

Effect of employment on women empowerment- a study on Sonepur district of Odisha, India

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Abstract

Objective: This study empirically examines various prospects of empowerment of women viz. autonomy, economy and gender bias and the effect of employment on the women empowerment.

Methods: A field survey was conducted with a structured questionnaire. Data were collected from 120 respondents (61 employed and 59 housewives) from Sonepur district of Odisha, India. A women empowerment index was constructed to capture the empowerment of the respondents taking autonomy, economic empowerment, and gender empowerment into account. A three-stage probability (and non-probability) sampling was followed to collect data, with district as primary unit (chosen based on convenience), institutions as secondary unit, and the respondents as the ultimate sampling unit.

Findings/Application: The study depicts a positive and significant effect of employment on empowerment of women. The result shows that autonomy, economy and gender biasness plays a major role in the empowerment of women.

Keywords: Employment, Empowerment, India, Odisha, Women.

1. Introduction

The empowerment of women has been widely acknowledged as an important goal in international development. The objective of development should not be on achieving certain indicators rather than increasing choices [1]. In this context, [2] defines empowerment as “the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.” This fits well within the broad definition of empowerment as “the expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one’s life” in the World Bank’s empowerment sourcebook [3]. Empowerment is derived from the word power; that means the ability to make choices. In [4] define the four dimensions of power. First, the power of knowledge, that includes the individual capabilities, sense of entitlement, self esteem, and self belief in them for bringing changes in their lives. The power to make economic decisions within their household, community and local economy was identified as the second dimension. The power to access and control over financial, physical and knowledge-based assets stands as the third dimension. Lastly, the power with, i.e., defining the ability to organise others to enhance economic activities is identified as the fourth dimension.

The concept of empowerment can be explained through three closely interrelated dimensions, i.e. agency, resources, and achievement. Agency represents the process of making choices and putting them in effect. Resources are the medium through which agency is exercised and achievement is the outcome of the agency. Therefore, a process of change that transforms women’s lives in these above four dimensions is regarded as empowerment with agency, resources and achievement [5]. In [3] also defines empowerment as a concept related to agency, autonomy, self-direction, self-determination, liberation, participation, mobilization and self-confidence. The empowerment and autonomy of women are very essential for the achievement of economic development. And at the same time biasness towards women in terms of autonomy in taking decisions, employment, education, etc. reduces the productivity of the country. In short, gender inequality hinders the growth of any economy per se. In our country there is a huge difference between treatments of boys and girls. More cases of biasness could be seen amongst poor particularly in rural areas. For example, a study found that in the poor neighbourhoods of New Delhi, girls are more than twice as likely to die of diarrhoea [6].

The gap widens when there is some kind of crisis. A research shows that during droughts families disproportionately sacrifice the welfare of girls [7]. Autonomy is the ability to obtain information and make decisions about one's own concerns [8]. Autonomy also refers to as bargaining power and is an important indicator in the empowerment of women. It facilitates access to material resources such as food, land, income and other forms of wealth, and social resources such as knowledge, power, prestige within the family and community [9]. This paper looks into various prospects of empowerment of women viz. autonomy, economy and gender bias and the effect of employment on the women empowerment.

1.1. Employment and empowerment: A conceptual framework

The most common argument on employment and empowerment explains that when women participate in income generating activities, their level of empowerment increases as they are having access to resources. That can improve their bargaining position and also allows them for greater control over decisions; as they become less dependent on their husbands. Getting wages through employment can make a difference in the empowerment. Because, earning a wage means women are contributing for their homes, as a result of which the behaviours of other family members will also be positive towards them [10]. Kabeer's study also revealed that women are valued, loved, and respected for their hard work. Women's contribution to the family earnings shows a positive relationship with empowerment. That means, larger the contribution, greater likelihood for empowerment [10-12]. Further, in a research conducted by [13] taking Bangladesh women reveals that contribution to the family earnings is inversely related to the empowerment of women in the sphere of domestic violence. That means, greater the contribution lesser the domestic violence and vice versa. Thus, in a nut-shell it can be articulated that women become empowered through employment. This hypothesis is validated empirically in the present study.

2. Methodology

1. Data

The study is based on primary data. To obtain the data, a field survey was conducted with a structured questionnaire. Data were collected from 120 respondents (61 employed and 59 housewives) from Sonepur district of Indian state of Odisha. A three-stage probability (and non-probability) sampling was followed to collect data, with district as primary unit (chosen based on convenience), institutions as secondary unit, and the respondents as the ultimate sampling unit. The present study chooses one college, one primary school, and one high school at random to collect the information from the working women. Further, apart from educational institution, the study collects data from women working in different administrative offices. Further, fifty nine (59) housewives were interviewed at random for the study.

2. Methodology for the construction of women empowerment index

The study captured the women empowerment of respondents using an index called women empowerment index (WEI), as index provides the information about all dimensions in a single number [14].

3. Variables identification

The variables to be considered for measuring the women empowerment are of high importance. Following [15] this study undertakes three dimensions, namely - decision making capacity of women, freedom of mobility, and gender relationship for measuring the empowerment of the respondents.

4. Calculation of women empowerment index

Data were collected for three indicators of women empowerment, i.e. autonomy, economic empowerment and gender empowerment. Scores were given to all variables of each indicator. For example, in autonomy if the respondents take the whole decision alone then score of 1 is assigned, otherwise 0. Indicators of empowerment were calculated by adding scores of all variables. The index of individual indicator was scaled down between 1 and 0 following the UNDP method of calculating Human Development Index [16], [15]. After finding out the index of individual indicators, the overall women empowerment index was calculated using the following.

$$WEI_i = \sum_{i=1}^3 W_i d_i$$

Where, WEI_i represents the overall empowerment index of i^{th} individual and W_i stands for the weight assigned to each dimension. Here, equal weights are given to each dimension, *s.i.e.* $W_1=W_2= W_3$.

5. Women empowerment amongst sample household

After calculating the empowerment index, a descriptive statistics on the index was provided (Table 1). The empowerment index was classified into three categories- low, medium, and high taking Mean± SD [15]. A majority of the respondents belong to the medium category. Further, the percentage of respondents belonging to the high category is found to be higher in employed than housewives.

Table 1. Women empowerment among sample households

Women empowerment	Employed	Housewives	Total
Low	4(6%)	7(12%)	11(9%)
Medium	46(75%)	49(83%)	95(79%)
High	11(19%)	3(5%)	14(12%)
Total	61	59	120

Source: Field survey

3. Results and Discussion

1. Socio-economic profile of the respondents

One hundred twenty (120) respondents were interviewed purposely for the study. Most of the interviewees were married (92%), Hindu (100%), and had joint families (10%). Participants’ ages were between 24 and 45 (mean= 35.57, SD= 6.82). A majority of the respondents’ were found to be graduates (82%).

2. Effect of employment on empowerment

In the present study the argument of empowering women through employment was verified empirically through regression analysis. The dependent variable was women empowerment index and the independent variable was the employment for the study. Since the women empowerment index was obtained by aggregating individual dimensions, it is assumed to be continuous [15], [17-19]. The result of regression analysis is presented in Table 2. The exhibits that employment bears a significant and positive coefficient (0.08). This implies, employment helps the women in achieving empowerment. The finding of the present study is in line with the past literature.

Table 2. Effect of employment on empowerment

Dependent variable empowerment index		
Number of observations: 120		
R ² - 0.2662		
RMSE- 0.07		
Variable	Coefficient	SE
Employment	0.08	0.01(6.54)***

*Note: SE= standard error, absolute t-statistic are mentioned in the parenthesis, *** significant at 1%*

Source: Authors’ calculation

4. Conclusion

The study focuses on the women empowerment through employment. The result shows that autonomy is getting improved because of education and thereby getting employment. Similarly, results show that those women’s who are in jobs are getting uplifted economically. Finally, gender biasness is being reduced by more and more women coming into the mainstream by getting educated and thereby getting employed. Therefore, more initiatives should be taken to educate women and thereby empower them to uplift the country economically.

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