EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE WOMEN OF IMPHAL (MANIPUR)

ABSTRACT

THESIS

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

IN

SOCIOLOGY

BY

THOUNAOJAM SUNITIBALA DEVI

Under the Supervision of

PROF. NOOR MOHAMMAD

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK
ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY
ALIGARH (INDIA)

2008
ABSTRACT

The basic premise of the study is that empowerment of women not only affects health of women themselves, but it also results in greater health benefits to their children, families and ultimately leading to the overall social development of the society. Healthy human beings are central to development because investments in health can translate into healthier men, women, and children and increased capacity to lead socially and economically productive lives. Children who are healthy grow and learn better and have an improved chance of developing the skills necessary for employment. Illness or the death of a household head can lead to family crisis and a vicious cycle of ill-health and poverty.

Manipur is not an exception from the various health problems concerning women. A study on the problems to find solution is the pressing need of the hour. The present study attempts to give a clear sociological outline about the empowerment of women in Manipur in respect to their health particularly reproductive health, within the social, economic and political context of their lives. To meet their health needs, women need to be empowered throughout the evolving stages of a women's life i.e. girl hood, adolescent girls and women. As the health of women is critical in every stage of her life, adolescent girls are also included under this study, as they belong to the initial stage of the reproductive age groups.

Keeping this background in mind, thorough investigation has been carried out with the following objectives:

Objectives of the study:

1. To describe in brief the social, economic, political scenario along with the participation and role played by women.
2. To find out the male-female ratio in Manipur in general and Imphal districts in particular.

3. To assess the educational background of women and available facilities.

4. To assess health needs of women and facilities available to them.

5. To assess and determine the knowledge and awareness about the importance of preventive health check-up, reproductive health, antenatal care, various contraceptive methods and HIV/AIDS etc.

6. To assess and find out the various governmental policies and programmes available for the empowerment of adolescent girls and women in India.

7. To examine how far the adolescent girls in Manipur have been benefited from the policies and programmes.

8. To identify problems and opinions relating to physical and mental development and health concerns of adolescent girls in Manipur.

9. To examine how far women in Manipur have been benefited from the policies and programmes.

10. To assess the decision-making power of the women of Manipur.

Both primary and secondary sources are used extensively in the present study in order to provide an objective empirical support to the study. This study is exploratory-cum-diagnostic in nature. The present study has taken up two districts of Manipur, namely, Imphal East and Imphal West as the area of study. Assessment of the health of women in both the Imphal East and Imphal West districts is done with the help of field surveys. The investigator studied the health and developmental needs of 400 respondents, viz., 100 adolescent girls (11-19
Findings on adolescent girls:

The findings about adolescent girls in Manipur shows that they need to go a long way to see them as empowered. Discrimination is seen in different forms in case of Manipur also. Preference for sons and discrimination against girls exists in the region, as it does throughout the country. Girls are always expected to help their mother in the household work when only some of respondents’ brothers do so. However, one important finding is that no discrimination in terms of education, food, etc. can be seen. They are often found to be regarded a burden on their families and have poor self-image as compared to their brothers.

One finding is that high percentages of girls are aware about the onset of menstruation. Here, mother plays an important role in providing the necessary information. The other sources of information are sisters, friends, and books, etc. The result also shows that those girls who are not given prior information before its onset do suffer from psychological stress, for example, they complained to suffer from discomfort, disgust and are even scared to see blood flow for the first time. This problem if not look into in time may create further health problems to the young girls. Good number of them is found following certain myths that forbid them from taking nutritional food they need to take during menstruation. To add to this, young girls also lack information on hygienic practice during menstruation, which consequently may increase susceptibility to various infections.

Another important factor for psychological stress among adolescent girls is lack of knowledge on physical change that has taken place due to the onset of
puberty. More than half of the girls are unaware and uninformed about the physical changes. But, parents who are regarded as the most important source of information for their children fail to prove. Here, we can see clearly the communication gap between the parents and their children. This deeply affected their interests, their social behaviour and the quality of their affective life, which may deteriorate their health condition and may have long lasting effect.

Further, it is clear from the study that most of the girls in general are aware of the basic knowledge of contraception, pregnancy, and childbirth, RTIs, STIs, and HIV/AIDS, etc. But still a few of them are ignorant that may prove to be risky for their future life, if this need is not addressed properly.

Findings on women:

The findings on Manipuri women reveal many issues relating to their socioeconomic background, their reproductive health needs, level of awareness regarding contraception, decision-making of women, etc. Women in Manipur are found to have low socioeconomic status. Majority is literate but few could go for higher studies. This may be the contributing factor for their lack of decision making power on important matters of sexual life, use of contraception, number of children she wish to have in future, permission in consulting doctors and freedom in mobility, etc.

Important revelations regarding the health status of women shows that majority is health conscious and has awareness regarding contraception, HIV/AIDS, etc. A maximum number of them going for antenatal and post natal care prove it. At the same time, another shocking revelation is that most of them are found to visit doctor only when their illness is serious. Further, it is found that many of them have some gynaecological problems. Women, who lack knowledge indulge in unhygienic practices and beliefs related to menstruation, believes in
certain myths like diseases can be cured by priest or traditional healers and offering to gods and goddesses. So, such women with this belief do not consult doctor. The greatest barrier to their problem is poverty combined with carelessness and lack of knowledge compelling them to various beliefs and practices that may lead to serious health consequences.

The result shows that women in Manipur are not taking part in the development process because of their low socioeconomic status. We can say despite the government policies and programmes, majority of women in Manipur are not empowered and not receiving the health services well. Though some of them are seen having the power, most of the women are not. This affects their health conditions. In the study area, the culture and traditions provide the right and power to male members in the family, to make a decision of the whole things about the women whether male is her father, uncle, brother or husband. The contributing factors that have maintained gender discrimination and the low health status of women in Manipur includes: their low socioeconomic status and situation, differential treatment towards children, insufficient knowledge and lack of awareness regarding their reproductive health, different attitudes and practices relating to health care, and lack of decision making power on important areas that effect their health. Thus, empowerment of women is not possible until and unless women realise their subordinate position and know their values so as to be able to break away from the various restrictions and the dependency that the traditional system of society has to offer.