

**SIGNIFICANT ISSUES, CHALLENGES, POLICY APPROACH AND IMPLICATIONS  
AND ROLE OF EDUCATION IN EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA-AN  
EMPIRICAL APPROACH**

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**Abstract:**

Due to its widespread usage, there are a variety of understandings of the term empowerment. However, if empowerment is defined as the major ability to essentially make choices, then being disempowered implies being denied choice. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the significant status of women's empowerment in India using various factors and indicators based on data from secondary sources. The study reveals that in spite of many efforts undertaken by the government, women in India are relatively disempowered and they also enjoy a somewhat lower status than that of men. The present paper also highlights the issues and challenges of women's empowerment. One of the most important concerns of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the empowerment of women, but practically, women's empowerment is still an illusion of reality in India. The notion of empowerment is that it is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability. Thus, there could be statistical swells indicating improvements in indicators of gender equality, but unless the intervening process involved women as agents of that change, one cannot term it as 'empowerment'. People who do exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be very powerful, but they actually are not empowered because they were essentially never disempowered right in the first place. In terms of specific activities or end results, empowerment cannot be defined in proper terms because it involves a process whereby women can freely develop, analyze and also voice their needs and interests without them being pre-defined or imposed from above. Also, the assumption that planners can identify women's needs runs against empowerment objectives. Education, on the other hand, is a milestone of women's empowerment because it enables them to respond to challenges, to go ahead and confront their traditional role and change their lives. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and also functions as a means of improving their own status within the family and also developing the concept of participation. The current paper also attempts to develop conceptual clarity of the term empowerment, delineating it from several other overlapping concepts such as social inclusion, gender equality, and so on, and it also advocates an inclusive approach of policy

measures in which planners working toward an empowerment approach develop important ways of enabling women themselves to critically review their own situation.

**Keywords: Women's Empowerment, Disempowerment, Inequalities, an Inclusive Approach, Change Agents**

## **Introduction:**

The status and role of women and related issues have attracted the attention of academicians, political thinkers and social scientists both in developing as well as developed countries, partially due to the observance of the International Decade of Women (1975-85) and partially because of the widely accepted truth that a society built on the inequality of men and women involves wastage of human resources which no country can afford. With swelling literature on empowerment of women and with the voluminous amount of public expenditure on women's empowerment schemes, it becomes imperative to understand the concept of empowerment of women so as to have a better understanding of its policy implications.

In this research paper we have dealt with the concept of empowerment of women in the first section and in the second section we go ahead and deal with a specific but most important determinant of empowerment of women, which includes decision making capacity or autonomy in decision making. The present paper tries to focus on the measurement of empowerment of women through enhancement in autonomy in decision making wherein women's participation in employment acts as a catalyst. We drew heavily on data from a primary survey of 448 females in the rural areas of Karnataka's Uttara Kannada District for this study. A sample of working and non-working women was selected for the study to understand the differences in autonomy in decision making capacity as an indicator of empowerment with respect to their working status. It has been ascertained that empowerment, particularly includes control over major ideologies and resources. Also, according to Sen and Batliwala (2000), it essentially leads to a growing intrinsic capability, greater self-confidence and also an inner transformation of one's consciousness that which enables one to overcome any external barrier. An emphasis is made mainly on two important aspects. Firstly, it is a power to achieve desired goals but not power over others. Secondly, the idea of empowerment is much more applicable to those who are quite powerless-whether they are male or female, or even a group of individuals, class or caste.

However, the concept of empowerment is not only specific to women, yet it is unique in that aspect and cuts across all types of class and caste and also within their families and households (Malhotra et.al, 2002). A change in the context of a woman's life is referred to as women's empowerment, which enables her increased capacity to lead a fulfilling human life. It is reflected in both external qualities (such as health mobility, education and awareness, effective participation in decision making, family status, and maternal security) and internal qualities (such as self awareness and self confidence) (Human development in South Africa, 2000, as quoted by Mathew (2003).

Empowerment of women refers to the process of improving the social, economic, and political status of women, who have traditionally been marginalized in society. It is also the process of guarding them against all possible forms of violence. As such, women's empowerment entails the construction of society, a political environment in which women can breathe freely without fear of exploitation, oppression, apprehension, discrimination, and the general sense of persecution that comes with being a woman in a traditionally male-dominated structure. It is believed that women constitute around 50% of the world's population, but India has shown a disproportionate sex ratio whereby the female population has by far been comparatively lower when compared with males. Women are not treated as equal to men as far as their social status is concerned. Women, however, have got equal rights and status to men in all the places in western societies. But gender disabilities and discrimination are indeed found in India even to this day. Hvas and Thesen (2002) claim that inherent in the concept is certainly a critical observation of power which reflects an unequal distribution of resources as well as a belief in the overall ability of individuals to essentially acquire control over their lives. Women's empowerment as such has five aspects, namely their sense of self-value, right to have and also determine their choices, their overall right to access opportunities and resources, their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally (Beniwal, opt, cit., 33). Today, most of the modern democracies and also developing nations are totally mesmerized with this specific theme and also have a public agenda for the process of women's empowerment. It is a 'national commitment' more or less, which is quite prevalent in these countries, including India (Singh, Vineeta and Kishore Kumar, 2012). Women's empowerment also entails granting women the freedom to make their own life decisions. It does not, however, imply 'deifying women,' as this would imply replacing patriarchy with equality.

There are a variety of understandings of the term 'empowerment' due to its widespread usage. Yet this widely used term is rarely defined. The claim for women's empowerment to be the goal or ultimate objective of many development policies and programmes leads to a demand for indicators of empowerment, both to reveal the extent to which women are already empowered, and also to evaluate if such policies and programmes have been effective towards their stated aims. To understand clearly the concept of empowerment, it is important to delineate certain overlapping concepts.

1. **Social inclusion as a key to empowerment:** Empowerment is described as *"the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them."* Social inclusion is defined as *"the removal of institutional barriers and the enhancement of incentives to increase the access of diverse individuals and groups to assets and development opportunities."* Thus, the empowerment process operates "from below" and involves agency, as exercised by individuals and groups. Social inclusion, in contrast, requires systemic change that may be initiated "from above."
2. **Gender equality and women's empowerment:** When it comes to indicators of gender equality, there could be statistical swells indicating major improvements, but unless and until the intervening process involving women as agents of that change, one essentially

cannot term it as empowerment. Gender equality or equity indicates the degree of equivalence in life outcomes for women and men, whereas the role of agency in the discourse on empowerment assumes prime importance does indicate gender equality or equity towards the degree of equivalence in life outcomes for both men and women, recognizing their various needs and interests and thus requiring a redistribution of both power and resources.

3. **Power and empowerment:** One way of thinking about power is in terms of the *ability to make choices*: to be disempowered, therefore, implies being denied the choice. Thus, the notion of empowerment is that it is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability. (The word 'acquire' is very important here). In other words, empowerment entails a *process of change*. People who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be very *powerful*, but they are not *empowered* in the sense in which empowerment has been described here, because they were never disempowered in the first place.

To develop a comprehensive understanding of empowerment through breaking the process into key components as desired. Kabeer's (2001) talks about understanding of 'choice', which comprises three interrelated components:

**Resources** or enabling factors or 'catalysts' for those conditions under which empowerment as such is likely to occur and they form the conditions under which choices are essentially made.

**agency** which is at the heart of the process through which the choices are made and **Achievements** which are generally conceived as the outcomes of various choices

According to Naila Kabeer, empowerment is "*the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.*" According to Kabeer, empowerment can not be reduced to a single aspect of process or outcome. How women exercise choice and the actual outcomes will depend on the individual. Choices will vary across class, time and space. Moreover, impacts on empowerment perceived by outsiders might not necessarily be those most valued by women themselves. Thus, there could be statistical swells indicating improvements in indicators of gender equality, but unless the intervening process involved women as agents of that change, one can not term it as empowerment. *Understanding empowerment in this way means that development agencies can not actually claim to empower women*, rather than they do provide appropriate external support and intervention which can, however, be quite important to foster and also support the overall process of empowerment, i.e., act as facilitators.

### **Consensus on Macro and Micro Indicators of Empowerment:**

There are a variety of ways in which indicators of empowerment can be developed. Each has some value, but none can be taken as a complete or absolute measure, because the nature of

empowerment as a multi-faceted concept means that it is not readily quantifiable. To understand empowerment, it is helpful to divide indicators of empowerment into two categories: those which attempt to measure women's empowerment at a broad societal level, in order to gain information and make comparisons between countries (GEM, GDI), and those which are developed in order to measure the effects of specific projects or programmes or catalytic factors (education, employment etc.) requiring a micro approach involving women themselves as agents of change.

### **Review of Literature:**

At the global level and also in India, a number of studies have been undertaken on women's empowerment. Some studies dealt with methodological issues, some on empirical analysis and some others on major measures and also tools of empowerment. Some of the important studies which were undertaken at the international level followed by other such studies conducted in India are as follows:

Moser (1993) focused on the interrelationship between gender and development, the formulation of gender policy and the implementation of gender planning and practices. The work of Shields (1995) provided an exploratory framework to understand and develop the concept of empowerment both from a theoretical and practical perspective, with a particular focus on women's perception of the meaning of empowerment in their lives. Anand and Sen (1995) tried to develop a measure of gender inequality. Pillarisetti and Gillivray (1998) mainly emphasized the methodology of construction, composition and determinant of GEM. Bardhan and Klasen (1999) critically examined GDI and GEM as two gender-related indicators of UNDP and argued that there are serious conceptual and empirical problems with both the measures and suggested some modifications to the measures, including a revision of the earned income component of the GDI. Accordingly, based on their suggestions, UNDP modified the procedure for calculating the GDI since 1999 without mentioning that it was different from the previous year's procedure (Bardhan and Klasen, 2000).

Similarly, Dijkstra and Hanmer (2000) assessed the concept of GDI and pointed out how it suffered from several limitations. According to them, GDI conflates relative gender equality with absolute levels of human development and thus gives no information on comparative gender inequality among countries. Using GDI, they further constructed a Relative Status of Women (RSW) index and admitted that RSW is also not an ideal measure of gender inequality. The paper concluded by offering a conceptual framework that provides the basis for an alternative measure of gender inequality.

Dijkstra (2002), while providing a critical review of both the measures, identified the strengths and weaknesses of these and suggested a new measure called Standardized Index of Gender Equality (SIGE) which attempts to encompass all possible dimensions of gender equality and avoids the conceptual and methodological problems of GDI and GEM. He further claimed that SIGE could serve as a first approximation of such an overall index. **Malhotra et al (2002)** in

their paper highlighted methodological issues of measurement and analysis of women's empowerment.

While discussing the current status of women in Bangladesh, Barkat (2008) opined that, while women as mothers are held in high regard at an individual level, there was an unclear understanding of empowerment of women as a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation in actual decision making and control over her own life.

Klasen and Schöler (2009) extended their previous works by way of suggesting concrete proposals for the two gender-related indicators and by presenting illustrative results for those proposed measures. The most important proposals included the calculation of a male and female HDI, as well as a gender gap index (GGI) to replace the GDI. Regarding the GEM, the most important changes proposed were different ways to deal with the earned income component and also to replace it with a more straight-forward procedure to calculate the measure. Using his proposed methods, he found different rankings of countries compared to that of GDI and GEM.

Mishra and Nayak (2010) in their work emphasized how education plays a central role in human development. As a matter of fact, the other two components– health and income–are dependent on educational development. Education permits a person to inherit the wealth of knowledge amassed over generations. It also makes a person more acceptable and productive. Education increases the chances of fitness and employability. Additionally, education leads to fulfillment. Economists have found that a larger share of the increase in productivity is attributable to the education of the people. Skill formation, which has quite limited scope to inculcate among the illiterate, is a necessary condition to foster growth. Therefore, literacy and some extent of educational proficiency are of fundamental importance for skill formation. In particular, literacy among females is of great importance, not only for participation in productive and civic activities, but also for rearing children for a better future.

Thus, from the above review of literature, it is evident that quite a number of studies have already been undertaken on women's empowerment and related issues. The entire gamut of literature has centered mainly around conceptual and measurement issues and the constraints on women's empowerment. In this regard, the current study analyzes the status of women's empowerment in India by taking into account various dimensions such as women's household decision making power, financial autonomy, freedom of movement, political participation, acceptance of unequal gender roles, exposure to media, access to education, experience of domestic violence, and so on, based on data from various sources.

### **Measuring Gender Empowerment Index**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Political participation and decision making</b>	<b>Economic participation and decision-making</b>			<b>Power over economic resources</b>
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Female &amp; Male</b>	<b>Female &amp; Male shares</b>		<b>Female &amp; male</b>	<b>Female and male</b>



	shares in parliamentary seats	of positions as legislators, senior officials and managers		shares of professional and technical positions	estimated earned income
Equality Distributed Equivalence % (EDEP)	EDEP for parliamentary representation		EDEP for economic participation		EDEP for income
<b>Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)</b>					

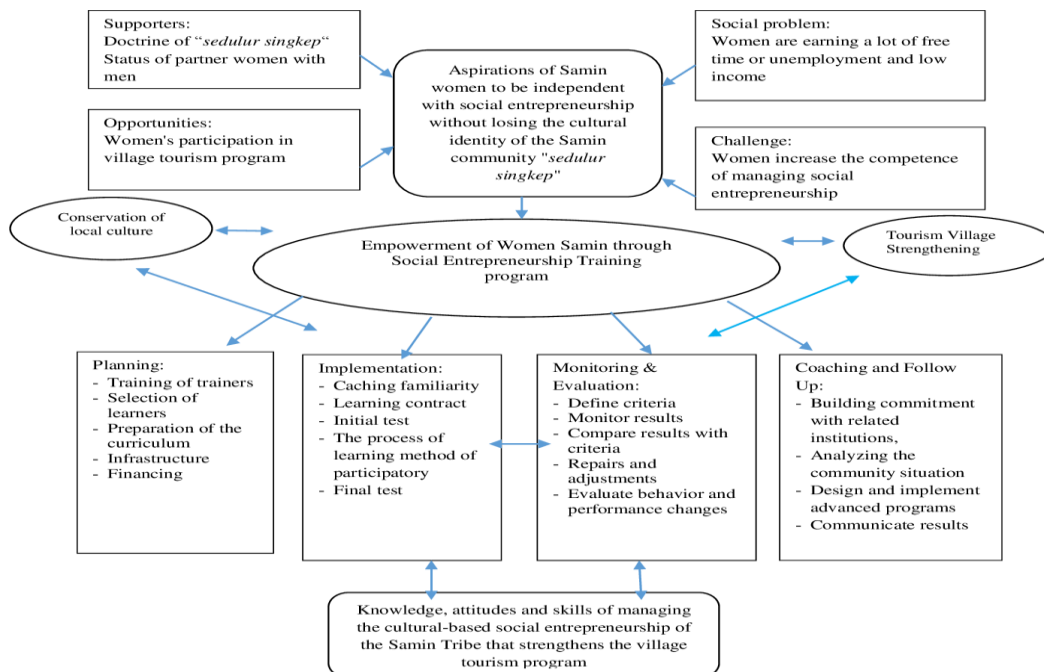
There have been several efforts to devise micro indicators of empowerment. In this effort, Naila Kabeer, Linda Mayoux, Anne Marie Goetz, Rahman, Ackerley, JSI (John Show International researchers), Sara Longwe and Hashmi have provided their own indicators.

#### **JSI Six Domains of Empowerment**

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Expressions</b>
1. Sense of Self & vision of a future	Assertiveness, plans for the future, future-oriented actions, relative freedom from threat of physical violence, awareness of own problems and options, actions indicating sense of security.
2. Mobility & visibility	Activities outside of the home, relative freedom from harassment in public spaces, interaction with men.
3. Economic Security	Property ownership, new skills and knowledge and increased income, engaged in new/non-traditional types of work
4. Status & decision-making power within the household	Self-confidence, controlling spending money, enhanced status in the family, has/controls/spends money, participation in/makes decisions on allocation of resources, not dominated by others
5. Ability to interact effectively in the public sphere	Awareness of legal status and services available, ability to get access to social services, political awareness, participation in credit program, provider of service in community.
6. Participation on non-family groups	Identified as a person outside of the family, forum for creating sense of solidarity with other women, self-expression and articulation of problems, participating in a group with autonomous structure.

JSI defines empowerment in a behavioral sense as the ability to take effective action encompassing inner state (sense of self, of one's autonomy, self-confidence, openness to new ideas, and belief in one's own potential to act effectively) and a person's status and efficacy in social interactions. In particular, it is the ability to make and carry out significant decisions

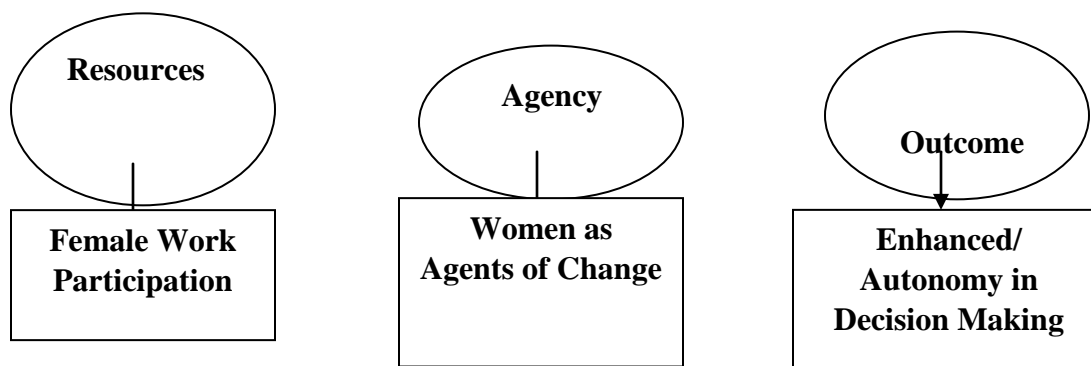
affecting one's own life and the lives of others. An increasing body of research indicates that commonly used proxy variables such as education or employment are conceptually distant from the dimensions of gender stratification that are hypothesized to affect the outcomes of interest in these studies, and may in some cases be irrelevant or misleading. In response, there have been increasing efforts at capturing the process through direct measures of decision-making, control, choice, etc. Such measures are seen as the most effective representations of the process of empowerment by many authors since they are closest to measuring agency. It could be argued that the indicators with "*face validity*" (i.e. indicators of empowerment based on survey questions referring to very specific, concrete actions) represent power relationships and are meaningful within a particular social context. Certain empirical examples cited from the review of literature point out to the fact that mere swells in government programmes for empowerment of women do not guarantee women's empowered status. For example Goetz and Sen Gupta's study of credit programs in Bangladesh challenges the assumption that loans made to women are always used by women. They found that in two-thirds of the loans in their study, men either significantly or partially controlled the credit women brought into the household. Women were unable to make their own decisions on how to invest or use the loan. This is an important finding as it supports Mayoux's point that empowerment cannot be assumed to be an automatic outcome of microfinance programs. Thus, a micro approach is required to assess the real situation. In our larger study we developed a comprehensive model of empowerment based on certain concrete micro indicators of empowerment.



**Above image showing model of women empowerment of Samin community through training on social entrepreneurship based on local culture**



Looking into the above discussions on the concept of empowerment let us now study as to how far participation in workforce by women acts as a catalyst to empower them. As deduced from the review on the concept of empowerment, it is a “*process*,” as opposed to a condition or state of being. As stated in the previous section of the paper the process of empowerment can be visualised as under, with female work participation in the labour market as a catalyst for change and women as agents of the change. Enhanced autonomy in decision making is supposed to be as an outcome of the process of empowerment.



#### **Autonomy in Decision Making as an Important Indicator of Women Empowerment:**

Women empowerment in society and family are closely linked to decision making influence. Autonomy in decision making has been measured in terms of participation of women in household responsibilities. To ascertain the influence of work participation of women on decision making, an important indicator of empowerment of women, we analyze the difference in participation in decision making on various issues categorized as under among workers and non-workers.

1. **Trivial Issues (TI):** includes decision in making in what items to cook and answering freely to questions asked.
2. **Issues Related to Own Self (IROS):** Obtaining health care for own health, decision making in going for outings, purchasing requirements for own self, visiting and staying with parents/friends/relatives.
3. **Issues Related to Children (IRC):** Decision making in purchasing requirements for children and decision making in education of children.
4. **Critical Issues (CI):** Decision making with respect to expenditure in marriages, borrowing money to meet household demands, borrowing money to start business, paying back of debts and control over using earned or saved money.

Table No. 1

Work Participation of Women and Autonomy in Decision Making

Status of Work		Decision Making Capacity on...		
		Decision in making in what items to cook		
		Yes Independently	Yes Jointly	No/Not Allowed
Worker	Trivial Issues	207 (95.0)	9 (4.1)	2 (0.1)
Non-worker		183 (79.6)	27 (11.7)	20 (8.7)
		Do you feel free in answering these questions		
Worker		Yes Promptly	Yes Probed	No
		198 (90.8)	10 (4.6)	10 (4.6)
Non-worker		190 (82.6)	26 (11.3)	14 (6.1)
	Issues related to Children	Decision on purchasing requirements for children		
Worker		167 (88.4)	147 (21.6)	0 (0.0)
Non-worker		110 (53.0)	96 (41.7)	12 (5.2)
		Decision on Education of Children		
Worker		152 (71.5)	59 (27.1)	3 (1.4)
Non-worker		107 (51.7)	103 (44.8)	8 (3.5)
	Issues Related	Decision on Own health related issues		

Worker		127 (58.3)	85 (39.0)	6 (2.7)
Non-worker		68 (29.6)	152 (66.1)	10 (4.4)
		<i>Decision on purchasing requirements for self</i>		
Worker		126 (57.8)	88 (40.4)	4 (1.9)
Non-worker		74 (32.2)	128 (56.7)	28 (12.2)
		<i>Decision on going out visiting and staying with parents/friends</i>		
Worker		124 (56.8)	68 (31.2)	26 (11.9)
Non-worker		81 (43.0)	100 (43.5)	31 (13.5)
		<i>Decision on going for an outing</i>		
Worker		158 (72.5)	51 (23.4)	9 (4.1)
Non-worker		111 (48.3)	81 (35.2)	37 (16.1)
		<i>Decision on expenditure on marriage</i>		
Worker	<b>Critical Issues</b>	33 (16.9)	151 (69.3)	30 (13.8)
Non-worker		15 (7.8)	153 (66.5)	59 (25.6)
		<i>Decision on how your earned/saved money will be used</i>		

Worker	45 (20.6)	150 (68.8)	7 (3.3)
Non-worker	19 (8.3)	113 (66.5)	58 (25.2)
	<i>Decision on borrowing money to meet household demands</i>		
Worker	56 (25.7)	131 (60.1)	31 (14.2)
Non-worker	23 (10.0)	123 (53.5)	84 (36.9)
	<i>Decision on borrowing money to start business</i>		
Worker	41 (20.6)	123 (56.4)	50 (23.0)
Non-worker	18 (9.5)	112 (48.7)	56 (41.8)
	<i>Decision on Paying back debts</i>		
Worker	50 (22.9)	122 (56.0)	46 (21.1)
Non-worker	18 (7.8)	110 (47.8)	102 (44.3)
<b>Total Workers</b>	<b>(58.6)</b>	<b>(35.2)</b>	<b>(8.0)</b>
<b>Total Non-workers</b>	<b>(38.8)</b>	<b>(44.4)</b>	<b>(16.8)</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>(47.7)</b>	<b>(39.8)</b>	<b>(12.5)</b>

Source: Field Survey, July-September, 2017.

From the above table 1 it can be ascertained that:

1. For the working women participation in decision making was found higher as compared to the non-working women in all aspects of household decision making
2. Higher the participation in decision making the higher is the degree of autonomy. Still one needs to look into the nature of this participation of women

3. The overall magnitude of decision making various across trivial issues, issues related to own self and also issues related to children and critical issues

**Table: 2**

**Magnitude of Autonomy in Decision Making**

Type of Issues	Autonomy in Decision Making	
	Worker	Non-Worker
<b>Trivial Issues(TI)</b>		
In making in what items to cook	VH	H
Answering Freely to Questions asked	VH	VH
<b>Issues Related to Children(IRC)</b>		
Purchasing requirements for Children	VH	M
Education of Children	H	M
<b>Issues Related to Own Self(IROS)</b>		
Obtaining Health Care for Own Health	M	L
Going for Outings	H	M
Purchasing Requirements for Own Self	M	L
Visiting and staying with friends, parents & relatives	M	M
<b>Critical Issues (CI)</b>		
Expenditure on Marriages.	VL	VL
Borrowing Money for Household Demands	L	VL
Borrowing Money to Start Business.	L	VL
Paying Back Debts	L	VL
Control over Using Money earned/saved	L	VL

**Note:** Very High (VH) =above 80%, High (H) =60-80%, Moderate (M) =40-60%, Low (L) =20-40%, Very Low (VL) = Below 20%

From the above table 1 it can be ascertained that:

1. For matters relating children autonomy were highest. All working women had autonomy in issues relating to children. Only 5% non-working women were not allowed or did not take part in decision making.
2. In case of issues classified as trivial issues the female participation in decision making is extremely high among working women whereas 9% non-working women did not enjoy autonomy in such issues.
3. For the issues related to own self autonomy ranged roughly between 10 to 20 percent. Autonomy in going for outing or visiting friends/relative/parents i.e., freedom of mobility was most restricted. On health issues around 66 percent non-workers made joint decisions. Independent decision making in own health related issues was almost double for workers.

Table: 3

Autonomy in Decision Making among Working Women

Occupational Categories	Issues												
	Trivial Issues		Issues Related to Children		Issues Related to Own Self				Critical Issues				
	IC	QA	PC	EC	OH	GO	PO	VS	EM	BH	BB	PD	CE
Agri. Labour	VH	VH	VH	H	H	H	M	M	VL	L	VL	L	H
Self Emp.	VH	VH	VH	VH	M	VH	H	M	VL	L	VL	VL	H
Regular Emp.	VH	VH	H	VH	H	H	H	M	L	L	L	L	H
Casual Labour	VH	VH	H	H	H	VH	M	H	M	M	M	M	H
Cultivator	VH	VH	H	M	M	H	M	M	VL	M	M	M	H
Family land workers	VH	VH	M	L	L	M	L	L	VL	VL	VL	VL	M
Supervisory Work on family land	VH	H	L	L	M	H	M	L	VL	VL	VL	VL	M

**Note:** Very High (VH) =above 80%, High (H) =60-80%, Moderate (M) =40-60%, Low (L) =20-40%, Very Low (VL) = Below 20%

1. In making in what items to cook ( IC)
2. Answering Freely to Questions asked (QA)
3. Purchasing requirements for Children (PC)
4. Education of Children (EC)
5. Obtaining Health Care for Own Health (OH)



6. Going for Outings (GO)
7. Purchasing Requirements for Own Self (PO)
8. Visiting and staying with friends, parents & relatives (VS)
9. Expenditure on Marriages. (EM)
10. Borrowing Money for Household Demands (BH)
11. Borrowing Money to Start Business. (BB)
12. Paying Back Debts (PD)
13. Control over Using Money earned/saved(CE)

**Source:** Field Survey, July-September, 2017.

It has been found and ascertained from the above study conducted that Decision making was most restricted in financial matters. Around 25-50 percent women did not participate in such decisions with variations in the levels of participation with respect to their status. Around 40 percent non-working women did not participate in decision-making in financial matters relating to borrowing money for household demands, starting business and paying back debts.

The Table 2 has been developed to show very clearly the magnitude of participation or autonomy in decision making and variations according to various issues concerned. The facts revealed from this table reiterate the findings inferred from the previous table. The Table 3 shows variations in the magnitude of autonomy in decision making across occupational categories. Though, working women in all categories showed very high autonomy in trivial issues, in issues relating children autonomy was restricted for family land workers and women as supervisory work on family land. In issues relating own self, autonomy was again restricted in these two occupational categories. Most important difference comes when we look into critical issues. Infact, three distinct categories emerge. First category comprising the family land workers and supervisory workers on family land had very low decision making autonomy. The second category of agricultural labourers, self employed and regular and salary employed had low to very low autonomy. Interestingly, the third category of casual labourers and cultivators had moderate autonomy in critical financial issues.

For the first category workers no money income or earnings are available thus, on issues of finances their autonomy was restricted. For casual laborers' families were very poor with male counterpart mostly casual workers too, had moderate autonomy in decision making.

**Table: 4**

**Incidence of Spousal Violence with Respect to Status of Employment and Frequency of Assertiveness**

Status of Employment	Assertion Levels	Frequency of Spousal Violence			Total
		Often	Sometimes	Never	
<b>Worker</b>	Always	33 (62.3)	38 (55.9)	48 (57.8)	119 (58.3)
	Sometimes	17 (32.1)	29 (42.6)	34 (41.0)	80 (39.2)
	Never	3 (5.7)	1 (1.5)	1 (1.2)	5 (2.5)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b> <b>(26.0)</b>	<b>68</b> <b>(33.3)</b>	<b>83</b> <b>(40.7)</b>	<b>204</b> <b>(100.0)</b>
<b>Non-Worker</b>	Always	13 (43.3)	27 (24.5)	46 (52.3)	86 (37.7)
	Sometimes	12 (40.0)	62 (56.4)	41 (46.6)	115 (50.4)
	Never	5 (16.7)	21 (19.1)	1 (1.1)	27 (11.8)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b> <b>(13.2)</b>	<b>110</b> <b>(48.2)</b>	<b>88</b> <b>(38.6)</b>	<b>228</b> <b>(100.0)</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		83 (19.2)	178 (41.2)	171 (39.6)	432 (100.0)

**Source:** Field Survey, July-September, 2017.

Among the occupation categories interestingly regular or salaried women employees reported to have never experienced spousal violence. Those workers with no nominal monetary income (family land workers and supervisory work on family land) experienced maximum spousal violence followed by agricultural labourers.

## Case study: Sitadevi

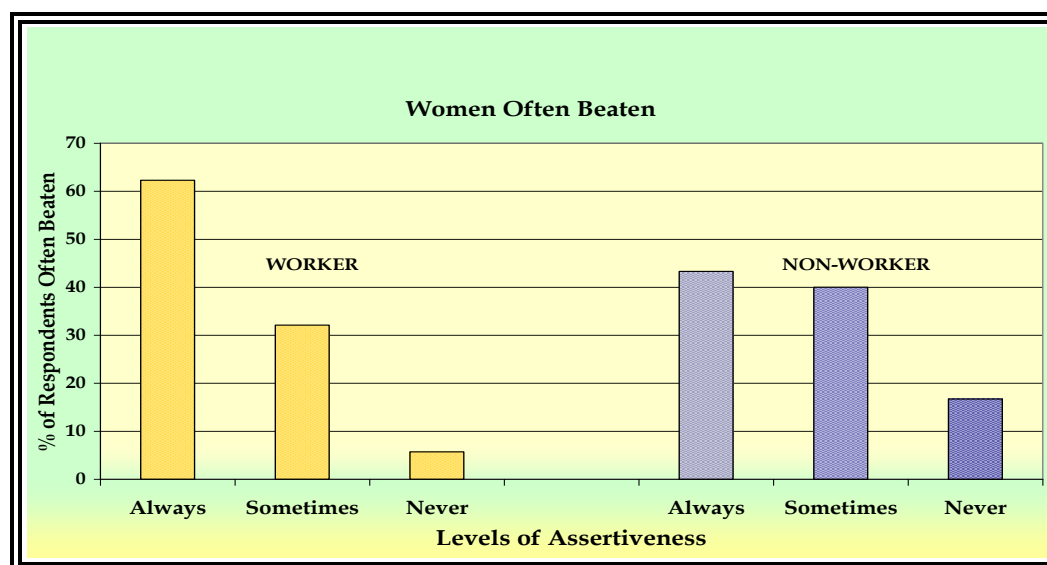
Village: Haldipur, Tehsil: Honnavar, Age: 36 yrs

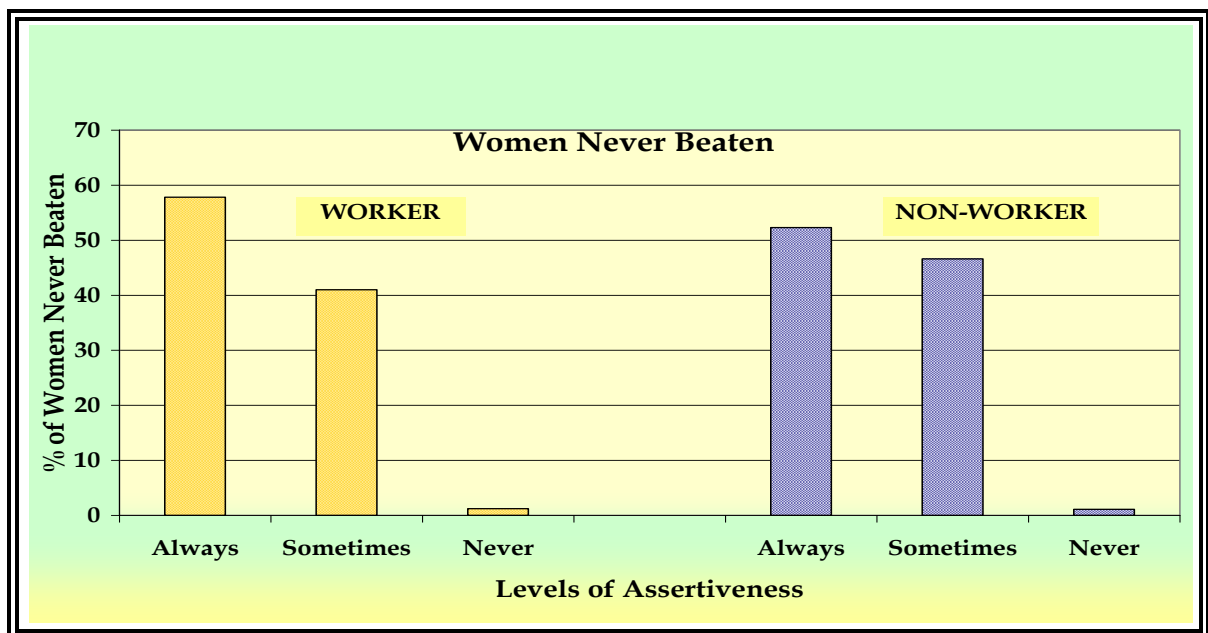
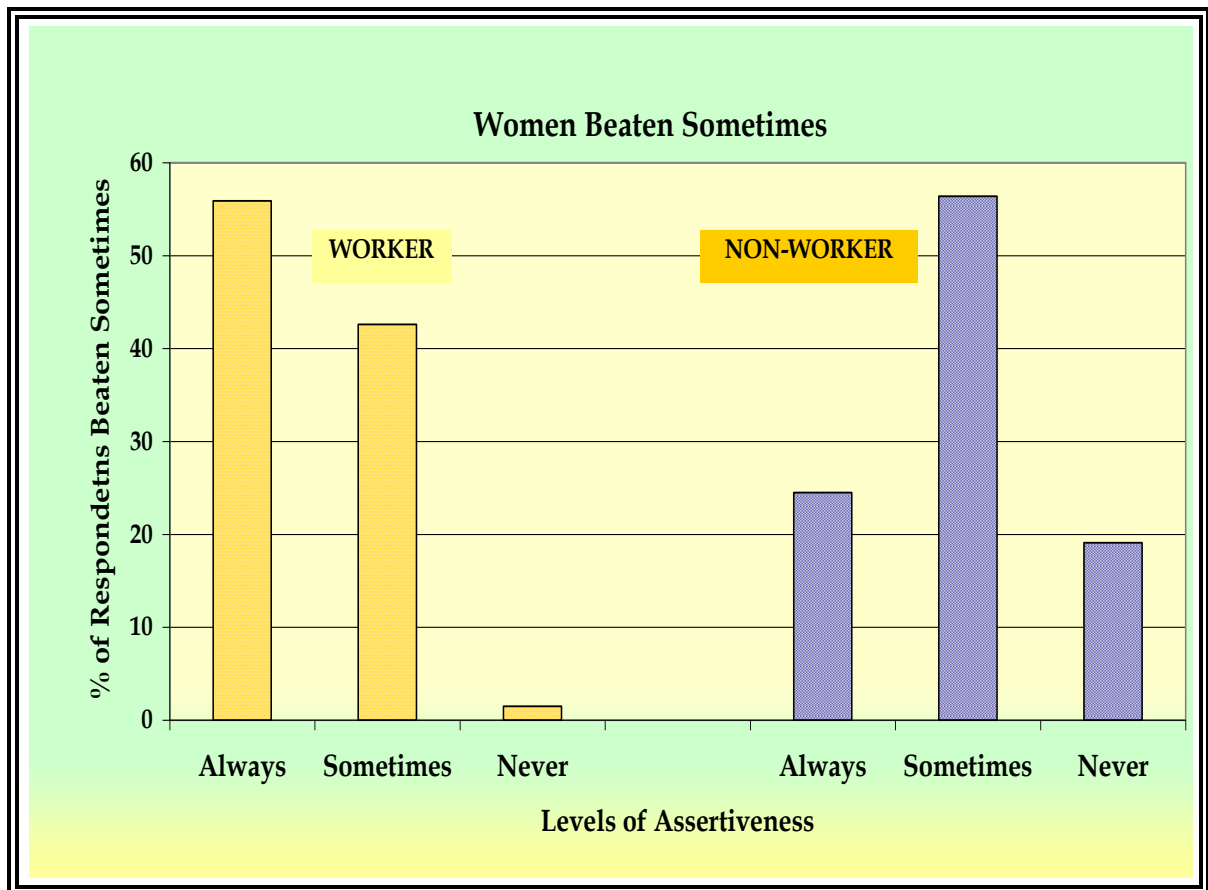
Sitadevi is a mother of four children (still expecting another). She works in others fields for petty wages (Rs.30 a day or five kg paddy or wheat) apart form bidi making for which she earns a paltry sum of Rs.28 for 1000 bidis. Her husband off and on job as a painter mostly within the village premises. His income hardly meets the domestic requirements as most of his earnings are spent on drinking, gambling and other vices. Thus, the whole burden of family's sustenance is on Sitadevi.

When asked, "How do you manage your living and do you get enough to eat on daily basis?" She bluntly says, my children have not had proper diet for days. When I can't meet feed my children a proper meal a day how do you expect me to eat! Interestingly Sitadevi fought for the post of pradhan in the panchayat elections on being provoked by her husband. Paradoxical to what is viewed of an empowered female pradhan, Sitadevi does not even know about her family indebtedness. She blindly okays her husband and puts signature (which she can crudely make) on any document.

## Levels of Assertiveness and Subjection to Spousal Violence:

An interesting study by Irene Casique, 'Empowerment of Women: the Well-being of Women and Families in Mexico', explores the effect of Mexican women's labor force participation and women's decision-making power on women's risk of experiencing domestic violence. She brings out in her study that women's participation in the labor market and higher decision-making power appear as factors increasing women's likelihood of being victims of domestic violence. In order to test this fact in our empirical study we analyze women's incidence to domestic violence with respect to her assertiveness in participation related to decision making in the household responsibilities.





In order to determine the prevalence of domestic violence, women respondents were asked if they had been beaten or physically mistreated by their in-laws or husband. There exists a significant limitation of the data collected in this respect. There exists a culture of silence to not only accept violence as their fate but also be silent about it and not express it. Such women do not even reveal violence against them to their parental relatives. When such a sensitive question was asked, responses had to be elicited very tactfully. The fact that in patriarchal societies, women are not only socialized into being silent about their experience of violence, but traditional norms teach us to accept, tolerate and even rationalize domestic violence [1], has been well proved in empirical study. Casique's findings are echoed in the current study, as women's labor-force participation and decision-making influence the levels of domestic violence. Among those respondents who responded to having been assertive, the incidence of spousal violence was often. Finally, the following case study poses a question to policymakers regarding their celebrations of increasing female participation rates, assuming it is a reflection of women's improved status in society.

### Case study: Meenakshi

Village: Hadinbal, Tehsil: Honnavar, Age: 37 yrs

Meenakshi, an agricultural labourer, is a mother of 4 children. She lost her husband eight years ago. She is struggling to make ends meet with her meager earnings of Rs. 30 per day. The eldest son (15 yrs. of age) is working in Mumbai and supports the family with his income. Her only asset is a thatched hut which badly needs maintenance. Her parents have disowned her as a witch who is responsible for the predicament of her family. She is regular subject to torture by her brothers-in-laws who have disowned her of any share in the property. She saved her hard-earned money (sleepless nights to make bidis) to buy a buffalo. Now her agricultural income is supported by her daily income. Now all that she aspires is to get her daughter out of this hell and give her a decent life. Lastly, she laments, for a woman to live without her husband is just like dying each day to live the next day.

### Some of the major issues and challenges of women's empowerment are as follows:

1. **Perspective and attitude orientation:** The most common and also unkind discrimination which is aligned with women is based on biased attitude. Also, the discrimination against the girl's child starts right from birth itself. Because boys are preferred over girls, female infanticide is a common practice in India. The suffering which an Indian girl faces ahead in life is only the starting point of a lifelong fight to be actually seen and heard as an individual
2. **Patriarch system:** Indian society traditionally has a patriarchal social order and system. In society, men are proclaimed the guardians of archaic and unjust traditions. They placed the burden of culture, traditions and honour on the women and mark their growth. The incidences of "honour killing" reveal the deformed social thread in the male-dominated society.

3. **Economic backwardness of women:** In transforming the available women's base into human resources, there certainly has been a failure. Women constitute only 29% of the workforce but form the majority of the poor in the country. In response, it hampered not only the economic development of women but also of the country as a whole.
4. **Implementation Gaps:** Throughout the years, the concentration has been given only to developing, devising and launching new schemes, policies and programmes. On the other hand, governments have paid less concentration and attention towards the suitable monitoring and implementation system. Even less attention is also paid towards the success rate of that particular scheme, policy or programme. The second issue in this regard is that if a particular scheme or programme once announced or started, the unwanted delay affects the successfulness of that policy, scheme or programme. It should be done in a timely and proper manner.
5. **Loopholes in the functioning of the judicial system:** There are a number of laws in place to protect women from all forms of violence. However, there has been an increase in the number of rapes, extortions, acid attacks, and other forms of violence. This all may be caused due to the delay in legal procedures and the presence of several loopholes in the functioning of the judicial system.
6. **Uninterested politicians:** The long pending Women's Reservation Bill underlines the lack of political will and interest of all political parties to empower women politically. In Indian politics, male supremacy triumphs, and women are forced to remain silent observers.

### **Women's education equality leads to long-term women's empowerment:**

Another area in which women's equality has shown a major improvement as a result of adult literacy programs is the area of enrolment of boys and girls in schools. As a result of higher participation of women in literacy campaigns, the gender gap in literacy levels is gradually getting reduced. Even more significant is the fact that the disparity in enrolment of boys and girls in neo-literate households is much lower compared to non-literate householders. The world has achieved equality in primary education between girls and boys. But few countries have achieved that target at all levels of education. The political participation of women keeps increasing. In January 2014, in 46 countries, more than 30% of members of parliament in at least one chamber were women. In many countries, gender equality persists and women continue to face discrimination in access to education, work and economic assets, and participation in government. Women and girls face barriers and disadvantages in every sector in which we work. Around the world, 62 million girls are not in school. Globally, 1 in 3 women will experience gender-based violence in their lifetime. In the developing world, 1 in 7 girls is married before their 15th birthday, with some child brides as young as 8 or 9. Each year, more than 287,000 women, 99 percent of them in developing countries, die from pregnancy and childbirth-related complications. While women make up more than 40 percent of the agriculture labour force, only 3 to 20 percent are landholders. In Africa, women owned enterprises make up as little as 10 percent of all businesses. In South Asia, that number is only 3 percent. Moreover, despite accounting for half of the world's population, women account for less than 20% of the world's



legislators. Putting women and girls on equal footing with men and boys has the power to transform every sector in which we work. Gender equality and women's empowerment isn't a part of development but at the core of development. To get rid of this, we have to do some educational awareness programmes on gender equality and women's empowerment to cement our commitment to supporting women and girls.

### **Conclusion:**

It is going to be a very easy task to empower women socially, educationally, economically, legally and politically. It is going to be very difficult to change the culture of ignorance for women which is so deep rooted in our society. But that doesn't mean that it is an unattainable task. It can be done through our mindset and accordingly the reforms will take place, but reforms take their time. In this context, it takes its time too. The thought of women's empowerment may sound tough by the yard, but by the inch, it is just a cinch. Here, we all need an intense effort focused in the right direction that would rest only with the emancipation of women from all types of evil. Women's empowerment is not a Northern concept. Women all over the world, including countries in the South, have been challenging and changing gender inequalities since the beginning of history. These struggles have also been supported by many men who have been outraged at injustice against women. Women represent half the world's population and gender inequality exists in every nation on the planet. Until women are given the same opportunities that men are, entire societies will be destined to perform below their true potential. The greatest need of the hour is a change of social attitude towards women. The education of women is the most powerful tool to change the position of society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. To encourage the education of women at all levels and for dilution of gender bias in providing knowledge and education, established schools, colleges and universities even exclusively for women in the state. Education develops the idea of participation in government, panchayats, public matters etc for elimination of gender discrimination.

Gender policies emphasize a greater participation of women in the labour market, while analysts of social exclusion stress employment-based inclusion for vulnerable or excluded groups. The empirical study emphasizes that simply celebrating statistical increases in Female Work Participation Rates does not guarantee women's empowered status; rather, the quality of work involved is an important determinant. The order of domain suggests a process of empowerment that begins at the level of a woman's individual consciousness and becomes externalized through greater physical mobility, raised awareness levels, increased autonomy in decision making, i.e., a strong role in the household, greater self esteem and, eventually, meaningful participation in the larger community. The empowerment process is not as linear as the description suggests, but more similar to a loop or spiral. The change in development policies from the focus on women's active role in production as a means to more efficient development, to the approach of women's empowerment through women organizing for greater self-reliance, has also meant a change in policies for the enhancement of women's economic role. The role of agency in assessing the empowerment of women is because of the many examples in the

literature of cases in which giving women access to resources does not lead to their greater control over resources, where changes in legal statutes have little influence on practice, where political leaders do not necessarily work to promote women's interests. Thus, while resources – economic, social and political—are often critical in ensuring that women are empowered, they are not always sufficient. Without women's individual or collective ability to recognize and utilize resources in their own interests, resources cannot bring about empowerment.

Understanding empowerment in this way means that development agencies cannot claim to empower women. Rather, they can provide appropriate external support and intervention, which can, however, be important to foster and support the process of empowerment, i.e., act as facilitators. Governments can ensure that their programmes work to support women's individual empowerment by encouraging women's participation, acquisition of skills, decision-making capacity, and control over resources. Therefore, an inclusive approach whereby planners working towards an empowerment approach must develop ways of enabling women themselves to critically review their own situation and participate in creating and shaping society is suggested.

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