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PERCEPTUAL STUDY OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT



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ABSTRACT

The empowerment of women is one of the central issues in the process of development of countries all over the world. A significant development in recent years has been increase in all levels of women's health. In that Women's mental health can be examined under the broad divisions of the nature and size of women's mental health problems. The unfolding of the complex scenario of women and their mental health has brought forth concepts of enrichment of women in the professional, social, personal and political dimensions. Compared to men, women suffer more from mental disorders. In

our culture, at present, women are at high risk to develop psychological problems and mental disorders. Evidence of effectiveness is used to inform the practice of mental health promotion in the settings where women live, work, learn and play the physical and social environments in which health is created and good mental health will be transformed in all the social aspects women.

KEYWORDS : Empowerment, women, mobility, opportunities.

INTRODUCTION :

➤ In the last two decades, women empowerment has been the concern of international agencies, national governments, regional governments and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). In the framework of women empowerment, social transformation is an important dimension to understand the level of empowerment. It explains about women gaining self confidence and believing in their potential, increased level of awareness, increased mobility and a stronger identity that gives them the power to assert themselves or express their needs. Indian Constitution has conferred and guaranteed equality before law, universal adult franchise and equal opportunities for men and women as fundamental rights. The imperative of gender partnership in matters of development has been recognised. In order to give a fillip to empowerment of women and appropriate institutional mechanisms and interventions have been consciously built into the development design.

Women Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength

of Women. It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities. Empowerment is probably the totality of the following or similar capabilities:

- Having decision-making power of their own
- Having access to information and resources for taking proper decision
- Having a range of options from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or.)
- Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making
- Having positive thinking on the ability to make change
- Ability to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power.
- Ability to change others' perceptions by democratic means.
- Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated
- Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma

Concept of Women Empowerment

The nature of empowerment can be diverse, depending upon the parameters that define the lack of power within the institutional framework in operation. Annas (1993) explains that two actual norms for human life exist globally: in no society is it indifferent to the shape of one's life and what one can make of it, whether one is a man or a woman. One's sex may close some options completely, or make them less available but it always makes a difference to what one's options are over one's life as a whole. According to her, in a traditional society norms for the lives of men and women are enforced strongly and there exists actual division of activities and ways of living. Malhotra et. al (2002) constructed a list of the most commonly used dimensions of women's empowerment, drawing from the frameworks developed by various authors in different fields of social sciences. These frameworks suggest that women's empowerment needs to occur along multiple dimensions including: economic, socio-cultural, familial/ interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. Since these dimensions cover a broad range of factors, women may be empowered within one of these sub-domains.

The World Bank defines empowerment as "the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process is actions which both build individual and collective assets, and improves the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets." Thus, as the World Bank (2001) report confirms societies that discriminate on the basis of gender pay the cost of greater poverty, slower economic growth, weaker governance and a lower living standard of their people. Kabeer (1999), stresses that women's empowerment is about the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability. According to her, it is important to understand empowerment as a process and not an instrumentalist form of advocacy, which requires measurement and quantification of empowerment. She further emphasizes that the ability to exercise choice incorporates three interrelated dimensions resources (defined broadly to include not only access, but also future claims, to both material and human and social resources); agency (including processes of decision-making, as well as less measurable manifestations of agency such as negotiation, deception and manipulation) and achievements (well-being outcomes). The researcher has observed the functioning of these groups in the rural areas of Mangalore and wanted to know how far these groups have helped the rural women to empower themselves. So the main aim of the study was to understand the areas of empowerment among these women.

The empowerment of women is one of the central issues in the process of development of countries all over the world. The Government of India has made Empowerment of Women as one of the principal objectives of the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) and also declared 2001 as the year of

'Women's Empowerment'. A significant development in recent years has been the mushrooming of community-based organizations and initiatives at the local level for women. Reports explore that self-help programmes, often in the form of savings and credit or microcredit schemes, have succeeded in changing the lives of poor women, enhancing incomes and generating positive externalities such as increased self-esteem.

The unfolding of the complex scenario of women and their mental health has brought forth concepts of enrichment of women in the professional, social, personal and political dimensions. This intricate and multifaceted need is often neglected. A gender sensitive approach to enhance women's mental health requires placing of social determinants of mental disorders over and above biological or constitutional factors. Moral commitment on the part of professionals and planners to facilitate a social change and of women's present status is necessary. Enrichment from the professional and social perspective involves external, non psychological meanings in contrast to the personal perspective which deals more with psychological and individual realms. The perplexing connections between a woman's individual enrichment and mental health take numerous dimensions.

The concept of empowerment has been the subject of much intellectual discourse and analysis. According to United Nations (2001), empowerment is defined as the processes by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices. Thus, it is the process of acquiring the ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability has previously been denied. The core elements of empowerment have been defined as agency (the ability to define one's goals and act upon them), awareness of gendered power structures, self-esteem and self-confidence (Kabeer 2001). Empowerment can take place at a hierarchy of different levels, individual, household, community and societal – and is facilitated by providing encouraging factors and removing inhibiting factors. Two vital processes have been identified as important for empowerment. The first is social mobilization and collective agency, as poor women often lack the basic capabilities and self-confidence to counter and challenge existing disparities and barriers against them. Often, change agents are needed to catalyse social mobilization consciously. Second, the process of social mobilization needs to be accompanied and complemented by economic security. As long as the disadvantaged suffer from economic deprivation and livelihood insecurity, they will not be in a position to mobilize (UNDP 2001).

Women Empowerment

A 'Woman' is an architect of society. She establishes the institution of family life, builds the home, brings up the children and makes them good citizens. Her strength in totality contributes in the making of an ideal family, ideal society and an ideal state. "In early days 'SHE' is supposed to remain in the custody and care of her parents. Once married she becomes a property and responsibility of her husband, who is supposed to take care of her needs and keep in his custody as his wife she performed as his servant, as his minister in decision making, as a mother to his children, as a lover in his bend. And when she becomes old, she lives in the house of her son and has to lead a solitary life. This situation is gradually changed in the modern life style. Women play vital roles in every facet of modern society. Now the society is trying to redefine the role of women in the institution of society and family. Women today enjoy an equal status with men and wider opportunities arrived today even in the rural area also. The status of women in modern India is a sort of a paradox. If on one hand she is at the peak of ladder of success, on the other hand she is mutely suffering the violence afflicted on her by her own family members. As compared with past women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality they have to still travel a long way. Their path is full of roadblocks. The women have left the secured domain of their home and are now in the battlefield of life, fully armored with their talent. 'Empowerment' -

Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their capacities.

"Women empowerment"- Women are an integral part of every economy. All round development and harmonious growth of a nation would be possible only when women are considered as equal partners in progress with men. Empowerment of women is essential to harness the women labour in the main stream of economic development. Empowerment of women is a holistic concept. It is multi-dimensional in its approach and covers social, political, economic and social aspects. Of all these facets of women's development, economic empowerment is of utmost significance in order to achieve a lasting and sustainable development of society.

Perspectives in Women Empowerment

Empowerment in Multi Forms:

Empowerment theory assumes that empowerment takes on different forms for different people. While the multifaceted nature of empowerment has been well represented in the literature through the investigation of context-specific questions (Kroeker, 1995; Rich, Edelstein, Hallman, & Wandersman, 1995; Serrano-Garcia, 1984), the range of empowerment experiences within a particular setting has not been fully explored. Although, within a given context, setting members may be working towards a common goal, these individuals have unique personal histories, assume different roles, and often represent different constituencies (Martin, 1992).

The Social-structural Perspective:

The social-structural perspective has its roots in the values and ideals of democracy, broadly stated. In this perspective, empowerment is linked to a belief in a democratic polity where power resides in individuals at all levels of a system (Prasad, 2001). The success and legitimacy of empowerment as democracy rests on a system that facilitates and promotes the participation of most employees (Prasad & Eylon, 2001).

The Psychological Perspective:

The Psychological empowerment refers to a set of psychological conditions necessary for individuals to feel in control of their own destiny. Conger and Kanungo (1988) viewed empowerment as enabling or enhancing personal efficacy. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) stated that psychological conceptualization by defining empowerment as intrinsic task motivation consisting of four dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and choice.

The Critical Perspective:

Critical and postmodern empowerment theorists contend that without the formal power structures of direct worker ownership and representation, typical empowerment interventions are in fact disempowering (Wendt, 2001) because real power still resides at the top of the organization (Boje & Rosalie, 2001). These theorists discussed that feeling empowered is not the same as being empowered (Jacques, 1996).

1.13 Empowerment Model

National Policy for Empowerment of Women

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants

equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.

Within the framework of a democratic policy, our laws, development policies, Plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993.

1. Goal and Objectives

The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include

1. Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential;
2. The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres, political, economic, social, cultural and civil;
3. Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation;
4. Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.;
5. Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women;
6. Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women;
7. Mainstreaming gender perspective in the development process;
8. Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child and
9. Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

Before conducting any kind of research study, there is need to study about the concepts, surveys and studies already made in the research area. Hence, before conducting the present study, the researcher studied different articles published in journals, research papers that are published in conferences and seminar proceedings, books, web sources, etc. There is need to review these kinds of literature, so as to know about the different concepts of the study area and the results arrived from the surveys and studies already conducted in the research studies that are relevant for the present study.

In a review like this the prime motive would be to throw significant theoretical issues which could be brought to bear upon the empirical fact for the purpose of validation of existing knowledge which in turn provides relevance and meaning for the findings of the present scientific ensuring. In addition to these a review provides us with the necessary insight into the current issues and themselves under investigation.

The researcher searched the different kinds of literature on keywords of the present research project such as Self Help Groups, Micro Finance, Women Empowerment, reducing gender inequality,

education of women, socio-economic status of women, political status of women, women empowerment programmes of different countries and that of India, legal programmes for the empowerment of women, self-help groups for the empowerment of women, etc. The collected literature is reviewed in the following section.

The socioeconomic situation and cultural milieu of a country can best be judged by the status and position which it can bestow on its women. Reddy and his associates (1994) state, "Although women constitute 50 per cent of India's population, perform two-thirds of the work and produce 50 per cent of the food commodities consumed by the country, they earn only one-third of the remuneration and 10 per cent of the property or wealth of the country".

Rural women, especially those from poorer and weaker sections, carry out multiple responsibilities from dawn to dusk in and outside the home. The in home tasks include managing the household like cooking (grinding, mashing, grating and baking), sweeping, washing clothes, cleaning dishes, fetching water, collecting fodder and fuel wood, preparing cow dung cakes and feeding and rearing the children. The out of home chores include wage work, on the others' land throughout the year. It is distressing to note that despite being engaged in back breaking manual labour, rural women are exposed to health hazards, sexual abuse, exploitation of every kind and ill-treatment at home.

Social background acts as a motivating and restraining factors in the life of the respondents in times of crisis. It is the social background which prevents the individual from break-down. It influences one's efficiency in the work world. In a major study Uplaonkar (1998) has shown how one's social background influences the occupational aspirations of college students. An individual's social prestige is determined by his relative position on various parallel vertical prestige hierarchies by his relative position on various parallel vertical prestige hierarchies like education; income etc., the social background of the respondents plays a very important role in developing their sense or perception of responsibility. It influences their social self and world-view ones ability to adjust and manage in life depends to a great extent on ones social background.

Women's development is directly related to national development. In the sixth five year plan a special chapter has been added "Women Development". In this it has been mentioned that the strategy should be threefold. i.e. Education, Employment and Health. They are interdependent and dependent on the total development process. The socio-economic background of the individuals is a relevant variable in the understanding of his place in the social structure". As such it could be stated that, it is of sociological relevance to focus empirically on the social and economical status of the women in general and women self help groups in particular. It is, therefore, significant and more than pertinent to focus on the personal traits of the women empowerment through self help groups in Gulbarga District to ascertain the implications of these for their socio-economic and educational status.

Conclusion:

Development today is human development. The accent is on the formation of human capabilities such as improved health, knowledge and skills and the use to which these are put in order to improve the quality of life. The development paradigm, therefore, puts the focus of development on people and their participation. Human development implies that people are Alpha and Omega of development. Undoubtedly, human development and people's participation go together. As the UN Human Development Report put it, "development must be participatory and for this people must have the opportunity to participate and to invest in the development of their capabilities. They also must have the opportunity to put their capabilities to use, to be fully involved in all aspects of life, to express them selves freely and collectively." After World War II, the concept of the equality of the sexes as one of the basic principles on which a community should be based was incorporated in the UN Charter.

Since then, among many things, there have been conferences on the theme of Women in Development, Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women adopted by the UN and UN Decade for women (1975-85). As a result, for the growth of social justice and maintenance of social order, public policy is framed in accordance with the needs and basic requirements of the people and area. At the time of policy making, due attention is always paid to the ideological constitutional framework, social-political systems within the prevailing legal and constitutional framework, social environment and cultural ethos of the people. After independence, during the planning era plans were formulated with a resolve to reconstruct the economically, politically and socially. In order to have a desired change and to have transformation in the socio-economic life of the villages relevant schemes of socio-economic and political development and rural employment were initiated in the planned process of development for eradication of poverty particularly through women.

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