



A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDICATORS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: EVIDENCE FROM NATIONAL FAMILY HEALTH SURVEY (2015-2021)

Tanu Priya Gupta*	Research Scholar, Department of Statistics, University of Lucknow.*Corresponding Author
Sheela Misra	Professor, Department of Statistics, University of Lucknow

ABSTRACT Empowerment of women forms an important part of a developmental process of a country. The meaning of Women empowerment lies in the ability of a woman to control her destiny. The present study focuses on the EAG (Empowered Action Group) states i.e. Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand because these states have more than 40% of the total population in India and are also backward in social, economic, demographic status. Data for the EAG states from NFHS-4 and NFHS-5 was used for the analysis. We studied the level of women empowerment in these states through some indicators under broad components of evidence, sources, and settings of women empowerment from NFHS-4 to NFHS-5. Some indicators such as decision-making, family planning (evidence), employment, educational status (sources), gender-based violence, and marriage before age 18 (settings) have shown an improvement over previously conducted surveys (NFHS 4). While indicators such as the use of bank accounts, mobile phones, and maintenance of menstrual hygiene (sources) posted a considerably higher increase.

KEYWORDS : Women Empowerment, Indicators, Empowered Action Group (EAG) states, National Family Health Survey (NFHS)

Introduction:

India, World's emerging economic power, is built upon the foundation of its strong human capital. Women comprising half of its population have a significant contribution to human capital formation. It thus becomes essential for a country such as India to promote the empowerment of women for its development. However, the extent to which this happens depends critically on the degree of gender asymmetry in society that somehow measures different genders on different scales. A final, but one of the most fundamental reasons for promoting the empowerment of women is that failing to empower women as well as men to utilize their full potential is a violation of their basic human rights.

It is critical at this point to emphasize the term 'Empowerment' and what meaning it holds. While several researchers have tried to capture the meaning of the word [Malhotra, Schuler, Boender 2002 for a review], the definition most relevant to the approach taken in this paper is one provided by Sen and Batliwala (2000): "Empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes both controls over resources and ideology... [includes, in addition to extrinsic control] a growing intrinsic capability - greater self-confidence, and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers..." This definition conceptualizes the concept of empowerment as generally applicable to the powerless irrespective of gender, caste, or class. However, Women empowerment, or lack of it is unique in the sense that it transcends all types of barriers present in society such as class and caste but unlike class or caste powerlessness, it permeates within families and households also. [Malhotra et al 2002].

This paper tries to provide an overview of changes in Women conditions, and the degree of their empowerment over a period in EAG (Empowered Action Group) states. 8 states (Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Odisha) are categorized into Empowered Action Group and are lacking behind in development indicators. Thus, this paper uses data from National Family Health Survey NFHS to document Women empowerment in these 8 states. NFHS collected information on several aspects of the empowerment of ever-married women aged 15-49. The next section discusses a conceptual framework based on which indicators of Women empowerment are developed. The values of indicators and their state-wise distributions are discussed in subsequent sections. Progress toward Women empowerment is measured by monitoring change in the indicators for which comparable values are available from the National Family Health Survey NFHS 4 (2014-15) and NFHS 5 (2019-21). [International Institute for Population Sciences].

Methodology:

Challenge related to computation of Women Empowerment- In

discussions of Women empowerment, emphasis is often placed on Women decision-making roles, their economic self-reliance, and their legal rights to equal treatment, inheritance, and protection against all forms of discrimination [Germaine and Kyte 1995; United Nations 1995] in addition to the elimination of barriers to their access of resources such as education and information. However, this paper follows Kishor (2000)'s three-pronged approach to describing Women empowerment.

Kishor's approach takes into account not only the indicators of the end process (i.e. empowerment) but also indicators of Women access to different sources of empowerment and Women location within an appropriate setting for empowerment. These three indicators (of evidence, sources, setting) together measure the process of empowerment as well as barriers that exist to it. Evidence of empowerment includes indicators that measure Women participation in household decision-making, financial autonomy, etc. Potential sources of empowerment are those that are considered building blocks of empowerment: knowledge and accessibility and control of resources such as employment for cash are among them. These indicators fail to provide the truest evidence of empowerment as there is no guarantee that the powerless will use, or will be able to use these tools to become empowered. Indicators of the setting or conditions for empowerment refer to the circumstances of the respondent's current and past environment. These can include, for example, indicators of current and past living arrangements and characteristics of people who directly influence the opportunities that respondent avails.

Indicators of Women Empowerment- As NFHS provides a vast amount of data, we only select those subsets that best describe different dimensions of Women empowerment.

Indicators of evidence of empowerment: This includes those indicators that measure Women degree of control over their environment by measuring their participation in household decision-making and usage of family planning methods.

Indicators of access to potential sources for empowerment: These indicators measure Women access to education, basic facilities such as a house, sanitation, bank account, mobile phone, etc, and meaningful employment. Employment, particularly for cash and in non-traditional occupations, potentially empowers women by providing financial independence, alternative sources of social identity, and exposure to power structures independent of kin networks [Dixon-Mueller 1993].

Indicators of the setting for empowerment: These indicators reflect circumstances in the lives of women as well as opportunities available to them. The most important among these is the age at first marriage. Early age at first marriage is likely to hurt empowerment by virtually terminating Women access to sources of empowerment such as formal education [Mason 1986, 1987]. NFHS-4 and 5 also provide data on

Women experience of violence. Violence against women is a fundamental violation of Women rights. In addition, an environment in which women are under the threat of violence curtails Women ability to control, or even access resources [Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottemoeller 1998].

Results and Discussions:

In this section, we examine the indicators described above based on the findings of NFHS 4 and NFHS 5.

Table 1: Percentage change in Participation in Household decision & Use of family planning methods from NFHS-4 to NFHS-5

States	Participation in Household decision(%)		Percent change	Use of family planning methods(%)		Percent change
	NFHS 5	NFHS 4		NFHS 5	NFHS 4	
	Bihar	86.5		75.2	13.06358	
Chhattisgarh	92.7	90.5	2.373247	67.8	57.7	17.50433
Jharkhand	91	86.6	4.835165	61.7	40.4	52.72277
Madhya Pradesh	86	82.8	3.72093	71.7	51.4	39.49416
Odisha	90.2	81.8	9.312639	74.1	57.3	29.31937
Rajasthan	87.7	81.7	6.841505	72.3	59.7	21.10553
Uttar Pradesh	87.6	81.7	6.73516	62.4	45.5	37.14286
Uttarakhand	91	89.8	1.318681	70.8	53.4	32.58427

As per Table 1, it is observed that all the EAG States have shown an increase in decision-making by women in a recently conducted Survey compared to NFHS 4. However, the highest increment was observed in Bihar which is 13.6% followed by Odisha and Rajasthan i.e. 9.3% and 6.8%.

Reportedly increase in family planning methods such as the pill, condoms, injectables, female/male sterilization methods, etc indicates an improvement in the reproductive health of women which is somehow related to their decision-making abilities. Among EAG states Bihar shows the maximum increase in the usage of family planning methods i.e. 131.5%, followed by Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh i.e. 52.7% & 39.4%.

Table 2: Percentage change in Employment & Education from NFHS-4 to NFHS-5

States	Employment		Percent change	Education				Percent change	
	NFHS 5	NFHS 4		Ever attended school		Percent age change	10 or more years of schooling		
	NFHS 5	NFHS 4		NFHS 5	NFHS 4		NFHS 5		NFHS 4
Bihar	12.6	12.5	0.8	61.1	56.9	7.381371	28.8	22.8	26.31579
Chhattisgarh	39.1	36.8	6.25	69.3	67.6	2.514793	36.9	26.5	39.24528
Jharkhand	18	24.8	-27.4194	64.5	61.1	5.564648	33.2	28.7	15.67944
Madhya Pradesh	26.8	29.9	-10.3679	67.5	64	5.46875	29.3	23.2	26.2931
Odisha	25.7	22.5	14.22222	71.5	67.8	5.457227	33	26.7	23.5951
Rajasthan	17.4	18.6	-6.45161	63.5	57.2	11.01399	33.4	25.1	33.06773
Uttar Pradesh	15.5	16.6	-6.62651	67.4	63	6.984127	39.3	32.9	19.45289
Uttarakhand	21.6	15.5	39.35484	75.2	72.7	3.43879	50.4	44.6	13.00448

Employment provides financial autonomy which is one of the important indicators of Women empowerment. Women who view their income as a substantial part of total household income are more likely to be self-sufficient than other employed and unemployed women

[Youssef 1982; Sen 1990; Mahmud and Johnston 1994]. Employment provides financial autonomy which is one of the important indicators of Women empowerment. The highest percentage change in women employed in the last 12 months and paid in cash is seen in Uttarakhand i.e. 39.3%. While Most of the other states are showing a decline in the percentage of women employed. This is visible in Table 2.

Education at the most basic level provides opportunities for women to climb up to higher positions. At the national level, Women education leads to increased productivity, income and economic development, improved quality of life, and a particularly healthy and well-nourished population [World Bank 2001]. All the States have shown a positive trend in educational outcomes as visible in Table 2. Rajasthan has shown the highest percentage change (11.1%) for women who ever attended school followed by Bihar (7.3%) and Uttar Pradesh (6.9%). While concerning change in the percentage of women with 10 or more years of schooling, Chhattisgarh saw the highest increase i.e. 39.2% over the two Survey periods. Rajasthan with 33.7% and Bihar with a 26.3% increase come in second and third position in the same category.

Table 3: Percentage change in Access to basic facilities from NFHS-4 to NFHS-5

States	Access to basic facilities							Percent age change	
	Use of bank account		Percent age change	Mobile phone usage		Menstrual hygiene			
	NFHS 5	NFHS 4		NFHS 5	NFHS 4	NFHS 5	NFHS 4		
Bihar	76.7	26.4	190.5303	51.4	40.9	25.67237	58.8	31	89.67742
Chhattisgarh	80.3	51.3	56.53021	40.7	31	31.29032	68.8	47.1	46.07219
Jharkhand	79.6	45.1	76.49667	49	35.2	39.20455	74.9	49.6	51.00806
Madhya Pradesh	74.7	37.3	100.2681	38.5	28.7	34.14634	60.5	37.6	60.90426
Odisha	86.5	56.2	53.91459	50.1	39.2	27.8061	81.5	47.2	72.66949
Rajasthan	79.6	58.2	36.76976	50.2	41.4	21.25604	84.1	55.2	52.35507
Uttar Pradesh	75.4	54.6	38.09524	46.5	37.1	25.33693	72.6	47.1	54.14013
Uttarakhand	80.2	58.5	37.09402	60.9	55.4	9.927798	91.2	69.9	30.4721

Health, especially menstrual hygiene for women forms an essential component while access to banking facilities and the use of mobile phones nowadays become necessities of life. Most of the states show a significant percentage change in usage of bank accounts and menstrual hygiene with Bihar having the maximum increase in both categories. In mobile phone use, the maximum increase has been observed in Jharkhand (39.2%) among these states.

Table 4: Percentage change in Gender-based violence & Marriage before age 18 from NFHS-4 to NFHS-5

State s	Gender-based violence								Marriage before the age of 18		Perce ntage chang e	
	Spousal violence		Perce ntage chang e	Physical violence during pregnancy		Perce ntage change	Young women (18-29) sexual violence		Perce ntage chang e			
	NFHS 5	NFHS 4		NFHS 5	NFHS 4		NFHS 5	NFHS 4		NFHS 5		NFHS 4
Bihar	40	43.7	-8.46682	2.8	4.8	-41.6667	8.3	14.2	-41.5493	40.8	42.5	-4
Chhattisgarh	20.2	36.8	-45.1087	0.9	4.9	-81.6327	0.8	1.7	-52.9412	12.1	21.3	-43.1925
Jharkhand	31.5	34	-7.35294	3.1	2.8	10.71429	1.3	2.1	-38.0952	32.2	37.9	-15.0396
Madhya Pradesh	28.1	33	-14.8485	2.3	3.3	-30.303	1	1.9	-47.3684	23.1	32.4	-28.7037
Odisha	30.6	35.2	-13.0682	3.5	3.2	9.375	0.8	1.8	-55.5556	20.5	21.3	-3.75587
Rajasthan	24.3	25.2	-3.57143	2.1	1.4	50	0.9	0.8	12.5	25.4	35.4	-28.2486
Uttar Pradesh	34.8	36.7	-5.17711	3.7	4.3	-13.9535	0.7	1.1	-36.3636	15.8	21.1	-25.1185
Uttarakhand	15.1	12.7	18.89764	2.1	1.4	50	0.3	0.1	200	9.8	13.8	-28.9855

Exposure and future threat of violence without causing any visible injury often lead to low self-esteem, underutilized potential, and even suicidal tendencies [Ellsberg 2000]. Most of the states are showing a percentage decline in gender-based violence i.e. spousal, physical, and young women (18-29) who experienced sexual violence by age 18. However, Uttarakhand witnessed an increase in spousal violence cases. On the other hand, some states such as Jharkhand, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand saw an increase in physical violence during pregnancy. Rajasthan along with Uttarakhand observed an increase in cases in the category of young women who experienced sexual violence.

All the EAG states are showing a percentage decline in women (aged 20-24) who married before the age of 18 years. Chhattisgarh (43.1%), Uttarakhand (28.9%), and Madhya Pradesh (28.7%) observed maximum decline which is a positive trend.

Conclusion:

Most of the indicators used in the above study such as decision-making, employment, educational outcomes, gender-based violence, marriage before 18, etc have shown improvements over the previous Survey (NFHS 4). Along with this use of mobile phones, bank accounts, and upkeep of menstrual hygiene have observed a significant jump that indicates improved status of women in an inherently patriarchal society. While there have been improvements, a wide gap in Women empowerment still exists. This needs to be addressed with the right policy measures, their effective implementation, and at last attitudinal change in society.

REFERENCE

1. Batliwala, Srilatha (1994): 'The Meaning of Women Empowerment: New Concepts from Action' in Gita Sen, Adrienne Germaine and Lincoln Chen (eds), Population Policies Reconsidered: Health, Empowerment, and Rights, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, pp 127-38.
2. Dixon-Mueller. Ruth (1993): Population Policy and Women Rights: Transforming Reproductive Choice. Praeger, New York.
3. Ellsberg, Mary Carroll (2000): Candles in Hell: Research and Action on Domestic Violence against Women in Nicaragua, Umea University, Sweden and Nicaraguan Autonomous National University, Leon, Nicaragua, UmU Tryckeri, Sweden.
4. Germaine, Adrienne and Rachel Kyte (1995): The Cairo Consensus: The Right Agenda for the Right Time, International Women Health Coalition.
5. Heise, Lori, Mary Ellsberg and Megan Gottemoeller(1998): 'Ending Violence among Women', Population Reports, Series L, No 11, Population Information Program, Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, Baltimore.
6. International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS): National Family Health Survey -4 (2014-2015), National Family Health Survey -5 (2019-2021), IIPS, Mumbai.
7. Kishor, Sunita (2000): 'Empowerment of Women in Egypt and Links to the Survival and Health of Their Infants' in Harriet B Presser and Gita Sen (eds), Women Empowerment and Demographic Processes, Oxford University Press, New York.
8. Mahmud, Simeen and Anne M Johnston (1994): 'Women Status, Empowerment and Reproductive Outcomes' in Gita Sen, Adrienne Germain and Lincoln C Chen (eds), Population Policies Reconsidered: Health, Empowerment and Rights, Harvard Series on Population and International Health, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston.
9. Malhotra, Anju, Sidney Ruth Schuler and Carol Boender (2002): 'Measuring Women Empowerment as a Variable in International Development', Unpublished paper prepared for the World Bank.
10. Mason, Karen Oppenheim (1986): 'The Status of Women: Conceptual and Methodological Issues in Demographic Studies', Sociological Forum, 1(2):284-300.
11. Sen, Amartya K (1990): 'Gender and Cooperative Conflicts' in Irene Tinker (ed), Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development, Oxford University Press, New York.
12. World Bank (2001): Engendering Development - Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice, World Bank and Oxford University Press, Washington, DC and New York, NY.
13. Youssef, Nadia H (1982): 'The Interrelationship between the Division of Labour in the Household, Women Roles and Their Impact on Fertility' in R Anker, M Buvinic and N H Youssef (eds), Women Roles and Population Trends in the Third World, Croom Helm, London.