

Research Article

Women's Empowerment and Gender Based Violence in Manipur

Dr. N. Dayabati Devi¹ and Prof. N. Pramodini Devi²

¹Research Assistant, Women's Studies Centre, Manipur University, Canchipur – 795003, Imphal, Manipur, India

²Director, Women's Studies Centre, Manipur University, Canchipur – 795003, Imphal, Manipur, India

*Corresponding Author

Dr. N. Dayabati Devi

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to analyze how far Manipur has progressed towards the twin goal of gender justice and women empowerment. Are women in Manipur moving forward? The present paper utilizes the data from two rounds of National Family Health Survey (National Family Health Survey – 3 and National Family Health Survey - 4), Indian version of Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) program. The present study assessed women's empowerment by measuring mainly eight (8) indicators namely, women participation in household decision making, women who worked in the last twelve (12) months who were paid in cash, women experiencing spousal violence, women experiencing violence during any pregnancy, ownership of a house/land (alone or jointly with others), women having a bank/saving account, women having a mobile phone that they themselves use and women who use hygienic methods of protection during their menstrual period. The results portray that despite the progress achieved in some areas particularly, household decision making, women who worked in the last twelve months, owning a house/land (alone or jointly with others), women having a mobile phone, women who use hygienic methods of protection during their menstrual period, women in Manipur face higher rates of spousal violence and violence during any pregnancy with 53.1 percent and 3.4 percent respectively.

Keywords: Women's empowerment, Gender equality, Decision making, Violence, Ownership, Sustainable development goals, Manipur.

INTRODUCTION

“Study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than empowerment of women” Kofi Annan, 7th UN Secretary General (1997-2006).

The term “Women's Empowerment” has become a catchphrase all over the world including India since last few decades. According to United National Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the term women's empowerment means:

- Acquiring knowledge and an understanding of gender/power relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.
- Gaining the ability to generate choices and thereby acquiring leverage and bargaining power, and

- Developing the ability to generate, organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic orders, nationally and internationally.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, 2004) has drawn a framework of women's empowerment to develop seven principles which include:

- Leadership Promotes Gender Equality
- Equal Opportunity, Inclusion and non-discrimination
- Health, Safety and Freedom from Violence
- Education and Training
- Enterprise Development, Supply Chain and Marketing Practices
- Community Leadership and Engagement, and
- Transparency, Measuring and Reporting.

Quick Response Code



Journal homepage:

<http://www.easpublisher.com/easjehl/>

Article History

Received: 25.05.2018

Accepted: 05.06.2019

Published: 24.06.2019

Copyright @ 2019: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution license which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non commercial use (NonCommercial, or CC-BY-NC) provided the original author and source are credited.

According to the United Nations' definition, women's empowerment and their full participation based on equality in all economic and social aspects including participation in the process of decision making and accessing the power is considered to be one of the major components of "achieving equality, development and peace" (Kiani, Z. *etal.*, 2015).

The Cairo Conference in 1994 organised by UN on Population and Development called attention to women's empowerment as a central focus and UNDP developed the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which focuses on the three variables that reflect women's participation in society – political power or decision making, education and health. 1995 UNDP report was devoted to women's empowerment and it declared that if human development is not engendered it is endangered. The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti). The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was passed in 2001 (Mamta, M., 2014).

At the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) nations unanimously agreed that it was essential to put in place effective policies and programmes at all levels that would foster the empowerment and advancement of women. To this end, nations endeavoured to promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in their activities.

The status of women in a society is a significant reflection of the level of social justice in that society. Women's status is often described in terms of their level of income, employment, education, health and fertility as well as their roles within the family, the community and society. In India women are discriminated due to several historical, religious and other reasons. A girl child is suppressed from the moment she is born in terms of personal development. She is made to undergo the feelings of being inferior and feeble. She is denied the prospects for personal expression (Bhasin, 2007).

Haydock, J. and W.D. Koeing (2003) come with some more findings that wherever the women are educated they gain strength and confidence to report to the concerned authorities about domestic violence without hesitation. But most of the uneducated women are not ready to come forward to report their harassment to the appropriate authorities. They conclude that empowering women is the best means to reduce domestic violence.

Promoting gender equality and empowering women is one of the goals of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs explicitly recognize the gender equality and women empowerment are not only human rights but also play a powerful role in promoting development and reducing poverty. When women have

the same opportunities, access to resources and life choices as men, the benefits extend far beyond women themselves. In line with the vision in SDGs, the mission of the gender equality strategy is to contribute to the eradication of poverty and significant reduction of gender injustice and empowering women as agents of change and leaders in the development process that shapes their lives. SDGs envisage a more inclusive sustainable and resilient society.

The Sustainable Development Goals explicitly recognize that the gender equality and women empowerment are not only human rights but also play a powerful role in promoting development and reducing poverty. When women have the same opportunities, access to resources and life choices as men, the benefits extend far beyond women themselves. In line with the vision in Sustainable Development Goals, the mission of the gender equality strategy is to contribute to the eradication of poverty and significant reduction of gender injustice and empowering women as agents of change and leaders in the development process that shapes their lives. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) envisage a more inclusive sustainable and resilient society.

The 1976-1985 was the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. Gradually it started to move away from focusing only on women when seeking to address their problems and increasingly acknowledged the need to analyse the roles of both men and women. It emphasised the need for men to participate in all actions towards gender equality explaining that women share common concerns that can be addressed only by working together and in partnership with men towards the common goal.

Achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls are integral facets of inclusive sustainable development, and that good quality education and lifelong learning are a crucial part of this process. They can equip people with capabilities and opportunities to participate fully and meaningfully in all dimensions of their lives – economic, political and social. And yet achieving gender equality and sustainable development requires addressing deep-rooted, longstanding gender discrimination and unequal power relations, including in education. It requires adequate and dedicated financial and other resources, political will and support structures to develop synergy, and collaboration within and across sectors, including education, health and environment, to address crosscutting and intersectional issues. The commitment of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind means that no SDG target can be met if gender equality and empowerment are not realized. Full integration of these issues in international development policy is long overdue.

Despite many international agreements, women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. They have less access to property ownership, credit, training and employment. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence. Gender equality will be achieved only when women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. This means sharing equally in the distribution of power and influence, and having equal opportunities for financial independence, education and realizing their personal ambitions. Gender equality demands the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. When women are empowered, whole families benefit, and these benefits often have a ripple effect on the society and future generations. The roles that men and women play in society are not biologically determined. They are socially determined, changing and changeable. And while they may be justified as being required by culture or religion, these roles vary widely by locality and evolve over time. Efforts to promote women's empowerment should ensure cultural considerations are respected while women's rights are upheld.

Experience has shown that addressing gender equality and women's empowerment requires strategic interventions at various levels of policy-making. Key issues include:

Reproductive Health:

The ability of women to control their own fertility is fundamental to women's empowerment and equality. When a woman can plan her family, she can plan the rest of her life. Protecting and promoting her reproductive rights include the right to decide the number, timing and spacing of her children. This ensures her freedom to participate more fully and equally in society. In addition, for both physiological and social reasons, women are more vulnerable than men to reproductive health problems. Collectively, complications of pregnancy or childbirth are the number two killer of women of reproductive age. Failure to provide information, services and conditions to help women protect their reproductive health constitutes gender-based discrimination and is a violation of women's rights to health and life.

Economic Empowerment:

Six out of 10 of the world's poorest people are women. Economic disparities persist partly because women do much of the unpaid work within families and communities and they continue to face discrimination in the economic sphere.

Educational Empowerment:

About two thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women. Lack of an education severely restricts a woman's access to information and opportunities.

Conversely, increasing women's and girls' educational attainment benefits both individuals and future generations. Higher levels of women's education are strongly associated with lower infant mortality and lower fertility, as well as better outcomes for their children.

Political Empowerment:

Gender equality cannot be achieved without the backing and enforcement of institutions. But too many social and legal institutions still do not guarantee women equality in basic legal and human rights, in access to or control of resources, in employment or earnings, or in social or political participation. And men continue to occupy most positions of political and legal authority; globally, only 23 per cent of parliamentarians are women. Laws against domestic violence are often not enforced on behalf of women.

The state (Manipur) cannot achieve its dream of peace and economic development without full and equal participation of women. Investing on women pays multiple dividends. Empowered women make better choices for themselves and their families and they can contribute more sustainably to their communities. When women move forward they bring the society with them.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how far Manipur has progressed towards the twin goal of gender justice and women empowerment. Are women in Manipur moving forward?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present paper utilizes the data from two rounds of National Family Health Survey (National Family Health Survey – 3 and National Family Health Survey - 4), Indian version of Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) program. The present study assessed women's empowerment by measuring mainly eight (8) indicators namely, women participation in household decision making, women who worked in the last twelve (12) months who were paid in cash, women experiencing spousal violence, women experiencing violence during any pregnancy, ownership of a house/land (alone or jointly with others), having a bank/saving account, having a mobile phone that they themselves use and women who use hygienic methods of protection during their menstrual period. The National Family Health Survey – 4 (NFHS – 4) has helped us to measure how far they have come and to map the course ahead.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Household Decision Making

Participation in household decision making is a common measure of women's empowerment. According to National Family Health Survey – 3 (2005-2006), when asked who makes decision on their own health care, making major household purchases, making household purchases for daily household needs and

visiting their own family or relatives 81 to 86 percent of married women participate in making each of these decisions. However, only 69 percent participate in making all four of these decisions and only 3 percent do not participate in making any of the four decisions. The overall married women participation in household decision making in National Family Health Survey – 3 (2005-2006) is 94.4 percent. As the separate indicators of participation of making decision for the National Family Health Survey – 4 (2015-2016) are not available as of now, we cannot say how much change, for better or worse has occurred by the separate indicators during the last ten years. However, the data available in the Fact Sheet National Family Health Survey – 4 (2015-2016) suggest that the overall participation of decision making has been increased by 1.8 percent (from 94.4 percent to 96.2 percent). Married women's participation in Manipur in household decision making in National Family Health Survey – 3 (2005 – 2006) and National Family Health Survey – 4 (2015-2016) is consistently higher than the national average by 17.9 percent (94.4 percent and 76.5 percent) and 12.2 percent (96.2 percent and 84.0 percent) respectively.

Women Who Worked In the Last Twelve (12) Months

The National Family Health Survey - 4 (2015-2016) shows women in Manipur who worked in the last twelve (12) months who were paid in cash decreased by 8.8 percent from 49.7 percent in National Family Health Survey – 3 (2005-2006) to 40.9 percent in National Family Health Survey – 4 (2015-2016). But women in Manipur who worked in the last twelve (12) months who were paid in cash in National Family Health Survey – 3 (2005-2006) and National Family Health Survey – 4 (2015-2016) is consistently higher than the national average by 21.1 percent (49.7 percent and 28.6 percent) and 16.3 percent (40.9 percent and 24.6 percent) respectively.

Spousal Violence

Attitudes toward wife beating provide insight into women's and men's view on women's status. Overall 43.8 percent of married women experienced spousal physical or sexual violence from their husbands (National Family Health Survey – 3). The prevalence of 43.8 percent spousal or physical or sexual violence in Manipur is among the highest in the country. The high incidence of violence against women is another indicator of the extent of gender inequality. Survey data of National Family Health Survey – 4 (2015-2016) is also not very encouraging as 53.1 percent of women have experienced spousal violence. Instead of a decline in the extent of spousal violence, the trend is on the rise by 9.3 percent while there is a decrease by 8.4 percent in the national average (37.2 percent to 28.8). When the data come to this level of violence in Manipur a gap in policy and practice in women's empowerment is clearly visible. Despite the policies, laws and initiatives by the civil society institutions violence against women is

widespread and the consequences for perpetrators rarely match the crime.

Violence during Any Pregnancy

Ever-married women who have experienced violence during any pregnancy in National Family Health Survey – 4 (2015-2016) is 3.4 percent which is slightly higher (.1 percent) than the national average with 3.3 percent.

Owning A House/Land (Alone or Jointly With Others)

Ownership of valuable assets namely house/land provides multiple avenues for empowerment. In terms of ownership of house/land (alone or jointly with others) by women it is heartening to learn that Manipur seizes the highest rank (69.9 percent) followed by Bihar (59 percent), Meghalaya (57 percent) and Tripura (57 percent). The proportion of women who own a house, either alone or jointly is far ahead of national average which is 38.4 percent (National Family Health Survey – 4). The gender gap is remarkable narrow when joint as well as sole ownership is considered.

Having a Bank or Savings Account

In case of having a bank/saving account only 34.8 percent of women in Manipur have their own bank/saving account (National Family Health Survey – 4). However, there has been an increase of over four times during the last ten years. Women having bank account in National Family Health Survey – 3 (2005-2006) were only 8 percent. Even though there has been an increase, women having bank account in Manipur is consistently lower than the national average with 15.1 percent in National Family Health Survey – 3 (2005-2006) and 53.0 percent in National Family Health Survey – 4 (2015-2016).

Having a Mobile Phone

When the ownership of mobile phone is considered, women having a mobile phone that they themselves use is 63.1 percent which is consistently higher than the national average with 45.9 percent in National Family Health Survey – 4 (2015-2016).

Women Who Use Hygienic Methods of Protection during Their Menstrual Period

In case of women who use hygienic methods of protection during their menstrual period is 76.1 which is consistently higher (18.5 percent) than the national average with 57.6 percent in National Family Health Survey – 4 (2015-2016).

Progress in some aspects of women empowerment is encouraging but like other states in India, women still face daunting challenges in their journey to equality. National Family Health Survey – 4 (2015-2016) highlights some of the aspects of improving status during the last decade from National

Family Health Survey – 3 (2005-2006) but also underscores the increase in spousal violence experienced by married women and women who suffer violence during pregnancy. The National Family Health Survey – 4 (2015 – 2016) pinpoints the area of progress and the area that lag behind. It gives us a clear picture of women’s lives in Manipur. They describe the current status of women and show how much change for better or worse has occurred since 2005-2006. The data also suggest how much work remains to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and broader goals related to gender equality and women’s empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the progress achieved in some areas particularly, household decision making, women who worked in the last twelve months, owning a house/land (alone or jointly with others), having a mobile phone, women who use hygienic methods of protection during their menstrual period, women in Manipur face higher rates of spousal violence and violence during any pregnancy with 53.1 percent and 3.4 percent respectively. The overwhelming policy challenge thus remains in the area of addressing the persistent increase of spousal violence. This entails focusing on the links between women’s social, cultural and economic position on the one hand and the basis on which households and state makes decision about investing in women and girl’s well being on the other. New direction in social policy cannot be achieved without breaking out of vicious cycle (high spousal violence and poor status of women) to a virtuous circle (low spousal and high status of women). This demands a multipronged effort and rethinking what the goals of interventions are for the improvement of lives of women.

No sustainable progress can be achieved unless women prosper along with men. In order to affirm our commitment to improving women’s lives to ensuring equal access to education and resources and to empowering to them to choose their own future a critical assessment is in order. Overcoming challenges and empowering women to fulfill their potentials as equal members of society requires profound changes in

attitudes, roles and behaviour at home, at work place and community.

REFERENCES

1. Bhasin, V. (2007). Status of Tribal Women in India, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, Delhi, India.
2. Government of India, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS – 4), 2015-2016, India Fact Sheet*, International Institute for Population Sciences (Deemed University).
3. Government of India, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS – 4), 2015-2016, State Fact Sheet – Manipur*, International Institute for Population Sciences (Deemed University).
4. Haydock, J., & Koenig, W.D. (2003). Pattern of Reproductive Skew in the Polygynandrous Acorn Woodpecker. *American Naturalist* 162, 277-289.
5. International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International, (2008). *National Family Health Survey (NFHS – 3), India, 2005-2006: Manipur*, Mumbai: IIPS.
6. Haydock, J., & Koenig, W.D. (2003). *Pattern of Reproductive Skew in the Polygynandrous Acorn Woodpecker*. *American Naturalist* 162, 277-289.
7. Kiani, Z., Simbar, M., Dolatian, M., & Zaeri, F. (2015). Relationship between structural social determinants of health and women’s empowerment in reproductive health. *Journal of School of Public Health and Institute of Public Health Research*. 13, 1-15, (In persian)
8. Mamta, M. (2014). Empowerment of Women in India: A Critical Analysis. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, IX, No. 3, pp. 479-480.
9. “The Fourth United Nation’s Conference on women in Beijing 1995”, Women’s National Commission (UK). Retrieved 25 April, 2014.
10. UNIFEM, (2004). “Women’s Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business.” New York: United Nations Global Compact, United Nations Development Fund for Women. Available at: http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/WomensEmpowermentPrinciples_en.pdf [accessed on 11-07-2012].