

Differentials and Determinants of Women Empowerment in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

The present study was conducted on a large sample of 3600 married women aged 15 – 49 years selected from both the rural and urban areas of three different districts of Tamil Nadu indicate that the overall level of women empowerment is around 50 percent of the expected level in both the rural and urban areas. The empowerment level of women on various dimensions indicate that the women are relatively more empowered (around 60 – 70 percent) in socio-cultural, familial and psychological, it is moderate (around 45 percent) in economic empowerment and it is very poor (less than 25 percent) in legal and political. The factors significantly associated with the women empowerment are: age of women, type of marriage, education of women and her husband, occupation of women and her husband, membership in SHG and exposure to mass media.

Keywords: Empowerment, dimension, mass media

Introduction

The need for women empowerment has been an important topic of discussion in many international forums such as the International Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (UN, 1993), the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), the Fourth International Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and the World Health Assembly (Geneva, 1996). Considering the importance of the need for women empowerment, the achievement of women's empowerment and gender equality was included as one of the Millennium Development Goals (UN, 2000) and it has been reemphasized as one of the 17 goals of sustainable development goals (UN, 2015).

Empowerment is a socio-political concept that goes beyond participation and consciousness-raising. It considers cognitive, psychological and economic components. The cognitive component refers to women's understanding of their conditions of subordination and the reasons that create such conditions. The psychological component includes the development of a feeling that women can improve their condition and the belief that they can succeed in their efforts. The economic component of empowerment signifies that women are able to engage in a productive activity that will allow them some degree of financial independence, however small and burdensome in the beginning. Such income generating activities however are however difficult to implement because they are risky, time consuming, and hard to sustain (Stromquist, 1988).

The concept of women empowerment involves several dimensions like social, economic, psychological and political. Social empowerment connotes formation of social capacities such as health, education, freedom and opportunities for realizing one's potentialities. Economic empowerment implies entitlement to employment, income, property, productive resources and benefits regardless of gender differences. Psychological empowerment signifies confidence building, acquisition of a sense of

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efficacy and ability to overcome the feeling of helplessness. Political empowerment implies equal say in the decision making process in the power structure at all levels from local to global. All these dimensions of empowerment are so intertwined with one another that over reliance on one to the neglect of the other not likely to work (Sharma, 2000).

Many researchers have developed different measures of women empowerment on various dimensions at the individual and societal level. The Gender Empowerment Measure developed by Aasha Kapur Mehta(1996) focuses mainly three measures of gender empowerment based on the following indicators: representation in Lok Sabha, state legislatures, gram panchayats, panchayat samitis and zilla parishads; the literacy rate; exercise of the right to vote; life expectancy and income. Holding the Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) devised by the UNDP to be unsatisfactory, Indira Hirway and Darshini Mahadevia(1996) present an alternative conceptual framework for measuring gender development in the south at the individual and societal levels and compute their Gender Development Measure (GDM) for 15 major states in India. On the other hand AnjuMalhotra.et.al (2002) have constructed a list of the most commonly used dimensions of women's empowerment, drawing from the frameworks developed by various authors in different fields of social sciences. Allowing for overlap, these frameworks suggest that women's empowerment needs to occur along multiple dimensions including: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. As the measurement of women empowerment on these six dimensions are found to be more appropriate, the measurement model developed by Malhotra at individual level is used for this study. The level of women empowerment on these six dimensions is assessed in this study in both the rural and urban areas of Tamil Nadu.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- i. to assess the level of women empowerment in both the rural and urban areas of Tamil Nadu;
- ii. to study the demographic and socio-economic differentials and determinants of women empowerment; and
- iii. to suggest suitable measures to improve the level of women empowerment in both the rural and urban areas.

Sample Design

The present paper is based on a large scale study carried out in Tamil Nadu during the period from June 2013 to May 2015 by the department of applied research of the Gandhigram Rural Institute with the financial assistance from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, New Delhi. The study was carried out on a sample of 1800 married women (aged 15–49 years) each from the rural and urban areas selected from three different districts of Tamil Nadu Viz. Madurai, Karur and Viluppuram representing low, medium and high level of gender development as per the gender Development Index of the Tamil Nadu Human Development Report.

The sample for the study was selected based on a multistage random sampling procedure.

In the first stage, each district was grouped into two sampling domains such as rural and urban areas. Both the rural and urban sample was selected in two stages. The selection of Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) which are the villages in rural areas and wards in urban areas in the first stage followed by selection of respondents using systematic sampling procedure within each of the PSUs in the second stage. In total, six PSUs from rural and six PSUs from urban areas were selected in each of the three districts based on PPS sampling procedure.

A complete list of all married women aged 15–49 years prepared for each PSU from the records maintained by the village health nurse/anganwadi workers served as the sampling frame for each of the selected PSUs. The sample for each PSUs is fixed at 100. In order to take care of non-response for various reasons, a 10 per cent over sampling was done. Of the 110 women selected using systematic

sampling procedure, 100 women were interviewed in each of the 12 selected PSUs in each of the three selected districts.

Measurement of Women Empowerment

The following six domains of women empowerment were considered in this study:

1. Economic;
2. Socio-Cultural;
3. Familial;
4. Legal;
5. Political; and
6. Psychological:

For each of the six domains, a set of indicators were developed and were placed on a three point scale (0, 1 & 2 for not taking decision on her own, taking decision in consultation with other family members and taking decision on her own on a specific task respectively) in order to measure the level of women empowerment in each domain and also total empowerment combining all six domains together.

Results and Discussion

Total Empowerment: The results of the analysis of data on the total empowerment of women combining all the six domains of women empowerment is presented in this section. Each of the six domains is having a set of measurement indicators. A total of 90 indicators combining all the six domains of empowerment are used to assess the overall empowerment status of women. The number of indicators under each domain and the total indicators are shown in Figure1.

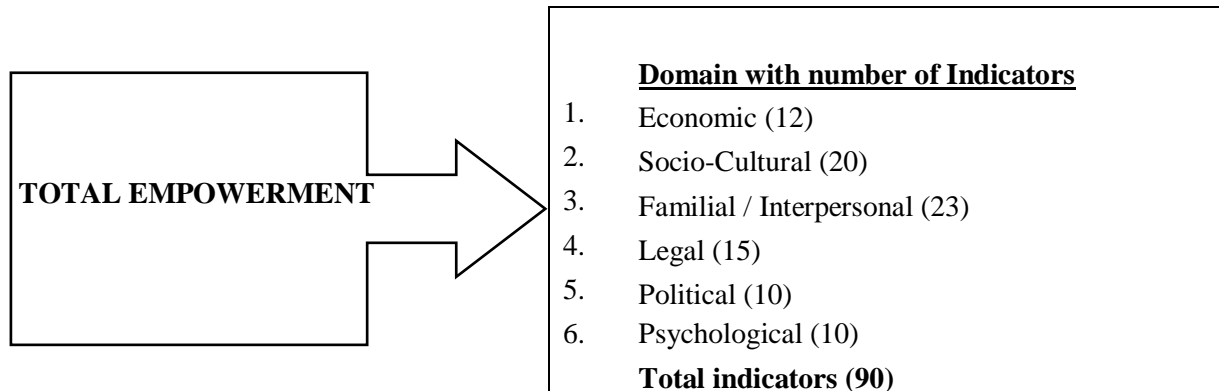


Figure 1

It is found that the overall total mean empowerment score is 88.83 for women from rural areas and 89.24 for women from urban areas which are 49.4 and 49.6 per cent of the total expected score of 180 for rural and urban areas respectively. The results of the study indicate that the overall empowerment status of women combining all the six domains of empowerment is lingering around just fifty per cent of the total expected level in both the rural and urban areas. Thus, women empowerment is just half way in both the rural and urban areas and there is a long way to reach the targets set under SDGs on women empowerment in India.

Empowerment by Demographic Characteristics: The mean empowerment score of women according to their demographic characteristics is presented in Table 1. It is observed that the mean empowerment score significantly increased with the increase in age of women in both the rural and urban areas. In rural areas, it has increased from 85.0 for women aged less than 25 years to 90.73 for women aged 40 years and above. In urban areas also, the mean empowerment score increased from 82.29 for women aged less than 25 years to 92.03 for women aged 40 years and above. Age of husband also shows a significantly positive effect on women's empowerment with the mean

empowerment score of women significantly increased with the age of husband in both the rural and urban areas. Increase in husband-wife age difference also significantly increases the empowerment status of women in rural areas but not in urban areas. Women who had non-consanguineous marriage in rural areas and those who had love marriage in both rural and urban areas tend to have more empowerment status than others. Family size is not making any significant difference in the empowerment status of women in rural areas. However in urban areas, increases in family size significantly decrease the empowerment status of women. Overall, among the various demographic variables examined in this study, age of women, age of husband, love marriage are showing significant influence on the empowerment status of women in both the rural and urban areas. Husband-wife age difference in rural areas and family size in urban areas are making significant difference in the empowerment status of women.

Demographic characteristics	Rural			Urban		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
All	1800	88.83	17.619	1800	89.24	19.139
Age of respondents (years)						
<25	202	85.00	19.569	226	82.29	18.209
25-29	460	88.35	17.138	429	87.11	19.618
30-34	424	88.63	16.414	437	91.37	18.225
35-39	361	90.12	16.779	364	91.37	18.380
≥ 40 yrs	353	90.73	18.534	344	92.03	18.299
		F=4.067	P≤0.003		F=13.823	P≤0.000
Age of husband (years)						
≤29	214	85.11	19.526	208	82.81	19.773
30-34	399	88.26	16.813	414	86.64	18.616
35-39	407	89.32	16.357	434	90.42	19.071
40-44	324	89.10	17.109	326	92.06	17.631
≥ 45 yrs	456	90.58	18.246	418	92.01	18.352
		F=3.765	P≤0.005		F=12.808	P≤0.000
Husband-wife age difference (years)						
≤ 3	432	87.38	17.394	460	88.19	19.960
4 – 6	785	88.40	16.651	763	89.60	18.550
7 – 9	310	90.71	18.394	308	89.75	17.983
10+	273	90.22	19.506	269	89.41	20.620
		F=2.891	P≤0.034		F=0.627	P≤0.597
Type of marriage						
Consanguineous	719	87.57	16.354	614	91.05	18.021
Non- Consanguineous	1081	89.72	18.230	1186	88.45	19.247
		t = 2.966	P≤0.003		t = 2.570	P≤0.010
Love / Arranged marriage						
Love marriage	211	92.82	17.641	265	93.63	18.532
Arranged marriage	1589	88.34	17.456	1535	88.60	18.838
		t = 3.622	P≤0.000		t = 2.957	P≤0.003
Family size						
≤4	1157	89.28	17.352	1251	90.25	18.733
5 – 6	561	88.38	18.609	478	87.65	19.826
7+	82	85.60	13.739	71	82.07	19.537
		F=1.937	P≤0.144		F=8.430	P≤0.000

* Expected total empowerment score : 180

Empowerment by Socio-economic Characteristics: The mean empowerment score of women according to their socio-economic characteristics is presented in Table 2. Education of women and their husband is observed to be the most significant factor in improving the empowerment status of women in both the rural and urban areas. In rural areas, the mean empowerment score has increased significantly from 85.09 for illiterates to 99.33 for the educational level of college and above, which is an increase of about 14 points. In urban areas, it has increased from 83.58 for illiterates to 99.84 for college and above which is an increase of about 16 points. Thus, education of women plays a significant role in improving the empowerment status of women in both the rural and urban areas.

In the case of education of husband, an increase of about 6 points in rural (87.43 to 93.24) and 9 points in urban (86.39 to 95.12) areas is observed for an increase in education of husband from illiteracy to college and above. Occupational status of women and their husband is also making a significant difference in the level of women empowerment in both the rural and urban areas. Salaried women and women having salaried husband seem to have significantly more empowerment than women engaged in other occupation in both the rural and urban areas. Community is not making any significant difference in the empowerment status of women in rural areas. However, in urban areas most backward caste women have attained significantly more empowerment status than women belonging to other caste groups. Women in nuclear family have attained significantly more empowerment status than women in joint family in both the rural and urban areas. Exposure of women to mass media seems to have significantly positive effect in empowering women in both the rural and urban areas. Overall, the results indicate that education of women and her husband, occupation of women and husband, type of family, membership in SHG and exposure to mass media are showing significant association with the empowerment of women in both the rural and urban areas.

Domain-wise empowerment status: The mean empowerment score attained by women under each domain and the total mean empowerment score combining all six domains of empowerment are presented in Table 3. The results indicate that in all, the level of women empowerment is only fifty percent of the total expected level in both the rural and urban areas. In rural areas, the domain wise level of women empowerment is highest at 66.5 per cent for familial aspects which is followed by psychological (65.2 per cent), socio-cultural (59.6 per cent) and economic (45.1 per cent). The rural women have very poorly performed in their empowerment status in political (23.3 per cent) and legal (19.7 per cent) aspects. A near similar pattern of empowerment status is observed for women in urban areas where the highest level of empowerment is observed for psychological aspects (70.1 per cent) which is followed by familial / interpersonal (66.7 per cent), socio-cultural (58.9 per cent) and economic (44.8 per cent) aspects. Legal (23.2 per cent) and political empowerment (16.9 per cent) are at the bottom of the empowerment level among the six domains in urban areas.

Heterogeneity in the levels of scores in different domains is depicted in figure.2. The median standardized score varies from domain to domain. However, the women empowerment score is almost similar for both rural and urban areas in all the domains except political domain. The box plot graph shows that in the domain of socio-cultural (freedom of women), Familial (domestic participation/freedom) and Psychological (level of psychological wellbeing) women empowerment is above median score (better). In the domain of Economic empowerment the total score is around median score (fair well) in both rural and urban areas. In the case of Legal awareness and Political awareness/participation, women empowerment is below the median score (not fair well). In summary, this analysis identify that the domain of Legal and Political aspects are to be concentrated more to improve the overall status of women empowerment.

Table 2: Mean empowerment score of women according to their socio-economic characteristics in both rural and urban areas						
Socio-economic characteristics	Rural			Urban		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
All	1800	88.83	17.619	1800	89.24	19.139
Education of respondents						
Illiterate	316	85.09	15.849	187	83.58	18.893
Literate & Primary	284	86.66	16.677	264	84.94	17.593
Middle	373	86.56	17.341	405	86.71	18.096
High School	468	88.98	16.892	497	90.24	18.581
Higher secondary	230	94.39	18.679	242	92.21	18.355
College and above	129	99.33	17.920	205	99.84	18.408
		F=19.871	P≤0.000		F=23.329	P≤0.000
Education of Husband						
Illiterate	260	87.43	14.852	124	86.39	16.333
Literate & Primary	248	86.74	16.421	247	85.85	18.557
Middle	351	89.07	18.260	381	89.34	18.668
High School	550	88.75	17.240	570	88.16	18.972
Higher secondary	233	89.71	18.966	250	91.65	19.175
College and above	158	93.24	19.720	228	95.12	18.846
		F=3.190	P≤0.007		F=7.919	P≤0.000
Occupation of respondents						
Own Agriculture	66	86.94	13.346	30	90.30	16.035
Own Business	68	93.29	19.116	154	94.56	16.987
Salary	78	106.26	17.260	132	104.23	16.776
Coolie	29	87.45	15.310	---	---	---
House Wife	1559	87.87	17.297	1484	87.33	18.924
		F=22.594	P≤0.000		F=38.118	P≤0.000
Occupation of husband						
Own Agriculture	126	87.14	15.340	52	90.37	21.098
Own Business	184	90.33	19.481	426	87.59	19.888
Salary	109	94.85	20.710	147	94.60	19.488
Coolie	1053	87.20	16.967	808	87.68	18.560
Others	328	91.88	17.477	367	92.26	18.406
		F=8.659	P≤0.000		F=7.449	P≤0.000
Community						
Scheduled Caste (SC)	567	89.05	17.606	451	88.99	18.618
Most Backward Caste (MBC)	603	89.16	16.560	485	91.59	16.848
Backward Caste (BC)	630	88.33	18.604	864	88.05	20.473
		F=0.404	P≤0.668		F=5.393	P≤0.005
Type of family						
Nuclear	1414	89.50	17.155	1434	90.66	18.282
Joint	386	86.52	18.687	366	84.16	20.239
		t = 2.122	P≤0.034		t = 5.821	P≤0.000
Membership in SHG						
Yes	623	92.96	16.645	473	96.22	17.379
No	1177	86.70	17.610	1327	86.88	18.784
		t = 6.121	P≤0.000		t = 8.027	P≤0.000
Exposure to mass media						
Poor	1537	87.13	16.689	1372	86.48	17.958
Good	263	98.76	19.563	428	98.07	20.130
		t = -10.172	P≤0.000		t = -11.318	P≤0.000

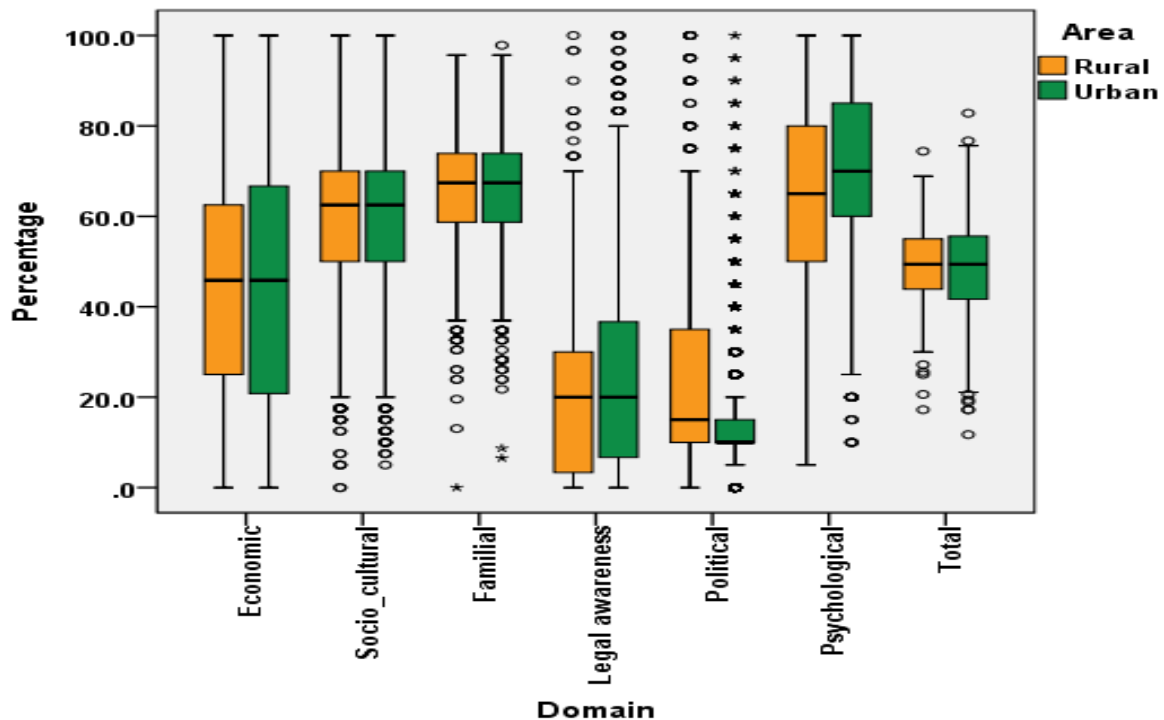
* Expected total empowerment score : 180

Table 3: Mean empowerment score for each domain and the total mean empowerment score combining all domains

Domains	Total Score	Mean score		Percent Score		Rank	
		Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Economic	24	10.82	10.75	45.1 ⁻	44.8 ⁻	4	4
Socio-Cultural	40	23.82	23.54	59.6 ⁺	58.9 ⁺	3	3
Familial	46	30.61	30.68	66.5 ⁺	66.7 ⁺	1	2
Legal	30	5.90	6.97	19.7 ⁻	23.2 ⁻	6	5
Political	20	4.66	3.37	23.3 ⁻	16.9 ⁻	5	6
Psychological	20	13.04	14.02	65.2 ⁺	70.1 ⁺	2	1
Total Empowerment	180	88.83	89.24	49.4	49.6		

+ Above the level of Total Mean Empowerment - Below the Level of Total Mean Empowerment

Figure 2: Box plot Graph of various domains of women empowerment



Discussions

The results show that among the six domains of women empowerment, women’s economic empowerment is at an average level and the legal and political empowerment are in a relatively poor status whereas the other three domains show a relatively better status. Economic empowerment

indicators used in this study are based mainly on their household spending. As it involves daily cash flow on various household expenditures, the women themselves are not taking the risk of purchase and spending money on their own and instead they got permission from their husband for every expense. Even the working women have to give their salary/wages to their husband and get it for every day spending. Thus the economic empowerment level of women observed in this study shows the high prevalence of women's economic dependence on others even for household spending. The deep rooted cultural practices which defines the women's role in the household as to look after the household work besides take care of the children, husband and other elderly members in the family prevents women in-taking decision in economic aspects even for the household expenses. Except for women headed households, most of the women are not involved in household spending and do it so after the concurrence of their husband. Thus the economic empowerment/independence of women seems to be a difficult task in the near future in both the rural and urban areas.

The legal empowerment of women is observed to be staggering around 20 percent of the expected level in both the rural and urban areas. This shows that women are very much ignorant of their rights which in-turn plays a curial role in making women submissive to all atrocities against them. The young women and those who have studied up to higher secondary and above are observed to have comparatively higher empowerment status in both the rural and urban areas. The results indicate the need for an intensive legal awareness programme for women in India in order to relieve themselves from the clutches of their submissive nature. They should be made aware that there is legal protection for them in every space in the country in order to achieve women empowerment.

In the case of political empowerment, the main focus in this study is their awareness about various political parties and leaders and their participation in various political forums, activities including public meetings and willingness to contest elections. Though the voters turn out seems to cross over 70 per cent in most of the elections in Tamil Nadu, their empowerment interms of their political awareness is very poor at about 23 per cent and 17 per cent of the expected level in rural and urban areas respectively. The urban women are much worse than their rural counterparts. They are not bothered about the happenings in the political space in the country. But their votes are major determinants of victory in the general elections. Though 30 per cent of seats are reserved for women in the local body elections, their awareness about the current political trends at the state and national level is very dismal. Thus, political awareness, opportunities and support for their participation in the state and national politics are important need of the hour to ensure women empowerment at grass root level.

Overall, the factors significantly associated with the women empowerment are age of women; type of marriage; education of women and her husband; occupation of women and their husband; membership in SHG and exposure of women to mass media in both the rural and urban areas. Thus the results indicate the need to focus on programmes which will improve women's educational attainment, regular employment, micro finance through SHG and more exposure to mass media.

Conclusion

Among the six dimensions of women empowerment assessed in this study, women fare better (around 60–70 per cent) in their empowerment level in psychological, familial and socio-cultural aspects which are their traditional role in the society. They are the silent spectators of all sorts violence against women in the society which make them more tolerant and gain more psychological strength to face and manage the situation in the interest of the family. It is a welcome trend that women in both the rural and urban areas have gained more psychological empowerment which seems to be a strong base for women to focus their empowerment in other dimensions also. They have a strong psychological determination which is having a strong bonding with the family and society. Thus, it is clear that women are psychologically very strong and could succeed in all other domains of empowerment, if given opportunities and political support. But, in reality, they are not given due representation either in state or national politics even in Government or Parties headed by women in India. All Government and political parties are dominated by male and women's participation in decision making at Government and political level is very minimal though nearly half of the

population are women in this country. Many women leaders in the country during the past and at present have clearly proved their ability to run Government successfully withstanding all odds in their political career.

In this context, the results of the study suggests the need for a massive political and legal awareness programme for women and all opportunities must be created for their participation and active involvement in legislation (political) judiciary (legal) and bureaucratic (government officials) systems in the country. Their number in these fields has to be increased; their voice to be heard and they should also be in a position to decide the safety, security and welfare of women of all sections of the society in the country. In order to achieve this goal, an intensive government sponsored institution / system has to function to implement women centered programmes and monitor / evaluate the impact of these programmes on the empowerment status of women in both rural and urban areas as well as among all sections of society. Unless women have the opportunity and ability to sit on the top of the decision making process, women empowerment will be a slogan forever at the global as well as national level.

Recommendations:

- Education (both school and higher education) is the basic need for women to empower. In this regard, school education has to be made available and easily accessible to girls in rural areas.
- Girl's school enrollment ratio and school retention ratio should be improved with adequate infrastructure facilities, adequate and qualified teachers and separate facilities for the privacy of girl students.
- Every school should have a female teacher who should also act as a counselor to guide, counsel and provide psychological support to girl students when they are in distress. This will allay the fears of parents on the safety of girls in school and encourage more parents to send their girls to school in rural areas.
- All girl students of BPL families should be given free education up to college level besides monetary support for their living expenses during college studies in order to encourage girls for higher education.
- Political and legal studies focusing on women's rights has to be made as add on course for all students at high school and college level mainly for awareness purpose without any credit basis.
- A massive political and legal awareness programme should be launched for women through mass media for which government should allocate funds generously in order to improve their political and legal empowerment.
- As women constitute nearly half of the population in the country, at least 30 per cent of seats in both the legislative assembly and parliament may be reserved for women. This will ensure their collective participation in Governance.
- Reservations may be made in all top positions in judiciary and bureaucracy at the state and central level in order to facilitate women's participation in decision making process at the state and national level.
- Women should be given due reservation in education and employment in both the government and private sectors so as to make them economically productive.
- Based on the results of the 2011 census and socio-economic survey, more employment opportunities should be created for women in both the rural and urban areas.
- Total prohibition should be strictly implemented throughout the country in a phased manner in order to prevent violence against women and relieve the poor from the clutches of debt and diseases.
- Toll free emergency number with recording facilities may be made available to every woman for immediate access to help during distress either in the hands of intimate family members or strangers.
- Women protection forums may be formed in each village and urban wards and these forums may be recognized by the district social defence cell of the government as a liaison agency between the government and the women in distress.

- The legal age at marriage of girls may be increased to 20 so as to make them both mentally and physically capable of facing the challenges of marital life.
- A regular monitoring and evaluation mechanism should be made available at the national and state level to help the Government to assess the reach and effectiveness of Government programmes aimed to empower women in the country.

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