WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN POST–REFORM INDIA: ITS MEASUREMENT AND DETERMINANTS

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ABSTRACT

Present study intends to analyse whether the policies for enhancing the levels of women empowerment could change the age old patriarchal norms and rules in Indian society, particularly its attitude towards women in the society. In this backdrop, current study based on Third National Family Health Survey, 2005-06 aims to estimate the level of women empowerment in India, identify the determinants of empowerment and track the variation of level of empowerment across regions and states with its causes.

As a measure, an empowerment index (EI) has been constructed using all the available decision-making variables. All these variables are classified into four decision making groups as access to money, spending money decisions, routine household decisions and mobility freedom. They are summed up to get EI for each respondent. Average value of this EI is found as 7.42 for Indian women and it varies across states. In general, Indian women is found to be endowed with average level of empowerment, very few have high level and low level empowerment.

To identify the determinants of empowerment, EI is regressed on various socio-economic factors available from NFHS 3. Study demonstrates that self confidence and awareness generating factors like women’s
education level, exposure to media and participation in economic activities played a significant role for determining their level of empowerment. Besides, respondent’s age and relation with head also significantly influence women’s level of empowerment. Bulk of them has medium level education and very few have high-level education. With these educational background only 40 percent Indian women opt for job, of them majority is found to be engaged in skilled or unskilled manual jobs. A few are found in high-level jobs indicating that even higher education failed to attract Indian women in the job market. This indicates the inappropriateness in implementing the Government of India’s two most vital policies linked to education and employment of women.

Therefore, formulating of effective strategies should take care of all the constraints faced by the target population. As sufficient number of women have exposure to audio-visual media (TV); it may help to make these facilities available to the target groups.