

Women Empowerment with Special Reference to Higher Education and Employment in Khulna City

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Abstract

Purpose: This study has put a great effort to measure the empowerment status of women who are both higher educated and employed.

Sampling and data collection: Data were collected from women employed in various organization like banks, educational institutions, NGOs and others for this study. Empowerment was measured based on economic freedom, household decision making, social & legal freedom and political freedom. A structured questionnaire using five point likert scale was used to collect opinions from the respondents. A total 178 employed women were finally interviewed.

Data analysis: The data were analyzed using t-test against population mean value. Descriptive statistical tools like mean value, standard deviation are also used to analyze the data.

Finding: The results reveal that higher educated and employed women are empowered at some extent in dimensions like economic freedom, household decision making, social & legal freedom and political freedom.

Originality: This study is an original work of authors.

Key words: Women Empowerment, Social Empowerment, Political Empowerment, Economic empowerment .

Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the most populous countries of the world. About half of its total population is female (BBS report, 2011). Total human resource (15+) is 53.7 million among which 13.5 million are women (BBS report, 2011) i.e. about 25% of our human resource is women. The contribution of women is a must to accelerate the growth and development process of country.

Even if the constitution promotes equal rights to women, women are experiencing deprivation in every sphere of their lives – education, working, independent thinking, and right to property (Islam and Sultana, 2006 cited in Khan and Afrin, 2012). Domestic and social violence, superstition, influences of local elite and lack of consciousness is also degrading the status of women in the society.

Government and non-government organizations have taken different initiatives to improve the situation of woman and as a result, the situation is being improved as female literacy rate is increasing, female are being more aware about their right and increased their participation in economic and political activities. Last four years, about 4.9 millions of women were added to the human resource of the country (BBS report, 2011).

Empowering women through employment, education and financial support is a prime target of the government of Bangladesh. This has also been included in the long term plan of the government named Vision-2021 and Millennium Development Goal (MDG) within 2015 which is postulated by the United Nations. This study put an effort to evaluate how higher education & employment affect on women empowerment.

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Literature Review

Different scholars define empowerment in different dimensions. But most of the definitions of empowerment focus on issues of gaining power and have power over decision making in the family and society and access to the resources that determine the quality of one's life in a specified society (Khan and Afrin, 2012). According to the World Bank, empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform that choice into desired actions and outcomes (<http://go.worldbank.org/V45HD4P100>). Women's empowerment can be defined in terms of women's self confidence and vision of the future; their status and bargaining power within the household and their status and networks in the community. Empowerment is related to change, choice, and power. It is a way of change that gives power to the individuals or groups who have little or no power and ability to make choices that affect their life. The structures of power—who has it, what its sources are, and how it is exercised—directly affects the choices that women are able to make in their lives (Mayoux, 1998; Cheston and Kuhn, 2002 cited in Khan and Afrin, 2012). Kabeer (2001) defines it as “the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.”

Empowerment is also understood as outcome of improvement in education, health, and economic and political participation. It is about women's ability in an absolute sense to exercise control, power, and choice over practical and strategic decisions. (Grown, 2008). Women empowerment ideally was defined as “a continuous process where the powerless people become conscious of their situation and organize themselves to improve it and access opportunities, as an outcome of which women take control over their lives, set their own agenda, gain skills, solve problems and develop self-reliance” (Sarawathy, et al., 2008 cited in Snijders, 2009).

Empowerment includes several dimensions as economic, household, legal, and political etc. Each of these dimensions is composite with various sub dimensions. For instance, the economic dimension may include labor force participation, wage differential etc. (Malhotra et al. 2002). Women's Empowerment Matrix consists of six dimensions- physical, socio-cultural, religious, economic, political, and legal; and six levels- individual, household, community, state, region, and global (Charmes and Wieringa, 2003). Thus, women empowerment can be assessed in terms of economic empowerment, empowerment in household decision making, social & legal empowerment and political empowerment.

Economic empowerment is the capacity of women to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways which recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth (Eyben et al, 2008). Women's economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to strengthening women's rights and enabling women to have control over their lives and exert influence in society (Sweden, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2010). In Bangladesh, women's ability to purchase some assets of their own, in the form of housing or land, or to invest their income in savings and government deposit pension schemes was an important source of security for those who were able to do this (Kabeer et al. 2011).

Household decision making power indicates that how much an educated-employed women have right to participate or decide the family decisions. Parvin et al. (2004) identified a number of indicators to measure women's participation in household decision making as: 1. Child Education, 2. Son's & Daughter's Marriage, 3. Buying Household Items, 4. Buying Personal Items, 5. Buying Household Assets, 6. Buying Agricultural Inputs, 7. Use of Contraceptives, 8. Avail Treatment, 9. Avail Recreational Facilities, 10. Visiting Parents or Relatives. Findings reveal that after being involved to economic activities, women's earnings significantly enhanced their capability to express their opinion and make decision to meet personal needs, to contribute to buy households assets, availing treatment and recreational facilities independently. Social empowerment and legal empowerment means women decisive power in the office control over male subordinates, participating the cultural programs, securities of free

movement access to legal support. Access to full and decent employment remains a challenge for most women and that is why women still continue to be in low paid, insecure jobs and informal economies. Women also face harassment in the workplace and dismissal for being pregnant. Women also have limited access to credit to engage in entrepreneurial activity. Hence, a new gender policy approach is needed that will focus on changing norms of unpaid care work through parental leave policy; quantify and reduce care work; develop educational systems that erase gender stereotypes; challenge notions of women's work based on stereotypes; and raise the quality of work in all sectors (ILO, 2010). Corporate culture and social cultural expectation of women's roles generates constraints on women's access to employment. It also forces women to think about low paid jobs, gender segregated labor markets, pay gaps, and discrimination and harassment in the workplaces, both formal and informal.

Political empowerment indicating the decision making power of female to cast vote freely, choosing political parties without any influence, right to participate in political activity, right to be candidate in the public elections. In Bangladesh, currently the prime-minister and the opposition leader of the parliament are female. To increase the political empowerment of female reserve seats for the women in national parliament increased from 45 to 50 as per 15th amendment of constitution dated 3rd July, 2011 (www.bangladesh.gov.bd). Besides these, political participation of women in the local government has been enhanced by securing a post of female representative for every 3 wards in City Corporation area and in union parishad (Ministry of Local Government).

Objectives

The main objective of the study is to measure the level of empowerment of higher educated-employed women of Khulna city and thus the specific objectives are to examine the level of economic empowerment, empowerment in household decision making, social & legal empowerment and political empowerment of higher educated-employed women.

Hypotheses

The main hypothesis of the study is

H₀: The higher educated-employed women of Khulna city are not empowered;

H₁: The higher educated-employed women of Khulna city are empowered;

We can be restated the main hypothesis more precisely by the following hypothesis--

H_{1a}: Women are economically empowered

H_{1b}: Women have freedom to take their household decisions

H_{1c}: Women are empowered socially and legally

H_{1d}: Women are empowered politically

Methodology

This study is confined within Khulna city. Women who are higher educated (at least have completed graduation) and employed (employed in formal sectors or self employed) were selected as the sample for this study. It is estimated (based on oral discussion with govt. officials, officials of Khulna city corporation, NGOs etc.) that about 2,500 higher educated women are employed in Khulna city.

This study has been conducted based on primary and secondary data. Secondary data has been obtained from different books, journals, websites etc. By using the software Raosoft (an online sample size calculator) with a margin of error 4%, confidence level 95%, with population size 2,500, the calculated sample size is 199 (200). For collecting primary data, a structured questionnaire with five point likert scale (where 'highly agree' is coded as '5' and 'highly disagree' is coded as '1') was distributed among the women who are employed in different organizations like schools, colleges, universities (both public and private), banks, medicals, beauty parlors and NGOs who were selected as sample for the study. After getting back the feedback (completed questionnaire from the respondents) it is found that 178 questionnaires are flawless & completed and thus we used only 178 for

analysis. SPSS has been used to process the data. Descriptive statistical tools like mean, standard deviation and T-test against population mean value have been applied for data analysis.

Scale Reliability

Cronbach Alpha reliability test was conducted for all the measures. Reliabilities were checked and they fall between 0.60 and 0.88, which is satisfactory for study (Nunnally, 1978). The overall Cronbach alpha of the four scales used in this study is 0.78. This indicates that the reliability of the scales is reasonably high thus, depicting high internal consistency among the measurement items. Scales reliabilities are .793 (Economic empowerment), .797 (Household decisions), .798 (Social empowerment), and .783 (Political empowerment).

Analysis and discussion

Based on the theoretical framework the responses are here presented first categorically (economic empowerment, House-hold decision making power, social empowerment, political empowerment,) then based on hypothesis mentioned earlier.

Table 01: Factor Affecting Economic Empowerment

Factor affecting economic empowerment	Mean	Std. Dev.
You can make small purchases for you and your family independently.	4.07	.82
You take part actively to purchase expensive items (car/ house/land etc.).	3.62	1.03
You can purchase large assets (land/car/house etc.) by your name.	2.90	1.11
You have savings of your own.	4.34	.66
Grand mean and overall standard deviation	3.73	.91

The grand mean value (3.73) indicates that the women are empowered to some extent but not highly empowered as the mean value is above the neutral value (3) where as the maximum level of empowerment is represented by the value 5. They are in better position in some areas under economic empowerment like small purchase, money saving but worst position to purchase large asset by their name. The overall standard deviation is .91 indicates that the responses tend towards closer of the average values. So, it can conclude that the response on economic empowerment is reliable.

Table 02: Factor Affecting House-Hold Decision Making

Factor affecting House-hold decision making power	Mean	Std. Dev.
You can participate the decide schooling of your children.	3.53	.987
You have active role to take decisions regarding child bearing.	2.71	1.03
You can help your maternal and paternal relatives financially.	3.14	.96
You are well supported by your family members to run daily activities.	2.99	1.10
Grand mean and overall standard deviation	3.09	1.02

The grand mean (3.09) is very close to neutral value indicating that the women are neither empowered nor underpowered. Under house-hold decision making power they are in better position in deciding school going of their

children (with a mean 3.53) but in the worst condition in taking decisions regarding child bearing (2.71) and cooperation of family members while they are at work (mean 2.99). Overall standard deviation is 1.02 which indicates that the individual responses of the respondents are less dispersed from the overall mean value. So, the responses are reliable on household decision making.

Table 03: Factor Affecting Legal Empowerment

Factor affecting Social empowerment	Mean	Std. Dev.
Your colleagues respect you as your position in the organization.	3.98	.642
You can make your decisions independently without any pressure from anyone.	3.61	.896
You feel righteous and free of hesitation in your office like all others.	3.48	.90
You have control over your male subordinates in the office.	3.71	.97
You have enough legal support by your counter side.	3.74	.89
You can participate different social and cultural programs by your choice.	3.75	.87
If you are dominated by anyone, you have enough scope for legal aids.	3.60	.76
You feel safe and secured while you travel from one place to another.	2.81	1.03
Grand mean and overall standard deviation	3.58	.87

The above table shows the Social empowerment of women. The grand mean value is 3.58 which indicate that higher educated-working women are economically empowered in to some extent. In the Social empowerment women are in better position in case of cooperation of colleagues, independent decision making, controlling male subordinates. But they higher educated-employed women are in the worst position in case of their safe movement in the society. Overall standard deviation is .87 which indicates that the individual responses of the respondents are clustered around the overall mean value. So, the opinions of respondents are reflected reliably in the responses on legal empowerment of women.

Table 04: Factor Affecting Political Empowerment

Factor affecting social empowerment	Mean	Std. Dev.
You can cast your vote without any pressure of your relatives or others.	3.51	1.13
Choice of political party is not influenced by your relatives or others.	3.65	0.93
You can participate the political activities freely.	2.97	0.95
You can take part in the election as a candidate if you desire.	3.06	0.91
Grand mean and overall standard deviation	3.30	.98

The above table represents the political empowerment status of higher educated-employed women. The grand mean value is 3.30, which indicates that higher educated-employed women are politically very little empowered. Among their political empowerment they are in better position in casting vote independently and choosing political parties. But their conditions are really poor in participating in the ongoing political activities and participation as a candidate. Overall standard deviation is .98 which indicates that the individual responses of the respondents are less scattered thus clustered concretely around the average value. It signifies that the opinions of respondents on political empowerment of women in Khulna city have been reflected reliably.

Result of hypothesis test and analysis

H₀: The higher educated-employed women of Khulna city are not empowered;

H₁: The higher educated-employed women of Khulna city are empowered;

Table 05: One-Sample Test for overall Women Empowerment

Test value = 3							
Variable	Sample size	Mean	Standard Deviation	T Value	P value	Degree of Freedom	Level of Significance
Women empowerment	178	3.64	.394	21.701	.000	177	.05

The results of table 1 show that the mean and standard deviation to women empowerment is 3.64 and 0.394 respectively. The mean value (3.64) indicates that the women are empowered. At 95 percent confidence level; the p value is .000 and level of significance is .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is (p < .05) rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted; it means that women are who are higher educated and employed are empowered.

a. Economic Empowerment

H_{0a}: Women are not economically empowered

H_{1a}: Women are economically empowered

Table 06: One-Sample Test for Economic Empowerment

Test value = 3							
Variable	Sample size	Mean	Standard Deviation	T Value	P value	Degree of Freedom	Level of Significance
Economic empowerment	178	3.73	.91	18.274	.000	177	.05

The results (table- 06) show that the mean and standard deviation to economic empowerment is 3.8 and 0.58 respectively. At 95 percent confidence level; the p value is .000 and level of significance is .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is (p < .05) rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted; it means that women are economically empowered.

b. Empowerment in Household Decision making

H_{0b}: Women do not have freedom to take their household decisions

H_{1b}: Women have freedom to take their household decisions

Table 07: One-Sample Test for Household Decision

Test value =3							
Variable	Sample size	Mean	Standard Deviation	T Value	P value	Degree of Freedom	Level of Significance
Household decision	178	3.09	1.02	7.531	.000	177	.05

The results (table-07) show that the mean and standard deviation to household empowerment is 3.09 and 0.80 respectively. At 95 percent confidence level; the p value is .000 and level of significance is .05. Therefore, the null

hypothesis is ($p < .05$) rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted; it means that women are empowered in house hold level.

c. Social empowerment

H_{0c} : Women are not empowered yet socially and legally.

H_{1c} : Women are empowered socially and legally.

Table 08: One-Sample Test for Social Empowerment

Test value =3							
Variable	Sample size	Mean	Standard Deviation	T Value	P value	Degree of Freedom	Level of Significance
Social empowerment	178	3.58	.87	13.99	.000	177	.05

The results (table- 08) show that the mean and standard deviation to Social empowerment is 3.58 and 0.56 respectively. At 95 percent confidence level; the p value is .000 and level of significance is .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is ($p < .05$) rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted; means, the women are empowered and legally.

d. Political Empowerment

H_{0d} : Women are not empowered yet politically

H_{1d} : Women are empowered politically

Table-09: One-Sample Test for Political Empowerment

Test value =3							
Variable	Sample size	Mean	Standard Deviation	T Value	P value	Degree of Freedom	Level of Significance
Political Empowerment	178	3.30	.98	6.82	.000	177	.05

The results (Table 09) show that the mean and standard deviation to political empowerment is 3.39 and 0.78 respectively. At 95 percent confidence level; the p value is .000 and level of significance is .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is ($p < .05$) rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted; means, the women are empowered politically.

Findings and conclusion

The study reveals that higher educated & employed women are economically empowered in to some extent. They enjoy substantial level of freedom in buying individually and for the family. Besides, they can take decisions about their saving and investment. But they are not substantially empowered to purchase big assets like land, house, car etc.

They can exercise their discretion for making decisions in household matters like schooling of children, proving financial supports to relatives but not exercise in some cases like child bearing.

This study has found that women particularly who are employed are empowered socially and legally. They can make their decision freely without any social pressure. They are respected and valued by their male colleagues in organizations where they work.

It reveals from the study that women are empowered politically. They enjoy substantial level of freedom in making political decisions like casting votes, participating ongoing political activities, development program. Women candidates are now equally participation in various local (union parishad, upazia parishad, pourasava) and national election.

The findings of the study draw the conclusion that the educated and employed women are empowered at certain level but not fully empowered in all the above mentioned dimensions such as economic, household, socially & legally and politically.

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