care and preferred to go to government hospitals and private nursing home for giving birth to children, when the illiterate women choose to have home birth.

11. Regarding the number of children the illiterate women opine that a mother should have more than two children where as the remaining literate group including college girls opine that it should not be more than two. Literacy and education are found to favour small family size. This is a positive sign of good women health and her empowerment.
12. Physical harassment and domestic violence play negative role in women empowerment; it is found that among illiterate females 8% and 56% belonging to 20-40 years, and 40 years and above age groups respectively reported physical violence by their husband and in laws. Of the remaining literate married women with below metric and secondary qualification have reported 12% and 15% respectively the physical harassment by their husband/in laws. But graduate and above or college girls have not reported any kind of harassment or violence. This shows the declining trend of such violence in educated families.
13. The illiterate as well as literate women with less than HSLC qualification have reported that they have no source of income, except the 20% that reported to be daily wage earners. For the marginal percentage (15%) of literate women business is the source of income. The graduate women (65%) are found to be in jobs. When asked how to improve their financial condition, the illiterate (80%) mentioned daily wages and secondary and above qualified married women mentioned jobs and business equally will help in improving their financial condition.
14. More than 50% of the literate including rural college girls are found to have membership of SHGs and take advantage of rural banking intervention for improving their economic status. However, 60% of the illiterate women report that the family expenditure is born by the husband or obtained from other sources. The expenditure of college girls is born by the father (70%) and mother (16%). Illiterate married women (86%) are found to dependent on husband and other family resources. Education of women is found to correlate positively with better source of income.

15. The whole sample of women, prefer vocational education to theoretical education. This may add to their job or earning capability and hence empower them more.
16. Encouraging feature of women in Assam is that there is no child marriage and purdah system except among some women belonging to minority communities. However, a small segment of the respondents from the literates report that the practice of witch hunting still prevails in the society. Nearly 20% of the respondents from different categories support the dowry system that still exists in the society and remaining 80% had negated it.
17. It is found that illiterate women have little say in decision making. But the majority of literate women take active part in decision making in the family. The participation in decision making is increasing more among the above qualified women.
18. Except the illiterate women of 40 years and above, almost all the women are found to be aware about legal rights. In addition, most of the women have experience of casting votes.
19. From among the illiterate women of 40 years and above, 30% is found to have the knowledge of marriage age of girls, rest of the sample was fully aware about marriage age.
20. Physical violence is reported by 40% and 28% of the illiterate women belonging to 20-40 years and 40 years and above respectively. However, most of the women except those of 40 years and above illiterate age group are found to possess knowledge of Domestic Violence Act 2005). This has resulted in reduction of domestic violence in the society in general and in educated families in particular.
21. The literate women are found to be fully aware of the reservation policy of women in legislature/panchayats. This is a positive sign for the political empowerment of women.
22. While comparing the attitude of females and males towards women empowerment high significant difference was found between females and males with higher mean score in favour of females.
23. As far as attitude score of literate and illiterate male is concerned, literate males have more positive attitude towards women empowerment than that of the illiterate.

24. The comparison in terms of literacy showed that there existed significant mean difference between literate and illiterate females was highly significant with higher mean value in favour of literate females.
25. Regarding the locality of college girls, high significant difference is noted between rural and urban college girls towards empowerment of women.
26. Regarding the age wise distribution of illiterate women, there is no significance mean difference of married women towards empowerment. This implies that they possess almost similar attitude.
27. The comparison of married women and unmarried college girls showed that there was significant mean difference between the attitude score of married literate women and unmarried literate college girls. The college girls had shown more positive attitude than that of married women as their mean score is more than their counterparts

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