

INTER-RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FAMILY STRUCTURE AND THE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A SURVEY REPORT

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ABSTRACT

In recent years empowerment of women has been recognised as a central issue in determining the status of women. Though it is perceived that the status of a women is enhanced by empowerment, it is not yet explained how it empowers women in the family set-up. The power relations in a family are a very important aspect from the point of view of empowerment of women. An employed woman may be very powerful and efficient in an organization but the situation at home may be different. The empowerment achieved through employment is analyzed through eight elements of empowerment e.g. self-esteem, importance in the family, role in deciding the number of children, decision making in family matters, role of employment in keeping up individuality, increase in self dependence, family income and in securing the respect of husband and in-laws. A survey has been done in Muzaffarpur in order to trace the inter relativity of family structure on the status of women empowerment.

Key words: Woman empowerment, Family structure, Muzaffarpur, Bihar.

INTRODUCTION

According to Kabeer (2001a) and Malhotra and Schuler (2005), empowerment is defined as “an increase in women’s ability to make choices about their lives and environment”.

Women’s role and situation had central place in the family structure. If any change takes place in the role, situation of working women, it influences their marital as well as family life. This change takes place at micro level of the family. The family is considered as the important unit of society and it also mediates the process of changes in society at individual, social, economic and political level.

The family is a dynamic and progressive force in the creation of culture, social characters and social development, it is not the output of the social factors. The family is the determinant of the transmission of culture, development of next generation, development of personality, personal relationship and individuals mind set and mental health.

Women’s role is an especial constituent which develops the human being as well as society. The development of society and nation depends greatly upon women’s participation in most of the

activities at social, economic and political level. Megha (1990) suggested that the women's status and duties changed with the type of families/home like traditional/conservative home or in a modern home, and its also depends on the income-based groups/types of family. Decision making about personal and social affairs affect the whole family members and the decision making by men/women enhances the status of the individual in the family. Women live with multiple role and duties, and sometimes they provide support to their family as a mother, a wife, a daughter and a sister (Zafar et al., 1995).

Women's empowerment has received a great deal of attention as both a means and an end of international development. Education, micro-credit, and land rights have all been promoted as ways to help women become the beneficiaries of development. At the same time, these policies and programs are seen as ways to help women become more powerful agents of development. Empowered women are supposed to secure the well-being of themselves and their families. While the importance of women's empowerment to development is increasingly accepted, however, the complexities of the links among empowerment and its determinants and consequences are still not well understood.

One element that has not been adequately addressed is the quality of family of compassionate aspects of relationships, including love, affection and support. Love and support found in high quality family relationships may be an important source of women's empowerment. Higher quality relationships may create an environment, where women are both more willing to assert themselves and family members above the women in the customary family hierarchy and to take her choices into account. In such a context, husband, mothers-in-law, or other senior family members may be better acquainted and concerned with her wishes and take young women's preferences more seriously. Further, family members wanting to maintain a loving or at least amicable relationship may be a powerful incentive for them to give women greater scope to make decisions. Thus, this paper addresses the question of whether high quality family relationships are a source of women's empowerment.

Before proceeding further, it is important to first make a brief statement about terminology. There are several terms for what is often the same, but blurry concept of women's empowerment.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To investigate the relationship between family structure and the level of women empowerment, the present study has been designed to test the hypothesis:

“Nuclear families have a greater level of women empowerment than joint families.”

MATERIALS & METHODS:

The respondents have all been selected from Muzaffarpur and were asked to fill a personal Data Sheet (PDS) and the questionnaire.

The sample size and the number of respondents selected was 320. The categories were made depending upon level of education (viz. no education, primary, secondary and higher education).

Education status of the family arrived at using a family educational status index varying from 2 to 5 and structure of the family (Joint or nuclear).

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

1. One day camp was organized in Muzaffarpur town and surrounding area and all the 320 respondents, after screening of PDS were selected from the same.
2. Empowerment Questionnaire: used for measuring the level of empowerment by using Cumulative Empowerment Index (CEI).
3. Statistical analysis: The mean and variance (Standard deviation) of the data collected were calculated and the p-value of the data were estimated.

The analysis starts with arranging the raw data in the form required for ANOVA. One way ANOVA was carried out for all the classes of respondents across all the dimensions to establish the validity of analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the present study have been shown in following text table: -

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Joint	160	5904	36.9	2.2
Nuclear	160	6752	42.2	3.5

Table showing the ANOVA for Cumulative Empowerment Index (CEI) across two family structures: -

Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	F	p-value	F-crit
Between groups	2803.07	1.0	2803.1	51.6	3.46	3.864
Within groups	21638.10	398.0	54.4			
Total	24441.17	399.0				

The extremely low p-value rejected the null hypothesis, which suggested about a significant difference in the empowerment index of respondents across different family structure.

The hypothesis proposed in this instance was that the level of empowerment is higher for a nuclear family and is lower for a joint family. This hypothesis too has been proven to be right, however, contrary to the proposed hypothesis, it has been found that in the space of household dimension, the empowerment level for joint families is higher than the empowerment level for nuclear families. On an average, a woman from nuclear family is 15% more empowered than a woman from a joint family, despite of the fact that woman in joint families are more empowered than woman in nuclear families in the household dimension.

CONCLUSION

The present study successfully establishes the dimensions of women empowerment with respect to Muzaffarpur district. The study establishes correlation between psycho-social correlates of family structure and the level of empowerment. The biggest gulf between the two setups i.e. a joint family setup and a nuclear family setup comes for the dimension of economic empowerment. In the dimension of economic empowerment, the women from nuclear families are almost 25% more empowered than women from joint families. This difference is the highest across all the categories and therefore marks the importance of family structure as a means of improving the economic empowerment level of women.

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