DO SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS STIMULATE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AT HOUSEHOLD LEVEL? EVIDENCE FROM SOUTH & SOUTH EAST ASIA

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ABSTRACT

The current study is an attempt to evaluate the current status of women's empowerment in the selected countries of (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Cambodia, and Timor-Leste) south and Southeast Asia using Demographic Health Surveys. A women empowerment index is constructed through principal component analysis that includes nineteen indicators of women empowerment. The study specifically measures the empowerment of ever married women aged 15 to 49 at the household level. The relationship between extent of empowerment (low, medium or high) and stimulating factors of women empowerment is analyzed using chi-square tests and regression analysis. We find that the individual factors such as women's education, age, and health appear to be more significant stimulating factors for women's empowerment. Similarly, women's age at first birth and the total number of children ever born have a significantly negative influence on women's empowerment. The education and age of the spouse, household wealth and gender of the household head being male also proved to be strong stimulating factors for women empowerment. Furthermore, high empowerment of females is found to be positively associated with better education, better health status, urban residence, higher level of household wealth in the study. We also find that the extent of women's empowerment is highest in Nepal and lowest in Pakistan as compared to the other three countries.

Keywords: Socio-Economic Factors, Women Empowerment, Demographic Health Survey

JEL codes: J16, I14, O15

INTRODUCTION

"*Woman the full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture and transform is.*" -Diane Mariechild

Empowering women is not only an essential part of human rights but it is also one of the goals developing countries are pursuing for the achievement sustainable development (Afshar, 2016). Women have remained at the mercy of the men (father, brother, husband or son) for centuries. This practice is continuing in different regions of the world as part of tradition, culture, or belief Fawole & Adeoye (2015); Furuta & Salway (2006). A woman performs multiple tasks

and roles at her house. At the same time, she is keeping care of her husband, children, and all other family members. She works from sunrise until the sunset without relaxing her body and mind. Everyone in the family demands her services without understanding the needs of women. There is dire need that women should be aware of their due rights. It's a compulsory part of development to produce a balanced society (Dobson, 2017).

Previous literature defines women empowerment as autonomy, power, education, employment status, agency, a goal or a process Abekah-Nkrumah, (2013); Haq et al., (2018); Ahmad & Sultan, (2004); Amare et al., (2019); Bradley, Candice (1995); Kabeer, (1999), (2005), (2012); Mosedale, (2005). Kabeer (1999, 2005, 2012) interpreted women empowerment in three interrelated dimensions, resource, agency, and outcome. Present study measures women empowerment using five dimensions such as work status, awareness, decision making, self-esteem, self-confidence and evaluates the possible factors that may stimulate women empowerment.

This study addresses the gap in the literature by computing a quantitative measure of women's empowerment following the Kabeer (1999, 2005 & 2012) women empowerment conceptual framework. Following are the objectives of the study

1. To assess the current status of women empowerment within the countries of South and Southeast Asia at the household level.
2. To determine the factors stimulating women empowerment in South and Southeast Asia at the household level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women Empowerment (Measurement)

In the previous studies, women empowerment was introduced by the term autonomy, power, status, agency (Lee-Rife, 2010). Autonomy indicates freedom, whereas empowerment can include freedom as well as agency and refers to the process(Malhotra & Schuler, 2005). Women's empowerment needs central changes in organizations' supportive male-controlled behavior (Hanmer & Klugman, 2016). Women empowerment considered a process to enhance the quality of life through attaining the ability to make choices for marriage, children, mobility, job, and entertainment. (Ahmad & Sultan, (2004); Bradley, Candice, (1995); Mosedale, (2005), empowerment is a goal or consequence (Sridevi, 2005). The concept of empowerment is complicated to understand due to its interchange or interlinked between women's status, autonomy, and gender equality (Panchani, 2014) Empowerment as *"altering relations of power… which constrain women's options and autonomy and adversely affect health and well-being."*(Yip, 2004). Empowerment is a way to uplifts the person's capabilities and in this context, women play the role of agents rather than the recipient (Batliwala, (1995); Bennett, (2002); Sen, (1993). Empowerment and social inclusion are interlinked. Social inclusion has occurred through the process of empowerment. The intensive aspect of empowerment is a process of change Oxaal, (1997); Rowlands, (1995); Rowlands, (1997). Empowerment concerned with power and linked with the distribution of power to individuals or groups who were previously neglected. Empowerment means to transfer control over power relations, power sources and domestic economic power Agarwal (1994); (Batliwala, 1995; Mahmud & Tasneem, 2014). Power is also defined in many ways *"domestic and economic power"*(Haroon, 2018). Empowerment has been conceptualized as "Bargaining Power"(Mabsout & Van Staveren,

(2010); Osmani, 2007), as decision making power (Hasan & Uddin, 2016; Kishor & Gupta, 2004; Lopez-Claros & Zahidi, 2005).

Kabeer (1999) explained empowerment in a comprehensive form in terms of interrelated dimensions resource, agency, and achievement. Resources referred in the form of economic, human and social. Agency referred the transfer of power to make choices and act upon it and achievement means wellbeing. Resources used to enhance the ability to exercise the choices in the right way. Change in resources; change the ability to make choices because resources are measured as potential rather than actualized choices. Empowerment well explained as an expansion in the ability of persons to make tactical life choices in the framework where they were previously deprived (Haroon, 2018; Kabeer, 2001; Malhotra et al., 2005) and suggested the process of resource-agency-agreement to get empowerment.

Women Empowerment (Socioeconomic Factors)

Kritz (2000) explained the women's age, education, and health as determinants of a woman's authority. Women empowerment has measured by household decision making and found the husband's education, woman's assets, and women paid work were the most significant determinants (Musonera & Heshmati, (2017). Women's empowerment was explained through poverty alleviation (Noreen, 2011). Alkire et al. (2013) find out that age, health, wealth, education as determinants of women empowerment. Further Sado, et al. (2014) find out wealth, education, age, employment status of women and household structural factors as the determinants of women empowerment. Age, education, and health of women, wealth status of household and family structure have very important contribution in determining women empowerment in Bangladesh, India ,Indonesia, Tanzania ,Uganda and Russia by Anderson and Eswaran (2009) ; Allendorf (2012) ; Amin and Becker (1998) ; Garikipati (2008).

In previous literature, most of the studies usually used limited indicators to measure women empowerment in the scenario of different countries and regions. In the present study combination of nineteen direct and indirect indicators was used to measure the women empowerment for five countries (Pakistan, India, Nepal, Cambodia and Timor Lester), three were selected from South Asia and two from Southeast Asia. Household-level and individual family characteristics were used to determine the stimulating factors of women empowerment; it will be an addition in the literature to understand the contribution of household level and individual level characteristics to enhance the empowerment in women of South and Southeast Asia.

In previous studies, women empowerment is explained in the context of power, autonomy, capabilities, social inclusion, gender equality, access to resources, awareness, and participation in decision making. Agarwal (1997); Beegle et al., (1998); Pulerwitz et al. (2000); Kahlon, (2004). Empowerment is a wide and complex and multidimensional issue and has multi-aspects in different context and region process Ahmad & Sultan, (2004); Bradley, (1995); Mosedale, (2005).

In the present study, empowerment is defined as a dynamic process in the current norms of society and household in which she faces challenges and lives to improve its well-being. This wellbeing can be attained in terms of five interrelated dimensions- work status, awareness, decision making, self-esteem, and self-confidence. The dimensions in the present study reflect Kabeer's (1999) three interrelated dimensions. Work status and awareness are the preconditions (resources) to exercise decision making (agency) and then after decision making its consequences (achievement) can be seen in the form of self-esteem and self-confidence. This study is more comprehensive and practical for the wellbeing of women in developing countries.

METHODOLOGY

Data Set

Data used for analyses has been extracted from the most recent Demographic Health Surveys (DHS)(2005-2014). DHS surveys present a wide range of information on the selected sample of the population that is comparable across countries. DHS data is collected by multi-stage sampling and random selection of households from the population units. Individuals are identified from the household roster such as: women aged 15–49 years, men aged 15–59 years and children in aged 0–59 months (Measure DHS, 2019).

The countries with the DHS datasets (2005-2014) and having data on the selected indicators of women empowerment are included in the study. Only 3 countries from South Asia and 2 countries from Southeast Asia meet this criterion and, therefore, are included in the sample. Detail of the sample selection is given in Appendix 1. Missing values are not included in the analysis.

Dependent Variable

The women empowerment index is constructed by five dimensions of women empowerment such as work status, awareness, decision making, self-esteem, and self-confidence. The work status of women is explained through two indicators i.e. whether women are currently working or not and by the categories of profession. Work status is coded "1" if the woman is working and "0" otherwise. The profession variable is ordered by assigning higher value to the highest salary and low value to the low salary.

Awareness is the indicators of learning which is measured through her exposure to the electronic news sources. If she has got information's from TV, radio and newspaper then yes otherwise zero. If she has heard about family planning from radio, TV or newspaper the variable is coded as "*Yes*" and "*No*" otherwise.

Decision making covered the four types of decision power i.e. decision-related to large household purchase, decision-related to husband's earning, decision about respondent's own

health and decision-related to visiting family or friends. Each indicator has four options and decision by women alone is assigned the highest score.

Self-esteem explains how a woman feels or justified her position against her husband humiliating behavior. Self-esteem is measured by five indicators. Beating is not justified if she argues with husband, burns food, neglects children, refuses sex or goes outside without telling her husband. If she feels beating is not justified then the variable is codes as "Yes" and "No" otherwise.

The dimension of self-confidence explains the confidence of respondent when she goes outside alone and gets money for medical treatment. If she can go out confidently and can get money for treatment the variable is coded "Yes" and "No" otherwise.

Independent Variables

Twelve variables are used as explanatory variables for determining the stimulating factors of women's empowerment in South and Southeast Asia. These variables are women education, age, age at first birth, body Mass Index, husband age & education, the total number of children ever born, the gender of the head of household, age of head of household, total member of the household, household wealth and place of residence.

Limitation of the Study

1. The current study is limited by the following constraints:
1. Only the ever-married women in the reproductive age (15-49) are selected for this study.
2. Only those countries are selected which have complete information about the indicators of women empowerment (work status, awareness, decision making, self-esteem, and self-confidence) and socio-economic and demographic determinants of women empowerment.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics and cross tabulations are used to display women empowerment indicators the current place of women empowerment in the south and Southeast Asia. The women empowerment index is calculated through principal component analysis. Cross-tabulation between women empowerment and its determinants has been employed to check significance between variables through Chi-Square criteria. Next, the ordinary least square technique has been employed for formal analysis. For the validity of ordinary least square technique, multicollinearity is checked through VIF values. The total number of children under five which is correlated with the total number of children ever born is removed to resolve the issue of multicollinearity. SPSS 22 software is used for analysis.

Model Specification for Women Empowerment Index

Women Empowerment Index=f (Women Education, Women Body Mass Index, Women Age, Women Age at First Birth, Husband Age, Husband Education, Gender of Head of Household, Age of Head of Household, Total Number of Children Ever Born, Total Household Members, Total Household Members, Household Wealth Index, Place of residence)   (3.1)

WE= Women Education
WBMI = Women Body Mass Index
WA= Women Age
WAFB = Women Age at First Birth
HA= Husband Age
HE= Husband Education
GHH= Gender of Head of Household
AHH= Age of Head of Household
TNCEB= Total Number of Children Ever Born
THM= Total Household Members
HWI= Household Wealth Index
PR= Place of residence

The econometric specification of the model is as follows

WEI=$\beta 0 + \beta 1 WE + \beta 2 WBMI + \beta 3 WA + \beta 4 WAFB + \beta 5 HA + \beta 6 HE + \beta 7 GHH + \beta 8 AHH + \beta 9 TNCEB + \beta 10 THM + \beta 11 HWI + \beta 12 PR + \varepsilon i$ (3.2)

Here WEI stands for women empowerment index and εi is the error term.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The women selected for this study are distributed by education, age, body mass index, age at her first birth and characteristics of her husband, children, head of household, household's wealth, size and place of residence, the current status of women empowerment as shown in Table 1 Chi-square test and regression results are reported in Tables 2, 3 & 4. Results of PCA and screen plot have been presented in the Appendix.

Table 1 SUMMARY STATISTICS OF INDICATORS OF THE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT INDEX					
Indicators of Women Empowerment	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Work Status					
Respondent is currently Working	181014	.3999	.4898	0	1
Respondent 's Employment Status by Professions	181082	1.888	2.248	0	7

Awareness					
Respondent Watching TV	181175	0.6579	.8448	0	2
Respondent reading Newspaper or Magazines	181292	0.7948	.8830	0	2
Respondent listening to the radio	181300	1.316	.8792	0	2
Respondent listen about family planning on the radio	181253	.3270	.4691	0	1
Respondent listen about family planning on TV	181294	.4955	.5059	0	1
Respondent listen about family planning from newspapers	181258	.2351	.4240	0	1
Decision Making					
The decision to spend's about women's Husband earnings	128925	2.701	.8925	0	4
Decision to women's Health	129841	2.891	.8755	1	4
Decision about large household purchases	129838	2.613	.8522	1	4
Decision about visits to family or relatives	129841	2.721	.8324	1	4
Self Esteem ('Beating' is not Justified)					
If wife argues with husband	181332	.6863	.4639	0	1
If the wife neglects children	181332	.6181	.4858	0	1
If go outside without telling husband	181332	.6889	.4629	0	1
If the wife refuses to for sex	181332	.8024	.3981	0	1
If wife burns food	181332	.8031	.3976	0	1
Self Confidence					
Not want to go alone for medical	181253	.8378	.8648	0	2
Getting money for treatment	181276	.8849	.8544	0	2
Women Empowerment Index	128331	3.670299	1	2.19	4.35

Table 2 present the current status of women empowerment in the South and Southeast countries. Women in Pakistan appeared to be least empowered and women in Nepal are, however, more empowered as compared to the other countries in the sample. Women's empowerment in Pakistan depends on social, traditional customs, locations (urban/rural), age, education, and working status. Women with higher education and employment tried to improve

their social and economic status but unfortunately the situations remained unchanged (Heaton et al., 2005; Jabeen & Jabeen, 2013; Jali & Islam, 2017; Janssens, 2010). According to the gender inequality index, Pakistan ranked 133rd, India 127th, Nepal 118th, Cambodia 116th out of 189 countries (UNDP, 2018).

Table 2					
STATUS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA (DHS)					
Sr#	Countries	Years	Mother Empowerment		
			Low	Medium	High
1	Pakistan	2013	30.0%	66.0%	4.0%
2	Nepal	2011	0.2%	61.0%	38.8%
3	India	2006	14.0%	79.0%	7.0%
4	Cambodia	2014	2.4%	68.3%	29.4%
5	Timor Leste	2010	17.2%	79.1%	3.6%

Women's empowerment is significantly motivated by the age of women and improves with the increase in the age of women. Generally, the age of women is considered the proxy of experience. An elderly woman seems to be empowered than younger women because they have more education, experience, and awareness (Upadhyay et al., (2014); Upadhyay & Karasek, (2012); Varghese, (2011).

Table 3 CROSS-TABULATION WEI WITH ITS DETERMINANTS				
	Women Empowerment Index			**Chi-Square**
Independent Variables	**Low**	**Medium**	**High**	
Women Characteristics				
Women Education				0.000
No Education	21.6%	73.6%	4.8%	
Primary	12.2%	76.7%	11.1%	
Secondary	8.4%	78.2%	13.4%	
Higher Education	1.8%	69.8%	28.4%	
Women Body Mass Index'				0.000
Less than 18.5 kg/m2	17.5%	77.1%	5.4%	
Equal or more than 18.5kg/m2	12.2%	77.1%	10.7%	
Women's Age				
15-25	18.6%	74.7%	6.7%	0.000
25-35	12.2%	75.8%	12.0%	
35-45	11.6%	75.8%	12.6%	
Above than 45	12.2%	75.1%	12.7%	0.000
Respondent Age at First Birth				
Below than 20	13.8%	76.0%	10.2%	0.000
20-30	9.0%	72.6%	18.4%	
Above than 30	16.1%	73.0%	10.9%	
Husband Characteristics				
Husband's Age				
15-25	21.1%	72.5%	6.5%	0.000
26-35	13.9%	75.7%	10.4%	
36-45	11.8%	75.8%	12.4%	
46-55	12.0%	76.0%	12.0%	
Above than 55	15.5%	75.8%	8.7%	
Education				
No Education	22.3%	73.3%	4.4%	0.000
Primary	13.4%	76.3%	10.3%	
Secondary	12.0%	76.8%	11.1%	
Higher Education	6.2%	73.0%	20.8%	
Household Head's Characteristics				
Gender of the head of household				
Female	14.3%	76.1%	9.6%	0.000
Male	8.8%	69.8%	21.4%	
Age of Head of Household				
15-25	15.8%	74.1%	10.1%	0.000
26-35	12.6%	76.0%	11.3%	
36-45	12.5%	75.9%	11.6%	
46-55	13.6%	75.8%	10.6%	
Above than 55	16.4%	74.0%	9.7%	
Women's Children Characteristics				
Number of Children Ever Born				
<=4	14.2%	73.9%	11.9%	0.000
>4	13.6%	75.9%	10.5%	

Household's Characteristics				
Total Household Members				
<=5	12.7%	75.9%	11.5%	0.000
>5	24.7%	70.9%	4.4%	
Wealth Index of household				
Poorest	21.2%	73.7%	5.1%	0.000
Poorer	19.7%	73.6%	6.8%	
Middle	16.6%	75.4%	7.9%	
Richer	12.1%	77.2%	10.7%	
Richest	5.4%	76.1%	18.5%	
Place of Residence				
Rural	16.8%	74.3%	8.9%	0.000
Urban	9.1%	77.2%	13.8%	

Source: Demographic Health Survey (Author's Calculation)

Results of PCA and regression are reported in table 3 and 4 respectively. Tables 3 & 4 show that women with higher education are more empowered as compared to low educated women. Women's education is categorized into four groups (no education, primary education, secondary education, and higher education), to capture the effect of each category. No education is considered a reference category. Women's empowerment is positively associated with primary, secondary and higher education as compared to the reference category. Compared to all education groups, women's empowerment is strongly motivated with higher education. Women with higher education are empowered as compared to women with less education (Jeckoniah et al., 2012).

The increase in the age of women at their first birth is negatively associated with women's empowerment. Older women at their first birth appear to have less power than women who are younger at their first birth. One reason for this finding may be that the women having children are considered strong as compared to women without children in South and Southeast Asia.

Women with better body mass index show a positive link with women empowerment as compared to the reference category, which proved good health as a stimulating factor (Anderson & Eswaran, 2009). Women who have older husbands revealed a negative association with empowerment. Husbands with older age usually take all decisions related to their wives by themselves. Table 3 shows that the women whose husbands belong to the age group of below 45 years are more empowered as compared to those whose husbands are aged above 45 years. Husbands in young age seem to be more supportive and understandable as compared to older husbands. Education of a husband has a positive association with women empowerment. Husbands with higher education can easily understand all basic rights and needs of women and empower their wives happily (Noreen 2011).

The age of the head of the household has proved a strong stimulating factor of women's empowerment. Households where the head of households is older, women seem to be more empowered as compared to those households where the head of households is at a younger age.

The male head of the household has a positive association with women empowerment (OS & Adeoti, 2016).

Table 4 SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS WOMEN EMPOWERMENT (REGRESSION ANALYSIS)			
Independent Variables	**Women Empowerment Index (WEI)**		
	Coefficient	**Std. Error**	**T-Stat**
(Constant)	3.648***	-0.0294	23.9
Women Characteristics			
Women's Age in Years	0.0039***	0.0009	4.36
Women Education (No education is reference Category)			
Primary Education	0-.0385***	0.0101	-3.78
Secondary Education	0.0429***	0.0101	4.29
Higher Education	0.2538***	0.0181	13.95
Women's Age at first birth	0-.0138***	0.0011	12.9
Women Body Mass Index (less than 18.5 kg/m2 is reference category)			
Body Mass Index	0229***	0.0081	2.84
Husband's Age in years	-.00252***	0.00006	-4.04
Husband's Education (No education is reference Category)			
Primary Education	0.0572***	0.0109	5.24
Secondary Education	0.1211***	0.0101	12.0
Higher Education	0.1989***	0.0149	13.29
Household Head's Characteristics			
Age of Head of household in Years	.0008***	**0.0003**	2.64
Gender of Head of Household (Female is reference category)			
Male	.1349***	0.0118	11.4
Women's Children			
Total number of children ever born	-.0353***	0.0025	-14.1
Household Wealth Index (Poorest is reference category)			
Poorer	-.0643***	.0124	-5.19
Middle	-.1057***	.0123	-8.54
Richer	-.0848***	.0134	-6.33
Richest	0.0061	0.0165	0.37
Place of residence (Rural is reference category)			
Urban	.0936***	0.0084	11.1
Total number of households members	0.0061***	0.0015	3.96

Note: The regressions include intercept terms. ***, ** and * denote statistical significance at the 1 and 5 and 10 percent levels, respectively

Male family members (father/husband) as head of household provide support to their women in attaining education, awareness and work status(Ayevbuomwan et al., 2016). Women having more number of children ever born are found to be less empowered. Women belonging to households with the richest wealth index seems to be more empowered as compared to households with poor wealth index (Gupta & Yesudian, 2006). Women belonging to the urban

place of residence seems to be more empowered as compared to those women who belong to a rural residence (Musonera & Heshmati, 2017). Household wealth and place of residence may impact education and health of women and consequently may lead to empowered women.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A combined index of women empowerment has been constructed through five dimensions of women empowerment. Pakistan is found to have lowest empowerment index and Nepal has the highest empowerment index in the sample countries. Higher education is a prime stimulating factor for women empowerment in South and Southeast Asia. Education of women and their husband show positive role to stimulate the women empowerment. Women with better health have better empowerment i.e. healthier women seem to be more empowered as compared to unhealthy women. Late marriages or high age at first birth reduce women's empowerment. Women belonging to the richest household and urban areas seem to be more empowered. In addition, education and health are considered as the two most important factors in enhancing the women empowerment (Mahmud et al., 2012; Malhotra & Schuler, (2005); Mason, (1998); Mosedale, (2005). It is recommended to implement the policies to increase the education level for women and ensuring health facilities at the doorstep of households to enhance women empowerment.

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