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 (NFHS 3), 2005-06 aims to estimate the level of women empowerment in India, identify the factors responsible for achieving a particular level of empowerment and track the variation of level of empowerment across regions and states with its causes.

As a measure of empowerment an empowerment index (EI) has been constructed using all the available decision-making variables. All these variables are classified into four broad decision making groups as access to money (AMI), spending money decisions (SPI), routine household decisions (RHDl) and mobility freedom (MI). 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 causes that influence the level of empowerment, estimated EI is regressed on various socio-economic factors available from NFHS 3. Study demonstrates that respondent's education level, exposure to media, participation in economic activities, which may be defined as self confidence and awareness generating factors, have been obtained as significant factors responsible for determining the level of women
empowerment. Besides, respondent’s age and relation with head also significantly influence women’s level of empowerment. Most of them have medium level education and very few have high-level education. With this 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 involve 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 and as here in India sufficient number of women have exposure to audio-visual media (TV); it may help to make these facilities available to the target groups.