

CONCEPT AND APPROACH OF EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN : SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NAGPUR DISTRICT

NEELIMA DESHMUKH AND RAMESH PRASAD DWIVEDI

Director , Centre for women studies & Development and
Prof. & Head Department of Public Administration & LSG, RTM Nagpur University, Nagpur.
Guest Faculty , Centre for women studies & Development
and Prof. & Head Department of Public Administration & LSG, RTM Nagpur University, Nagpur.

Abstract:

There are a variety of understandings of the term empowerment due to its widespread usage. If empowerment is looked upon in terms of ability to make choices: to be disempowered therefore, implies to be denied choice. 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'.

KEYWORDS :

Women's, Empowerment, Approach, violence .

INTRODUCTION

“To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman.

If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, woman is less brute than man.

If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior: Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her man could not be.

If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?”

Mahatma Gandhi

People who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be very powerful, but they are not empowered, because they were never disempowered in the first place. Empowerment cannot be defined in terms of specific activities or end results because it involves a process whereby women can freely analyze, develop and voice their needs and interests, without them being pre-defined, or imposed from above. The assumption that planners can identify women's needs; runs against empowerment objectives.

The present paper is an attempt to develop conceptual clarity of the term empowerment delineating it with several other overlapping concepts of gender equality, social inclusion, powerful etc. and suggest and advocate an inclusive approach of policy measures whereby the planners working towards an empowerment approach develop ways enabling women themselves to critically review their own situation and participate in creating and shaping the society as agents of change themselves.

The status and role of women and related issues, have attracted the attention of the academicians, political thinkers and social scientists both in developing as well as developed countries, partially due to the

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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 literatures on empowerment of women and with voluminous amount of public expenditure on women 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 paper we have dealt with the concept of empowerment of women in the first section and in the second section we deal with a specific but the most important determinant of empowerment of women i.e., 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. For this study we largely draw data from the primary survey conducted for 448 females in the rural areas of Nagpur District. A sample of working and non-working women was selected for the study to understand the differences in the autonomy in decision making capacity as an indicator of empowerment with respect to their working status.

There are a variety of understandings of the term 'empowerment' due to its widespread usage. Yet this widely used term is rarely defined. The claims 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.

I. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:

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. Whereas the role of agency in the discourse on empowerment assumes prime importance, gender equality or equity indicates the degree of equivalence in life outcomes for women and men, recognizing their different needs and interests and requiring a redistribution of power and resources.

II. Powerful and Empowerment:

One way of thinking about power is in terms of the ability to make choices: to be disempowered, therefore, implies to be 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.

III. Social Inclusion 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, 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.”

There are various attempts in the literature to develop a comprehensive understanding of empowerment through breaking the process down into key components. Kabeer's (2001) understanding of “choice” comprises three inter-related components:

Resources: or “enabling factors” or “catalysts” for conditions under which empowerment is likely to occur i.e., they form the conditions under which choices are made;

Agency: which is at the heart of the process through which choices are made, and;

Achievements, which are conceived as the outcomes of choices.

According to Naila Kabeer, empowerment is “the expansion in people's ability to make strategic

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life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.” According to Kabeer, empowerment cannot 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 cannot term it as 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.

Consensus on Macro and Micro Indicators of Empowerment

There are a variety of ways in which indicators of empowerment can be developed. Each have some value, but none can be taken as 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.

Measuring Gender Empowerment Index

Dimension	Political participation and decision making	Economic participation and decision-making			Power over economic resources
Indicator	Female & Male shares in parliamentary seats	Female & Male shares of positions as legislators, senior officials and managers		Female & male shares of professional and technical positions	Female and male estimated earned income
Equality Distributed Equivalence % (EDEP)	EDEP for parliamentary representation		EDEP for economic participation		EDEP for income
Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)					

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.

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JSI Six Domains of Empowerment

Domain	Expressions
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.

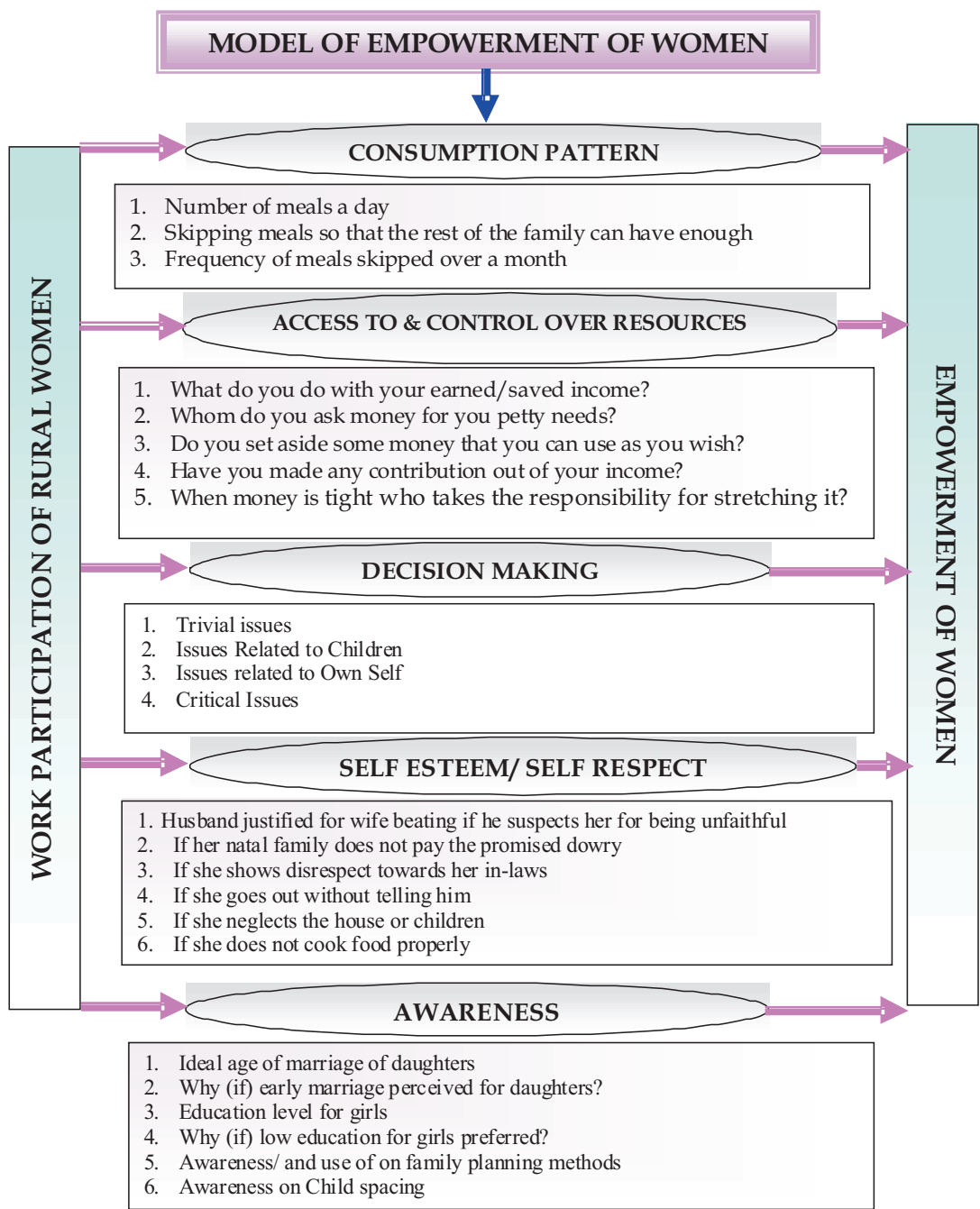
JSI defines empowerment in a behavioral sense as the ability to take effective action encompassing inner state (sense of self, of one's autonomy, self-confidence, openness to new ideas, belief in one's own potential to act effectively) and a person's status and efficacy in social interactions. In particular, 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. (as shown in fig. 1)

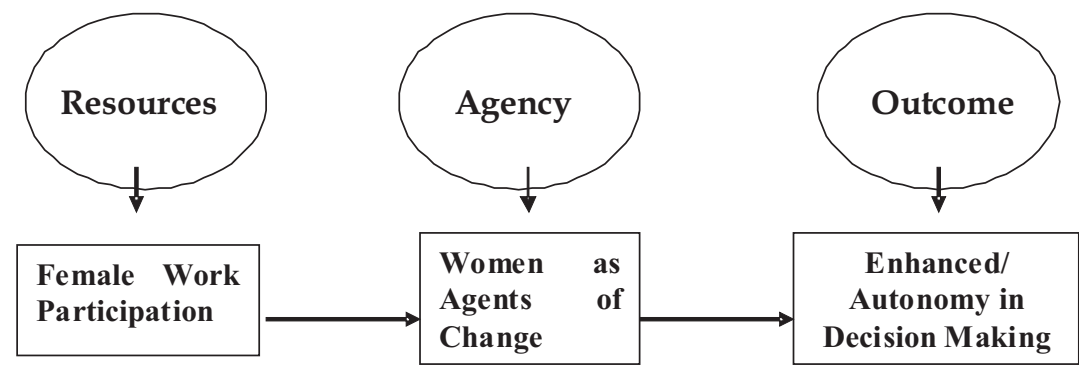
Fig:1



ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

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 Section I of the paper the process of empowerment can be visualized 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. (Fig.2)

Fig. 2



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)

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	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 to	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)
		Decision on purchasing requirements for self		
Worker		126 (57.8)	88 (40.4)	4 (1.9)
Non-worker		74 (32.2)	128 (56.7)	28 (12.2)
		Decision on going out visiting and staying with parents/friends		
Worker		124 (56.8)	68 (31.2)	26 (11.9)
Non-worker		81 (43.0)	100 (43.5)	31 (13.5)
		Decision on going for an outing		
Worker		158 (72.5)	51 (23.4)	9 (4.1)
Non-worker		111 (48.3)	81 (35.2)	37 (16.1)

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		Decision on purchasing requirements for self		
Worker		126 (57.8)	88 (40.4)	4 (1.9)
Non-worker		74 (32.2)	128 (56.7)	28 (12.2)
		Decision on going out visiting and staying with parents/friends		
Worker		124 (56.8)	68 (31.2)	26 (11.9)
Non-worker		81 (43.0)	100 (43.5)	31 (13.5)
		Decision on going for an outing		
Worker		158 (72.5)	51 (23.4)	9 (4.1)
Non-worker		111 (48.3)	81 (35.2)	37 (16.1)
	Critical Issues	Decision on expenditure on marriage		
Worker		33 (16.9)	151 (69.3)	30 (13.8)
Non-worker		15 (7.8)	153 (66.5)	59 (25.6)
		Decision on how your earned/saved money will be used		
Worker		45 (20.6)	150 (68.8)	7 (3.3)
Non-worker		19 (8.3)	113 (66.5)	58 (25.2)
		Decision on borrowing money to meet household demands		
Worker		56 (25.7)	131 (60.1)	31 (14.2)
Non-worker		23 (10.0)	123 (53.5)	84 (36.9)
		Decision on borrowing money to start business		
Worker		41 (20.6)	123 (56.4)	50 (23.0)
Non-worker		18 (9.5)	112 (48.7)	56 (41.8)

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		Decision on Paying back debts		
Worker		50 (22.9)	122 (56.0)	46 (21.1)
Non-worker		18 (7.8)	110 (47.8)	102 (44.3)
Total Workers		(58.6)	(35.2)	(8.0)
Total Non-workers		(38.8)	(44.4)	(16.8)
Grand Total		(47.7)	(39.8)	(12.5)

Source: Field Survey.

From the Table 1 following points emerge:

- 1.Participation in decision-making was found higher for the working women as compared to the non-working women in all aspects of household decision making. Higher the participation in decision making higher is the degree of autonomy. Still one needs to look into the nature of this participation of women.
- 2.The magnitude of decision making varies across trivial issues, issues related to own self, 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
Trivial Issues(TI)			
1.	In making in what items to cook	VH	H
2.	Answering Freely to Questions asked	VH	VH
Issues Related to Children(IRC)			
1.	Purchasing requirements for Children	VH	M
2.	Education of Children	H	M
Issues Related to Own Self(IROS)			
1.	Obtaining Health Care for Own Health	M	L
2.	Going for Outings	H	M
3.	Purchasing Requirements for Own Self	M	L
4.	Visiting and staying with friends, parents & relatives	M	M
Critical Issues (CI)			
	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%

Source: Developed from Table 7.22

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- 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,

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

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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 causal 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 labourers' 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	
	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)
	Total	53 (26.0)	68 (33.3)	83 (40.7)	204 (100.0)
	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)
	Total	30 (13.2)	110 (48.2)	88 (38.6)	228 (100.0)
Grand Total		83 (19.2)	178 (41.2)	171 (39.6)	432 (100.0)

Note: Sixteen Cases Not Applicable

Source: Field Survey

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.

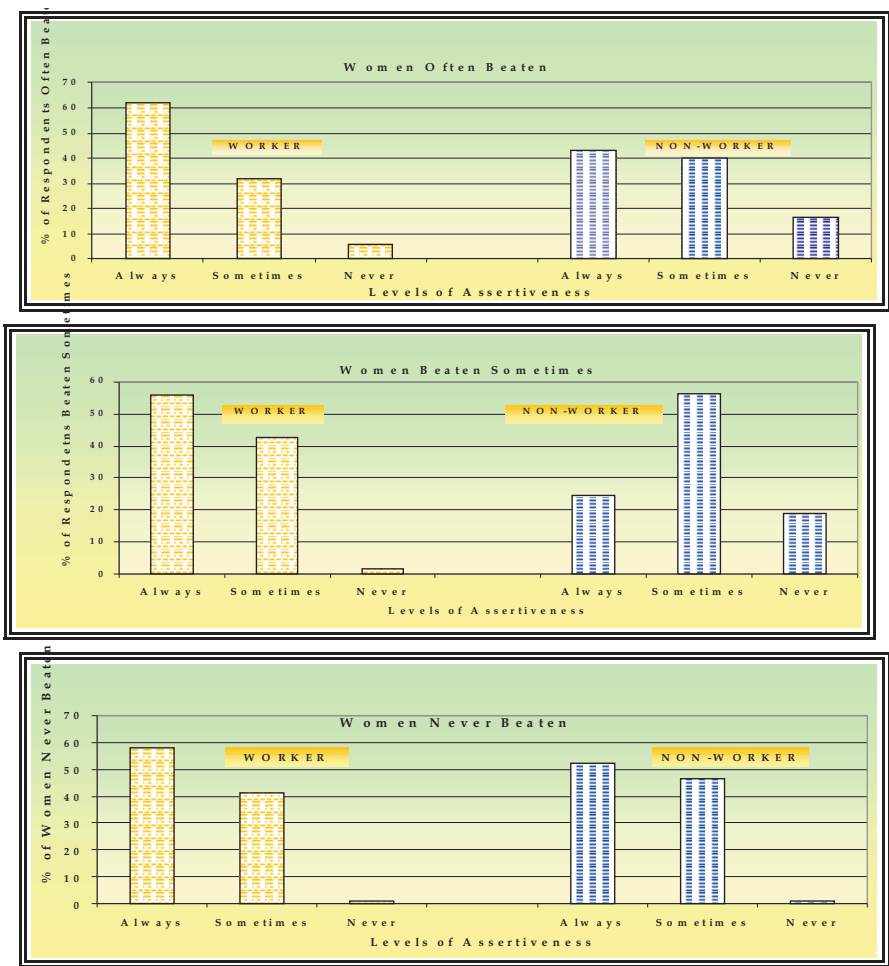
LEVELS OF ASSERTIVENESS AND SUBJECTION TO SPOUSAL VIOLENCE:

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

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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. To test this fact in our empirical study we analyze women's incidence to domestic violence with respect to her assertiveness in participation in decision making in the household responsibilities.

Chart No. 7.10 (a, b, c)



In order to access the prevalence of domestic violence, question was asked to the women respondents if they were beaten or physically mistreated by their in-laws or husband. There exists 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. 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 to accept, tolerate and even rationalize domestic violence, has been well proved in the empirical study. Casique's findings find its reflections in the present study also, as women's participation in labour market and decision making has implications on the levels of domestic violence. Among those respondents who responded to have been always assertive, incidence of spousal violence was often. Lastly, the following case study puts forth a question for the policy makers on their celebrations of increasing female participation rates assuming it to be reflection of women's improved status in the society.

CONCLUSION:

Gender policies emphasize a greater participation of women in the labour market, while analysts

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of social exclusion stress employment-based inclusion for vulnerable or excluded groups.

The empirical study points out to the fact that mere celebrations of the statistical swells in Female Work Participation Rates does not ensure women's empowered status, rather the quality of work involved is also 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 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 the planners working towards an empowerment approach must develop ways enabling women themselves to critically review their own situation and participate in creating and shaping the society is suggested.

“The women's movement at its deepest is not an effort to play "catch-up" with the competitive, aggressive "dog-eat-dog" spirit of the dominant system. It is rather, an attempt to convert men and the system to the sense of responsibility, nurturance, openness, and rejection of hierarchy that are part of our vision.”

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