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Commerce

ROLE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN REAPING THE BENEFITS OF DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND IN THE YEARS TO COME

KEY WORDS: women empowerment, child development, demographic dividend.

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment of women is a procedure that helps women to recognize their capability, capacity, identity, strength, power and their application in their lives to emancipate them from the clutches of patriarchal society and its customs, traditions and practices. Literature review supports the view that empowerment of women (mother's at large) has a constructive role to play in developing the children and reap the benefits of demographic dividend in the years to come. The present study is based on primary data collected from 50 samples through survey of households in the Kottayam District and secondary data collected from journals, newspapers, websites of ministries and departments of Government of India and press information bureau. The objectives of the study are: (i) to assess the role of women empowerment in improving the educational status of children (ii) to assess the role of women empowerment in ensuring the health status of children (iii) to assess the role of women empowerment in reducing the skewed child sex ratio. The results established the favourable impact that the empowered women can have on the development of children and thereby enabling the country to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend.

INTRODUCTION

The strength of the chain is the strength of its weakest link. Women, being the weakest link in a society, should be strengthened for strengthening the society as a whole. Instead of being stated in words, this weakest link could be strengthened only by empowering women. This is a global issue and has gained momentum in the recent decades. In India, the provisions in the constitution, the ratification of different international conventions, legislative acts and moreover the programs launched by the Central and State Governments have contributed to this major initiative.

Demographic dividend means the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non working age share of population. With the increased demographic dividend, the economic growth will boost only when the younger population has access to quality education, adequate nutrition, and health including access to sexual and reproductive health. This study deals with the role of women empowerment in reaping demographic dividend in the years to come.

Women empowerment is a process of enabling women to realize their identity, potential and power in all spheres of their lives. It is a multidimensional aspect including higher literacy and education for women, better healthcare for women and children, equal ownership of productive resources, increased participation in economic and commercial sectors, awareness of their rights and responsibilities, improved standards of living and acquiring self reliance, self esteem and self confidence. All these factors will in turn have an impact on their families, especially on the decisions regarding the health and education of their children who constitute the future of India. Thus, it will help in reaping better demographic dividends in the years to come.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A number of studies have been conducted on Women Empowerment through SHGs, Kudumbashrees, Micro financing and so on. However, this study is concerned with understanding and analyzing the role of women empowerment in reaping better demographic dividends in the years to come.

SCOPE OF STUDY

The study has a broader scope as it helps in analyzing how far women empowerment helps in reaping better demographic dividends in future by offering the younger population better education, better healthcare and moreover by reducing the

skewed child sex ratio. The present study was conducted among the households in Kottayam District. The rationale for selecting Kottayam District includes our convenience and the level of literacy among the general public.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women."—Kofi Annan

Empowerment can be described as a process of enhancing the choice making capacity of individuals or groups, total freedom to choose from among available options, and thereafter, transforming the chose options into desired actions and outcomes. Hence, it involves social transformation of common persons through a rearrangement of power (Dey & pain, 2007). Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender-based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices. Women empowerment does not mean 'deifying women' rather it means replacing patriarchy with parity. Women empowerment is a process whereby women become able to organise themselves to increase their own self reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination (Keller & Mbewewe, 1991).

Swami Vivekananda, one of the greatest sons of India, quoted that, **"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved, it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing."** Therefore, the inclusion of "Women Empowerment" as one of the prime goals in the eight Millennium Development Goals and as the fifth goal of Sustainable Development Goals underscores the relevance of this fact. Thus, in order to achieve the status of a developed country, India needs to transform its colossal women force into an effective human resource and this is possible only through the empowerment of women.

There is no denying the fact that women in India have made a considerable progress in almost seven decades of Independence, but they still have to struggle against many handicaps and social evils in the male-dominated society. Despite initiatives at national and global levels, the condition of women did not change by leaps and bounds. Women participation in parliament is abysmally low at 10%; labour force is 28.80% while the average of developing nations is 49.50% and attendance of secondary education is 26.60%. Female literacy rate in India according to 2011 census is 65.46% which is still below the world average of 79.70%.

Although child stunting has shown a decline it is still high at 39%.

OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Women empowerment is instrumental in development of the country. The present study focuses on the role women empowerment in reaping the benefits of demographic dividend in the years to come and has set the following objectives to address in the study:

- To assess the role of women empowerment in improving the educational status of children.
- To assess the role of women empowerment in ensuring the health status of children
- To assess the role of women empowerment in reducing the skewed child sex ratio.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design adopted for the study was descriptive and analytical in nature.

SOURCES OF DATA

This study was based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected through questionnaire specifically designed for the survey. The secondary data was gathered from relevant journals, newspapers, websites of ministries and departments of Government of India and press information bureau.

SAMPLE DESIGN

Universe: The population of the study includes households who are able to reasonably judge the impact of women empowerment on child development and the society.

Sample size: Out of the population, a sample of 50 households was drawn from Kottayam District.

Sampling technique: The sampling technique used in the study is Convenience Sampling.

TOOLS FOR ANALYSIS

The collected data from the respondents was gathered, consolidated and analyzed. The analysis includes use of

- statistical tools of percentage analysis, correlation analysis
- graphical representation through charts and graphs
- Likert scale

Based on those findings, conclusion was drawn and suggestions were made.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

On analysing the primary and secondary data generated through the study, it was found that 70% of the respondents opined that empowered women prefer to provide their children with higher education and professional courses. 52% of the respondents were of that empowered women aims to ensure the holistic development of their children while 40% aimed at making them employable.

TABLE 1: LIKERT TEST OF EDUCATIONAL PARAMETERS

	Agree (3)	Neutral (2)	Disagree (1)	Likert Value
Teach And Train Children	44	4	2	2.84
	132	8	2	142
Investment In Education	30	17	3	2.54
	90	34	3	127

Source: Primary Data

From the above table it is clear that majority of the respondents are of the view that empowered women can better teach and train their children and they are in a better position in terms of bargaining power in the family and their ability to contribute significantly to the process of decision making and thereby they can bring to effect significant changes to the pattern of investment in education of their children. **Thus, the findings establish the importance of women empowerment in the progression of the educational attainments of their children.**

From the analysis of secondary data it was found that malnutrition is higher among children whose mothers are uneducated or have less than five years of education.

TABLE 2: IKERT TEST OF HEALTH PARAMETERS

	Very High (5)	High (4)	Average (3)	Low (2)	Very Low (1)	Likert Value
Vaccination	23	27	0	0	0	4.46
	115	108	0	0	0	223
Nutrition	24	26	0	0	0	4.48
	120	104	0	0	0	224
Medical assistance	20	22	8	0	0	4.24
	100	88	24	0	0	212
Physical Fitness	20	17	13	0	0	4.14
	100	68	39	0	0	207
Extra Curricular Activities	18	26	6	0	0	4.24
	90	104	18	0	0	212
Sanitation And Hygiene	26	24	0	0	0	4.52
	130	96	0	0	0	226
New Developments	20	17	6	7	0	4
	100	68	18	14	0	200

Source: Primary Data

From the table 2 it is evident that empowered women are very highly aware about the importance different means of ensuring health of their children. They show voluntary willingness in availing the facilities and services that are offered in this regard. Empowered women is believed to possess a high degree of awareness about importance of providing timely vaccination and medical assistance, need of proper nutrition and balanced diet and ensuring personal hygiene and sanitation. They also exhibit very high degree of awareness on the significance of extracurricular activities in the development of children. They have high degree of awareness about new developments that takes place in the field of health and medicine. **Thus the study has exposed the constructive role that empowered women plays in ensuring the physical mental and emotional health of their children.**

TABLE 3: LIKERT TEST OF PARAMETERS OF GENDER PARITY

	AGREE (3)	NEUTRAL (2)	DISAGREE (1)	LIKERT VALUE
FOSTER GENDER EQUALITY	39	8	3	2.72
	117	16	3	136
EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITIES	40	8	2	2.76
	120	16	2	138
END TO FEMALE INFANTICIDE	31	16	3	2.56
	93	32	3	128
TRANSFORMATION IN VALUE SYSTEM	32	16	2	2.60
	96	32	2	130

Source: Primary Data

From table 3 it was evident that women empowerment has a role to play in bringing gender equality in the society. Majority of the respondents agreed to the view that with the empowerment of women especially mothers girl child would get an equal opportunity to grow and develop. The best part of the respondents were in favour of the view that empowerment of women can bring an end to the evil practices of female infanticide and foeticide. A significant proportion of the respondents agreed to the view that empowerment of women can bring about a transformation in the value system of the society based on patriarchal stronghold, cultural and caste norms which considers women as inferior to men.

Thus findings of study establish the importance of women empowerment in addressing the problem of skewed child sex ratio existing in the Indian society.

SUGGESTIONS

- 1) Government should formulate policies and schemes targeting specific groups and based on level of development of the

region.

- 2) There must be initiatives to bridge the loopholes in the implementation of policies and schemes.
- 3) NGOs and self help groups can play a pro active role in empowering women and thereby improving the educational and health status of their children.
- 4) Service of ASHA workers in this direction can be a great leap forward.
- 5) Appropriate measures should be taken to eliminate discriminatory practices like gender pay gap, associating women only with pink collar jobs etc.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study states beyond doubt that women empowerment has a crucial role to play in the integrated child development. Children being the future of the country must be provided with proper education and health facilities to make them productive human resource and the best brains of the country. Moreover women empowerment can bring gender parity in the society which is a precursor for reducing poverty and enhancing economic growth. An egalitarian society with better education and health status only can ensure that India could make best use of its demographic dividend in the years to come. Thus women empowerment is the significant step forward in reaping the benefits that accrues to a country from demographic dividend.

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