

(RE) MAPPING EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES AMONG MARRIED WOMEN IN RURAL INDIA: A PANEL DATA STUDY

Asoke Howlader^{1*}, Sidhartha Sankar Laha², Arindam Modak³

¹PhD Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology Durgapur, India,

²Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Tufanganj Mahavidyalaya, Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India, ³Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology Durgapur, India.

Email: ^{1*}asoke.nitd@gmail.com, ²sidharthasankar09@gmail.com, ³arindam_m@yahoo.com

Article History: Received on 03rd October 2019, Revised on 30th November 2019, Published on 10th December 2019

Abstract

Purpose of the study: This paper endeavours to re-examine the socio-economic factors influencing empowerment among married women in rural India over two points of time, 2005 and 2012. It examines the interplay of the work status of rural married women and the poverty status of their household in influencing empowerment.

Methodology: The study uses the nationally representative multi-topic India Human Development Survey (IHDS). IHDS panel data has been utilized to assess the entry and exit from a workforce of rural married women, to define the components of empowerment among rural married women and analyze the socio-economic factors influencing the empowerment among rural married women.

Main Findings: The outcomes show the increase in the overall empowerment rates in spite of their mobility constraints seem to have badly risen during the period 2005-2012, especially in the context of deteriorating work input among rural women. Moreover, working rural married women from BPL (Below Poverty Line) rural households are less likely to be empowered as compared to working rural married women from APL (Above Poverty Line) households.

Applications of this study: The rural female work participation rate is declining in the phase of rising economic growth and education. In this context, their empowerment would not only benefit their personal lives but also impact their economic lives, thus contribute to the country's GDP. This makes it vital to analyze as to what comprises their empowerment in the first place so that it can be promoted through various schemes.

Novelty/Originality of this study: Women's economic empowerment and their participation in work are essential to bringing in the fullest demographic dividend for inclusive economic escalation and sustainable development in India. Thus, empowerment which may not necessarily be implied by employment is conditioned upon the poverty status of the household. However, the empowerment of rural married women is facilitated by higher education of self, husband and other family members.

Keywords: Empowerment, Rural Married Women, Binary Logistic Regression, Panel data.

INTRODUCTION

Global Gender Gap Report (2017) released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) has ranked India at a low of 108 out of 144 countries on the gender equality scale. It has been pushed further down from 87 in 2016. Women's economic empowerment currently faces many challenges like few opportunities for a paid job, jobs mostly concentrated in the informal economy which is characterized by low pay, poor working conditions, and low-value addition, etc. (Krogh et al., 2009).

It has been estimated that India can boost its GDP by \$700 billion in 2025, amounting to 1.4% per year of incremental GDP growth, by raising the female labor-force participation (FLFP) rate by mere 10% points. However, this requires us to bring in 68 million more women into the workforce (Arora, 2017). India has one of the lowest work participation rates for women in South Asia. However, at the same time, it has one of the highest growth rates in the world. In this phase of rising economic growth and globalization, the declining FLFP is puzzling. To reap India's demographic dividend to its full potential, promote inclusive growth and sustainable development, efforts towards enhancing women's empowerment and their labor market participation are crucial.

"Any society that fails to harness the energy and creativity of its women, is at a great disadvantage in the modern world"
~ (Tian Wei)

Despite policies like 'Beti Bachao - Beti Padhao'¹, Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, Mandatory Maternity Leave and numerous other programmes and laws to prevent female foeticide and promote gender equality, the IHDS-II (second wave in 2012) data shows that in rural areas, 82% of the husbands desire to have at least 1 boy child and only 50% of the husbands desire to have at least 1 girl child in 2012 when asked for preference about the sex of the child if they wished to have children. The preference for a girl child looks bleak in the Indian society and their future also could be equally grim, if immediate

¹The Beti Bachao - Beti Padhao campaign launched on 15 January 2015 from Panipat in Haryana. The campaign is aimed at stopping female foeticide and improving the status of women in Indian society by giving her opportunities for education (Economic Survey of India, 2015-16)