

Providing Equal Household Decision Making Power: A Stepping Stone For Women Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims at understanding the role of family structure and decision-making power of women. In addition to investigate the autonomy of women in decision making under a different family structure like nuclear and joint family. This study focuses on women empowerment through decision making authority at household level. The male headed household in Muzaffarpur district is the norm, and it is not accepted culturally to be female headed household. The prime objective of this study is to examine the women empowerment through decision making power at household level. It has been assumed that there is a positive relationship between women empowerment and decision making at household level. Both quantitative and qualitative data have been used to obtain reliable data, across the district of Muzaffarpur. One day camps were organized in different areas of Muzaffarpur town and the appeared respondents were invited to fill a personal data sheet and the questionnaire. A screening of respondents was carried out on the basis of the personal data sheet. The obtained data were subjected to one way ANOVA test and correlation analysis to find out the relationship and significant differences. The present study highlights the issues about a strong relationship between decision making authority and women empowerment.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Decision-making, Family structure, Household level, Muzaffarpur, Bihar.

INTRODUCTION

The literal meaning of Empowerment is to give power or authority to someone. Women are important to the family as a mother as well in a society as a character and moral builder. Women are working in the family without any compensation however at the workplace they earn money as per their position. Empowerment of women refers to giving decision making power to women in social, economic and political sphere of life. The famous proverb, "charity begins at home" clearly means in this context that process of women empowerment should start from our own home.

Women's position in the household determines women's autonomy in the family. It is worth to examine whether can decide about household matters like buying household assets and jewellerys, having access to money, having mobility to go to relatives house or getting health care facilities.

Participation in household decision making process under the study refers to the extent of women's participation in planning and executing decisions regarding household expenditure, child welfare, reproductive health, farming and socio-political matters in

coordination with other family in the areas of health, education, training etc (Banu, 1996; Khan, 2000; Kabir, 1996).

Decision making about personal and social affairs affect the whole family members and the decision making by men/women enhances the status of the individual in the family. Women live with multiple role and duties. They provide support to their family as a mother, a wife, a daughter and a sister (Zafer et al., 1995).

Women's decision-making power in family relies on several factors such as socio-cultural factors, religion and their education, employment, marital status and types of family. Sharma et al., (2014) mentioned that the authoritarian role in a family is associated with the eldest member, and decision-making power is concentrated in him/her (eldest member) to take a decision on behalf of the family members in the traditional joint family.

The family is one of the most important socio-economic institution in our society, but the nature of the links between family members varies dramatically across nationalities. Lakadwala and Surendradas (2001) suggested that in nuclear families, women take more decisions in comparison to joint families.

The degree of women's decision-making power does not remain same over the different aspect of life considered. Women are almost the sole authority to decide about cooking and have access to money but can rarely buy jewellery of its own. Less than one third of women can decide about health care or get permission to go to relative's house or market. The present study focuses on women positions in the family with regard to their role in the intra family decision making, their degree of control over some selected items. The study was designed to examine women's empowerment and decision-making power among family structure within their household in Muzaffarpur, Bihar.

OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS

The prime objective of this study is to examine women empowerment and the decision-making power at household level. In addition to this prime objective the following objective have been incorporated in this study: -

- (i) To find out the relationship between decision making power and women empowerment.
- (ii) To identify the level of empowerment and decision-making power in nuclear and joint family system.

To meet the above objectives, the assumed hypothesis was: -

“There is a positive relation between women empowerment and decision-making power at household level”.

RESEARCH MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the present study, the respondents have been selected from Muzaffarpur and were asked to fill a personal data sheet (PDS) and the questionnaire.

The sample size and the number of respondents selected is 320. The categories were made depending upon level of education (Viz. no education, primary, secondary and higher education), education status of the family (arrived at using a family Educational Status Index (ESI) varying from 2 to 5 and structure of the family (joint or nuclear).

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

1. One day camps were organized in Muzaffarpur town and surrounding areas and all the 320 respondents, after screening of personal data sheet (PDS) were selected from the same.
2. Empowerment Questionnaire used for measuring the level of empowerment by using cumulative empowerment index (CEI).
3. **Statistical Data Analysis** The mean and standard deviation were calculated and they were subjected to estimate the p-value of the data.

One way ANOVA test was carried out for all the classes of respondents across all the dimensions to establish the validity of analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the present study have been shown in following text table: -

Table 1: Showing the ANOVA for empowerment index across two family structures

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Joint	160	2032	12.7	1.2
Nuclear	160	2368	14.8	1.8

Table 2: Showing the single factor ANOVA for household empowerment index across the two-family structures.

Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	F	p-value	F-crit
Between groups	439.352	1.0	439.4	50.6	5.212	3.865
Within groups	3452.520	398.0	8.7			
Total	3891.872	399.0				

Extremely low p-value rejected the null hypothesis and suggested a significant difference in the household empowerment score of respondents across different family structure.

The investigation was to find the relationship between the level of a women's empowerment level and the family structure in which she lived. ANOVA for the same helped us to establish the two family structure; joint and nuclear. Low p-values for the ANOVA of these across different dimensions established that these represent significant different classes of empowerment. Furthermore, it was found that the correlation between family structure and level of empowerment was not uniform amongst the different family obstruction. For a joint

family, the economic empowerment is found out to be at a higher level where as for nuclear families, household and social empowerment levels were found out to be higher.

It was also found that the decision making in different spheres is positively correlated to the level of empowerment. A higher level of empowerment establishes higher decision making by women across social, economic and household matters.

CONCLUSION

From the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the present study, it could be concluded that there exists positive relationship between decision making power and women empowerment. The degree of women's decision making power does not remain the same over the different aspect of life and situation. Women have sole authority to decide about cooking and have access to money for this purpose, but can rarely purchase household assets and jewellery of its own. Further, women have freedom to decide about their healthcare and visits to their relative's house. In Muzaffarpur district, there are different cultural norms and beliefs and women respect their male partners. Majority of women take any decision with their husband's permission and husbands do not believe that their wives should take the decision by their own. The shy nature and inability to combat the patriarchal system are the another reasons for their low decision-making powers. Hence under such scenario there is emergent need to change the attitude of both women and men. This will be certainly an stepping stone to empower women by giving decision making authority to them.

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