

Perception and Effect of Education on Women Empowerment in Some Selected Areas of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Women empowerment is one of the most important issues of today world. Despite a major contribution in the development process, female population has low status as compared to men, specifically in the developing world. Consequently, at present it has become a major topic of socio-economic and demographic research. An attempt has been taken in this study to investigate the various issues of empowerment such as women's preference about rearing and education of male-female children, decision making about economic, household and freedom of physical movement, in 4 districts of Rajshahi, Khulna and Rangpur divisions. The perception of women about their importance level concerning child rearing and child education increases with the increasing of their own education. Women empowerment for different educational attainment of the respondents is significantly different. Highest empowerment level is in higher educated women. The outputs of the study demonstrate the policy implications that can improve the empowerment of reproductive aged married women. Education and employment opportunities should be created for them to increase their self-esteem and also increase their status in society. The present research would be played an important role to provide effective policy to minimize the gap between men and women and to ensure their rights in every sphere of life.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Educational attainment, ANOVA, WEI, HDI, GEM

Introduction

Women empowerment is a dynamic process that cannot be measured in numeral quantity directly. Since there is a nexus of a few overlapping terms, that are most often included in defining empowerment such as options, choice, control and power. These are referring to women's ability to make decisions and affect outcomes of importance to themselves and their families. Control over one's own life and over resources is often stressed. These conceptual terms should be translated into operational definitions which should also be consistent with the spirit of national as well as international conventions. The government of Bangladesh has from time to time enacted or amended several Acts to safeguard women's legal right or to improve their status. The presence and participation of women in decision making process would enable them to empower themselves. Subsequently, this process will lead to women empowerment through enhanced self-confidence, resources, coping abilities, freedom of choices and power relations. Development planners initially assumed that overall economic development and the process of modernization would bring about an improvement in the status of women by benefiting both men and women equally (Lewina, 1999)¹. During the second half of 20th century, a large number of commendable initiatives have been drawn national and international perspective to the study on women's empowerment. A considerable number of studies have also done on it and several steps have taken according to the recommendations of these studies. Consensus about what actually comprises women

empowerment, and how it is measured, is debated in the development literature. Education is one of the dominant factors and the precondition for all types of development and subsequently women empowerment as well. It sustains women empowerment along with other development process. Hashemi and Schuler's (1993)² work provides an important starting place for the development of a theoretical model of women's empowerment in rural Bangladesh. Morgan and Niraula (1995)³ in Nepal, found that women who experience more mobility are more likely to intend to have fewer children. They express that South Asia is generally characterized by the subordinate role of its women and their limited ability to invest in their children's futures and make independent decision about childbearing. Lazo (1995)⁴ stated that women's powerlessness arises from their illiteracy, lack of awareness, poor knowledge and skills and also from their lack of self-esteem and confidence. Anderson (1996)⁵ and Claridge (1996)⁶ have identified that the self-confidence and self-esteem as essential 'first steps' to an individual's empowerment. In this study, gender awareness refers to the ability of women to identify problems arising from gender inequality and discrimination, which affect their ability to have access to and control over resources. Khuda *et. al.* (2000)⁷ argued that through facilitating female education, female empowerment, female mobility and access to the media Bangladesh implemented a strong family planning program effort, which has brought about a significant fertility decline. Mason and Smith (2003)⁸ suggest that enhancing education and greater employment opportunities for women help to increase community norms and values

which influence women empowerment. A number of studies have shown that women may be empowered in one area of life while not in others (Malhotra *et al.*, 2003; Kishore and Gupta, 2004; Hashemi *et al.* 1996)^{9, 10, 11}, while Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001)¹² have studied women empowerment in different countries with special emphasis on demographic determinants. Mason (2001)¹³ suggests that women with a high level of education and job outside home normally have fewer children. Malhotra *et al.* (2003)⁹ provide considerable review of this debate. They explained many ways in which empowerment can be measured with six dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, familial-interpersonal, legal, political and psychological. Parveen and Leonhauser (2004)¹⁴ found that education, training and exposure to information media have the potential to increase women's empowerment. They also found effective initiatives undertaken by the concerned agencies in improving women's education, skill acquisition training and access to information could enhance women's empowerment in order to achieve gender equality and development at all levels in the rural society of Bangladesh. Parveen (2007)¹⁵ found that in Bangladesh the rural women's empowerment can be attained by fostering their educational gap to men. Now it is the time to evaluate the reflection of mother's education to child; the perception about the need of mother's education for child rearing, child education and male-female children education preference. Ojobo (2008)¹⁶ in his study stated that education is an instrument per-excellence for effective national development as well as a dynamic instrument of change," it is also the

basis for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women. Education empowers women by improving their living standard. It is the starting point for women's advancement in different fields of human endeavor. Khan *et al.* (2010)¹⁷ in their study explored that education provides awareness, confidence and knowledge to the women that help them to decide about their lives and the lives of their intimates. Malik and Courtney (2011)¹⁸ in their research article explored to what extent participation in higher education offers empowerment to women in Pakistan. They found women in their study women highlighted economic independence and an increased standing within family and society as the main benefits of higher education participation. Education makes a person able to choose and able to demand. It makes the person able to choose her goals, generate opportunities to reach the goals and determine the overall direction of her life. The UN Millennium Project Taskforce on Gender Equality adopted an operational framework that assesses gender equality and women's empowerment, along with human capabilities as measured through education which is one of the three dimensions women empowerment.

This project identified a strategic priority of strengthening the opportunities for post-primary education for girls while meeting commitments to universal primary education that must be acted upon in order to achieve gender equality and empower women and fulfill the MDG by 2015. There is no denying that education substantially contributes to women empowerment. So for unveiling the actual picture of perception about female

education and the effect of it for different levels an attempt has been taken into consideration.

Materials and Methods

Materials

This study was designed by purposively selected sampling from three divisions namely Rajshahi, Rangpur and Khulna. The sample size is 500 in which the respondents are taken from 18 villages/mohollas of 10 unions/municipalities from 5 upazilas of four districts under three divisions from July 2010 to January 2011. The unit of analysis is reproductive aged married women. In this sampling design the sample size is 500 of which 250 households from rural areas and 250 households from urban areas. A structured questionnaire was adopted for household-level survey. The reproductive aged (15-49 years) married woman who is the prime decision maker of the family was interviewed. The questionnaire comprised the questions regarding general profile of the respondents, perception about formal and non-formal education and educational facilities.

Methods

The study was performed by several statistical tools and techniques including frequency distribution, contingency table development and analysis, multiple linear regression

Construction of index

Women empowerment is a multidimensional process and it is very difficult to measure it in a quantitative scale. It comprises the entire complex of interactions, roles, rights and statuses that surround being male versus being female in a given society or culture (Mason, 1997)¹⁹. However, in our investigation we have tried to measure women empowerment in a measurement scale by

analysis and logistic regression analysis. The selected socio-economic and demographic variables used in this study. The demographic characteristics included in this study are respondent's age, respondent's age at marriage, etc. This study also includes socio-economic characteristics which are place of residence, respondent's education, husband's age, husband's education, respondent's occupation, religion, torture by both husband and family members.

Education pertinent to women empowerment

In order to examine the mean difference of women empowerment that might exist among the groups according to educational characteristics, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized. This statistical analysis was appropriate to answer the study objective in which examines the mean difference of empowerment among the respondents according to education attainment. Empowerment may be defined as the process of removing the factors which cause the powerlessness. It has to be viewed that women as society's active members who need education to participate, effectively and meaningfully in any activity and as equal partners of men. Actually there is no such powerful alternative like education to empowerment women.

constructing women empowerment index as a quantitative manner using different dimensions in accordance with Mason and Smith (2003)⁸. The different indicators of women empowerment are summarized in three major dimensions of women empowerment are given as follows:

1. Women's economic decision making
2. Their household decision making and
3. Their freedom of physical movement.

The detailed description of these three dimensions with their relevant indicators is given in Table 7. It was ascertained through a four-point scale having 15 statements which were positively stated. The women's responses were expressed by 'respondent alone', 'respondent and husband together', 'husband alone' and 'with other family member'. A score of 4, 3, 2 and 1 was assigned respectively to each positive statement. The first dimension comprises three indicators and so the minimum score this dimension is 3 and the maximum scores of this dimension is 12. The second dimension comprises seven indicators and so the minimum score this dimension is 7 and the maximum scores of this dimension is 28. The last dimension comprises five indicators and so the minimum score this dimension is 5 and the maximum scores of this dimension is 20. Then an index of each dimension is constructed as follows:

$$\text{Dimension Index, } I_i = \frac{\text{Actual score of } i\text{th dimension} - \text{Minimum score of } i\text{th dimension}}{\text{Maximum score of } i\text{th dimension} - \text{Minimum score of } i\text{th dimension}}; \quad i = 1, 2, 3$$

The ultimate women empowerment index (WEI) is calculated on taking arithmetic mean of these three indices such as below:

$$\text{WEI, } I = \frac{1}{3}(I_1 + I_2 + I_3)$$

So the performance of women empowerment index value is varied from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 1 in accordance with the construction of the Human Development Index (HDI) developed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). These indices provide a measurement of the achievement of empowerment or autonomy of a woman and the achievement is the amount of the proportion of unity.

Table 1: List of variables with their categories and codes

Variables	Categories with codes
Age of respondent (years)	1 = <20, 2 = 20 to 34, 3 = 35+
Age at marriage of respondent (years)	1 = <15, 2 = 15-19, 3 = 20-24, 4 = 25+
Husband's age	1 = 20 to 34, 2 = 35 +
Place of residence	1= Urban, 2= Rural
Respondent's educational level	0 = Illiterate, 1 = Primary, 2 = Secondary, 3 = Higher secondary, 4 = Tertiary
Respondent's religion	1 = Muslim, 2 = Non-Muslim
Household head	1 = Male, 2 = Female
Respondent's occupation	1 = Housewife, 2 = Service, 3 = Business, 4 = Agricultural labor, 5 = Non-agricultural labor, 6 = Students
Respondent's earning status	1 = Earner, 2 = Non-earner
Household per-capita monthly income (Tk.)	1 = 1-5000, 2 = 5001-10000, 3 = >10000
Household monthly expenditure (Tk.)	1 = 1-5000, 2 = 5001-10000, 3 = >10000
Husband's torture	1 = For dowry, 2 = Physical illness, 3 = Unwillingness of intercourse, 4 = Parents low status in the society, 5= Drug addiction
Familial torture	1 = For dowry, 2 = Physical illness, 3= Parents low status in the society, 4= Drug addiction

Results and Discussion

Perception of Self Education for Child Rearing

A person becomes well enabling with the help of education. There is no doubt that a woman who has self-sense about the essence of mother's education for child rearing will perform creditably well her God-given responsibility to the home and society at large. An educated woman who has such self-sense will be able to help her children with their school assignments, enlighten them in their school work, and inquire about the academic performances of her children. This will ensure blissful homes, well-educated and well-behaved children and contented husbands and an endowed nation. In this investigation, an attempt has been made to explore the situations of necessity of mother's education for child rearing.

Table 2: Distribution of the respondent's self-sense level about the essence of mother's education for child rearing

Perception level	Percentage (%)		
	Rural	Urban	Both
No need at all	2.4	0.4	1.4
A little bit needed	9.6	6.0	7.8
Fairly needed	18.8	13.6	16.2
Highly needed	67.6	79.2	73.4
No concept	1.6	0.8	1.2
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

A woman can be aware of child rearing if she is educated adequately. Since most enlightenment campaigns in favor of child rearing are publicized through the radio, television, newspapers, posters, pamphlets or magazines etc. Accordingly it has to be assessed the association between women’s education and the perception level of self-sense about the essence of mother’s education for child rearing which is represented in Table 3. From this table it is observed that educational status of women have positive significant (level of significance = 0.00) association with the perception level.

Table 3: Respondents’ educational level and their perception level about the essence of mothers’ education for child rearing

Perception level	Educational level of the respondent				
	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Higher secondary	Tertiary
No need at all	3	3	1	0	0
A little bit needed	10	7	19	3	0
Fairly needed	7	13	48	7	6
Highly needed	25	41	180	53	68
No concept	2	3	1	0	0

Chi-Square value = 281.44 and significance level = 0.00

Perception about the essence of mother education endow child education

A full definition of empowerment must include women’s understanding of participation in the decision making ability to child education as a cognitive component. It makes understanding the self and the need to make choices about education. The participation in giving the opinion to child education is one of the explicit components of empowerment. In this view point an attempt has been made to explore the perception level of women for endowment of child education which is represented in Table 4.

Table 4: Distribution of women of perception about the essence of mother education endow child education

Perception level	Percentage (%)		
	Rural	Urban	Both
No need at all	4.0	1.2	2.6
A little bit needed	12.0	4.4	8.2
Fairly needed	30.4	21.2	25.8
Highly needed	36.4	61.2	48.8
Fully responsible	14.4	11.6	13.0
No children	2.8	0.4	1.4
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

From this table it can be said that about 49 and 26 percent women perceived that mother education is essential to endow child education as highly needed and fairly needed respectively. Among the all women 13 percent perceived that mother education is fully responsible for endowment of child education. Only 1.2 to 4.0 percent of urban and rural women respectively perceived that mother education is not necessary at all for endowment to child education.

Women’s education can help to attain the educational development of her children which ensure their potentialities and maximum activation when necessary, Women’s better education can also play role to aggregate of all the processes by which their children develop physical, mental and emotional capabilities, attitudes and other forms of behavior which turn into the positive outcome in their family in which they live. So it is necessary to assess the association between women’s education and their perception level of mother education necessity to endow child education which is shown in Table 5. From this table shows that educational status of women have positive significant (level of significance = 0.00) association with the perception level.

Table 5: Respondents’ educational level and their perception level of mother education necessity to endow child education

Perception level	Educational level of the respondent				
	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Higher secondary	Tertiary
No need at all	3	1	8+	0	1
A little bit needed	12	8	16	3	2
Fairly needed	10	22	80	7	10
Highly needed	11	28	110	45	50
Fully responsible	11	7	29	7	11
No children	0	0	6	1	1

Legends: Chi-Square value = 282.67 and significance level = 0.00

Perception of sex preference about child education

Education preference for female children as well as male children should be strengthen for the continuous process of women empowerment. To uplift women in all aspects of daily life up to the mark as their men counterpart reached it is essential to turn out gender discrimination in education sector. Consequently, women become dignified members of the society as assets and specifically become a human resource. When male-female education is going on equivalently then development at all aspects reach at a reasonable velocity. Education can resolve the challenge to encourage women to define their goals and incite them to prove their potential and make disillusion of

society’s assumptions of their potential. Through sheer force of habit, mothers pass traditions to their daughters. For poor rural families, the opportunity cost of sending their daughters to school is considered too high. The immediate and everyday need for girls to help with housework and on the farm to sustain the family takes priority, as the financial benefits of education become apparent only in the long run, if at all. In cultures where dowries exist, girls are considered a burden on the family. Awareness of girl education is essential to improve their future. As a result she can become an asset rather than a burden to the family, the community and to the country as a whole. This investigation shows the percentage distribution of the respondent according to the perception about male-female child education preference.

Table 6: Distribution of the respondent according to the perception about male-female child education preference

Preference level	Percentage (%)		
	Rural	Urban	Both
Male preference	20.0	14.4	17.2
Female preference	5.6	2.4	4.0
Male-Female equal preference	70.4	82.0	76.2
Don’t think at all	4.0	1.2	2.6
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

The results show that about three-fourth of the respondents perceived that male-female have equal preference to educate. It is seen that about 70 percent of rural respondents and 82 percent of urban respondents discerned that both male and female should get equal preference for education. Yet, the study also reveals that about 17 percent of the total women perceived male child education is preferable to female child education. On the contrary, only 4 percent of the total women perceived that female child education is preferable to male child education. There is noticeable differential between rural and urban respondents regarding male-female child education. So it has to be kept the fix special gaze on girl education preference but not keep the boys lag behind.

Table 7: Description of the indicators of three dimensions for constructing women empowerment indices

Dimension	Description of indicator	Response & Coding
Economic decision making	Decision about household purchases for daily needs	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member

	Decision of purchasing small household goods	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member
	Decision of purchasing large household goods	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member
Ho u s e h o l d d e c i s i o n m a k i n g	Decision on children education	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member
	Decision on child health care	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member
	Decision on own health care	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member
	Decision on family member health care	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member
	Final say on food to be cooked every day	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member
	Decision on familial ceremony	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member
	Decision about marriage of child or other family member	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member
Freedom of physical movement	Goes to shopping	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member
	Final say on visits to family or relatives	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member

	Final say on visits to non-relatives	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member
	Attend on any type of recreational program	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member
	Participate to religious activities	4=Respondent alone 3=Respondent and husband 2=Husband alone 1=Other family member

Effect of education on women empowerment

The results obtained show that there was no significant differences in the means of women’s empowerment among the socio-economic status variables except the marital status and educational attainment.

Women’s education considered as the key factor in women’s empowerment. Ackerly (1995)²⁰ and Kishor (2000)²¹ argued that empowerment can be measured directly through education level and knowledge. Further, Dighe (1998)²² discussed that education has the strength to enable women to think critically and to question their disempowerment. Therefore, education could provide opportunities for women to evaluate themselves, and gradually develop self-confidence and a positive self-image so that they begin to appreciate their own capacities and potentialities.

Table 8: One-way ANOVA table of educational attainment of women and its index’s value

Educational group	Number	Mean	SD	F	P	η²
Illiterate	47	0.553	0.248	9.438	0.000	0.071
Primary	67	0.484	0.126			
Secondary	249	0.542	0.202			
Higher secondary	63	0.594	0.162			
Tertiary	74	0.666	0.181			

The one-way ANOVA was employed to investigate the impact of respondents’ education on their empowerment. Respondents were divided into five groups according to their education backgrounds (illiterate, primary, secondary, higher secondary and tertiary). The results of the ANOVA test indicated there was significance difference in the means of empowerment of respondents for five educational attainment group, F (4, 495) =9.438, P=0.000. Based on Cohen (1988)²³, criteria

(.01=small effect, .06 moderate effect, and .14, large effect) the eta-squared of 0.071 indicated that the mean difference of women empowerment between groups were fairly moderate. Analysis of means showed that the tertiary group with Mean=0.666, SD=0.181 has the high performance in empowerment compare to the other education groups.

Conclusion

In this investigation it is found that there exists a noticeable differential between rural and urban respondents about the perception of the statement that mother education is highly needed for child rearing. On the other hand, rural women have somewhat greater perception about the statements that no need mother education at all, a little bit need and even for fairly need to child rearing than that of their urban counterpart. Accordingly it is found that the association between women's education and the perception level of self-sense about the essence of mother's education for child rearing represented educational status of women have positive significant (level of significance = 0.00) association with the perception level. The percentage distribution of the respondent according to the perception about male-female child education preference resulted that about three-fourth of the respondents perceived that male-female have equal preference to educate. There is noticeable differential between rural and urban respondents regarding male-female child education. So it has to be kept the fix special gaze on girl education preference but not keep the boys lag behind.

Acknowledgements

The authors are thankful to Chairman, Department of Population Science and Human Resource Development, University of Rajshahi-6205, Bangladesh for his kind help,

advice and inspiration during the research work and manuscript preparation.

Authors' contribution

SA and MGM designed the experiments, developed the methodology and prepared the manuscript. SA, and MGM collected the data and carried out analysis. AHB assisted with data analysis and manuscript preparation.

Conflict of interest disclosure

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest and there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome.

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