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Research Article

Determinants and Indicators of Women Empowerment: A Walk Through Psychological Patterns and Behavioural Implications

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Abstract

Background: This study makes an attempt to identify, understand, interpret and analyse various determinants and indicators of women empowerment. **Materials and Methods:** This conceptual study analyses psychological patterns and their behavioural implications to women empowerment. **Results:** This study highlights different aspects that hinder women empowerment and suggests appropriate measures to overcome traditional and stereotype patterns. The study frames three determinants (psychological patterns of society, family and women) that affects six indicators (education, educational freedom, economic contribution, economic freedom, household management and decision making, perceived status within the household and health) that directly influence the status of women empowerment. **Conclusion:** The policy implications of this study suggest that women herself need to take action for their rights and strongly raise their voices about equality in order to separate herself from the traditional paradox that woman is a commodity to be kept at home.

Key words: Determinants, indicators, psychological patterns, behavioral implications, women empowerment

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INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment has been studied as an important medium to achieve the goal of gender equality in recent times. Gender equality impacts not only the women but the society as a whole¹. Need for women empowerment got felt strongly around 1970s with the issues such as feminization of extreme poverty and disparities in politics, education and wealth getting raised². In 2000, the millennium development goals furthered the campaign for women's rights in areas such as education, health and poverty. A number of agencies including United Nations, World Bank, World Health Organization are currently working on the theme of women empowerment.

In order to ascertain the level of women empowerment in any region, there is a need for having precise indicators to measure the status of women empowerment. Much diverse conclusions have been drawn with respect to the indicators of women empowerment. Broadly, these indicators range from quantitative to qualitative. Quantitative indicators help standardize the measurements of change and are therefore, preferred by global agencies³. Quantitative indicators, however, fail to provide an in-depth analysis particularly pertaining to social and psychological patterns, which are no less important either. Qualitative indicators help understand how gender roles evolve⁴. Hence, qualitative indicators also need to be brought into the frame for complementing the quantitative one.

So far, the literature is presenting no clear distinction between indicators and determinants of women empowerment. In fact, the two terms have also been used as synonyms in various studies. Besides, there is also little mention of the psychological patterns of the women, families and society in causing or hindering women empowerment. There is a genuine need to present the determinants of women empowerment in difference that the indicators. The efforts to empower women and to attain the goal of gender equality can only take a real shape once the determinants are clearly identified. This study addresses the issue of women empowerment in a psychological perspective, distinguishing clearly between the indicators and determinants of women empowerment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design: This study uses a qualitative research design, which is based on the review of inter-disciplinary literature about women empowerment, gender issues and their psychological causations.

Instruments and tools: This study, being a conceptual input based on qualitative design, does not use any instruments of quantitative research. Rather, this study uses textual and graphical tools to report and analyze the work.

Literature on indicators of women empowerment: Available literature mainly categorizes the indicators of women empowerment.

Economic participation and opportunity: In present era of consumerism, perception in respect of requirement of unlimited physical facilities is on a constant increase. This leads to the need of more monetary resources at the level of family, which makes a case for every adult member of the family to contribute in terms of money. With women representing one-half of human capital, limiting the ability of women to contribute impedes economic growth⁵. Gender Inequality in Sub-Saharan African and East Asian countries is 15-20%^{1,6,7} observes that ensuring equal access to women with respect to financial and development opportunities empowers women, expedites progress towards gender equality and can translate into improved national and international economic efficiency. Economic growth and women's empowerment are the key concepts to develop theories as "Simultaneous relationship" to understand the existence of relation between them⁸. Women emerging as actors of society to help in shaping up the inclusive policies as they are getting equal access to economic opportunities⁷. This coupled with the spread of education across genders has increased the awareness among women about the need to make monetary contributions to the family. So much so, that woman has starting taking 'Work' as a right than just a responsibility.

The effects of economic contribution on women empowerment are hard to capture. While some studies show economic globalization reducing gender inequalities and increasing women's status⁸⁻¹⁰ indicate non-significant, negative or curvilinear relationships^{8,9}.

The monetary contribution of women in household is being viewed as a symbol of status in society in particular. Women who contribute monetarily are perceived to be indispensable member of family by general public though the fact may be different within the family structure where her status among family may not be treated to be as high as in society. It cannot thus be assumed that contribution in household income will always lead to higher status and further to empowerment. While, in some families, women enjoy equal status irrespective of their monetary contribution;

in some others, the situation may be reverse such that despite making monetary contribution, women may not enjoy equal status.

Economic freedom: Having control over one's own resources carries positive implications for improved ability and empower relations for the holder, suggesting that cash savings were a strong indicator of the woman's improved and evenly balanced power relations within the household¹¹. Besides contributing economically to the family, having freedom to spend it as per her own wishes, remains a core indicator of a woman's empowerment. The purpose of women joining professional careers is commonly assumed to be the improvement in their financial status, which may lead to freedom of fulfilling their own shopping desires-including jewellery, clothing, holiday trips, etc and their desires in terms of family-including electronic appliances, furniture, property, etc. It is also assumed commonly that the women have full freedom to spend their earnings as per their own wishes, while in reality, those earnings may usually be handed over to their senior member of family. The right to spend their money as per their wishes does not necessarily come with the women making monetary contributions to the family.

Vogler¹² argued that the partner with the larger income was likely to play a dominant part in decision making. It is also observed that the power relations between husbands and wives would become more evenly balanced if wives start gaining access to economic resources through paid employment. On the contrary, this could become reality only in rare cases.

There are also instances where women enjoy economic freedom even without making economic contribution to the family. For example, Kabeer¹³ pointed out that in rural areas women have a longstanding practice of having "Secret savings" for themselves, which ensures them a sense of economic autonomy.

Differences are also observed in the ways women use their freedom to spend their earning. While, in earlier times, women earnings were used as savings for future requirements; in present era, there are examples of women who only spend their earnings on themselves without any savings or contribution in household expenditure. Further, women entrepreneurs tend to invest a major part of their earnings for the expansion of their business.

Household management and decision-making: This indicator attempts an important evaluation of women where empowerment and decision making at household

matters go hand in hand. In the countries where women are usually the homemakers for their families, they consider the decision-making autonomy with regard to household management as their prime right. Handapangoda¹¹ reported that greater monetary contribution to the household offers women an active agency to have a stronger voice in family decision making and evenly balanced marital power relations. The decision making in household sphere plays a significant role for women. In terms of resource equity, literature shows a generally positive relationship with gender equality. Better livelihoods help women gain greater bargaining ability, become more independent in taking personal and household decisions, overcome spousal resistance, leading to influence the cause of gender inequality^{14,15}.

Kabeer¹³ presented evidence from studies on South Asia suggesting that, within the family, the purchase of food and other items of household consumption and decisions related to children's health, appear to fall within women's arena of decision making; while the decisions related to the education and marriage of children and market transactions in major assets tend to be more clearly male oriented. It is also assumed by family members that the outlook of a working woman is widened as compared to a non-working woman, because of her increased vision and awareness about the present environment.

There is different evidence on the household freedom to women in nuclear and joint families. In most of the nuclear families, women enjoy equal right to take decisions on household expenditure, whereas it is limited in the case of joint family system where the women may not even be consulted on major decisions irrespective of her economic contribution to the family.

Perceived status within the household: The perceived status of women could not develop as an extensively utilized subjective indicator of measuring women empowerment¹⁶. The woman working out has to face huge challenges both at household and professional level. It requires women to be multi-talented if they opt for professional careers since the need to balance their work life and family life comes along. It is commonly viewed that the work of women outside the home should not interfere with their proper duties of nurturing and caring for children. The women play dual responsibility to take care of the family with respect to food, child education, guest's hospitality and other similar duties. Adhikari¹⁷ pointed out that absence from home for a long time makes women vulnerable to the questions about character. Women have to perform multiple tasks of being a

breadwinner, a homemaker and a mother-to-be-at-home. More actively performing the role of a breadwinner may lead them to achieve a better and more reasonable status as a breadwinner but a lower evaluation in the other two roles¹⁸.

The traditional approaches to measuring poverty assign no economic value to unpaid domestic work. It makes a strong case that women should be recognised and appreciated within the family for their timeless devotion. Their work needs to be appreciated by the family members. On the contrary, previous studies reveal that very rare cases are found on any material appreciation or recognition of the women by their family members¹¹.

Further, it is perceived that women enjoy good status in society if they are working for their family. In early times, only few professions were treated to be respectful for women to work and were honoured in society and within family also. But in the modern era, no work is treated as hazard for women to be employed though it may confine the status of being appreciated by family within. The women who spend long hours on their work are perceived to be careless for household activities and are not appreciated for her contribution to the family. The children of the family feel lonely in the absence of their mother and come up with complaints. Also, it has been found that bonding with their children is less during the childhood but with the passage of time when they are grown up, they realise the situation and feel appreciated for the mother. It has been also seen that at the time of retirement, the family members whole-heartedly appreciate the dedication of women on both the front.

Education and educational freedom: Education empowers women to achieve more in their social, career, economic and family lives. It is believed that men and women have a similar distribution of innate abilities. Gender inequality in education leads to less opportunities getting provided to no less able (than men) women. This may lower the productivity of the human capital in the economy and thus lower economic growth. Dollar and Gatti¹⁹ observed that lowering the impact of male education on economic growth will raise the impact of female education. One can view this factor as similar to a distortionary tax on education that leads to a misallocation of educational resources and thus lowers economic growth. This effect could affect economic growth directly through lowering the quality of human capital. In addition, it can also reduce the investment rate as the return on investments is lower in a country with poorer human capital.

Gender bias in education and employment appears to have a significant negative impact on economic growth which further leads to higher fertility and child mortality. Hill and

King²⁰ also studied the impact of gender differences on education in an empirical growth context. Instead of trying to account for growth of GDP, they relate levels of GDP to gender inequality in education. It is found that a low female-male enrolment ratio is associated with a lower level of GDP per capita, over and above the impact of levels of female education on GDP per capita.

The effects account for a considerable portion of the differences in growth experience between the developing regions of the world. Gender inequality in education may generate a poverty trap which would justify public action to escape this low-level equilibrium with self-perpetuating gender gaps in education. Barro and Lee²¹ and Barro and Sala-i-Martin²² suggested that a large gap in male and female schooling may signify backwardness and may therefore be associated with lower economic growth.

As female education is believed to promote the quantity and quality of education of their children (through the support and general environment educated mothers can provide their children), this positive externality is likely to exist.

Moreover, to the extent that similarity in education opportunities at the household level generates positive external effects on the quality of education. Reduced gender inequality may be one way to promote such external effects. For example, it is likely that equally educated siblings can strengthen each other's educational success through direct support and play inspired by educational activities. Similarly, couples with similar education levels may promote each other's life-long learning.

The effect of educational inequality reduces the employment chances of women at higher positions and lower availability of human capital to the country that will further be hurdle in the growth of the economy. Promoting female education appears to therefore have a higher payoff there than elsewhere¹.

Health: Educated women have greater knowledge about health, which develops her ability to focus on the health of her children⁷. The bargaining power of educated women particularly with respect to family health and nutrition is on a higher side as compared to their spouses. Thomas²³ maintained that in the case of families where women were working, the impact of unearned income on child survival was 20 times greater as compared to other families. Gender role plays an integral part on women's health which further affects both individual and at national economic welfare level. In low-income and middle-income countries, healthy and productive life of women is crucial for the well-being of a nation, given the fact that around three-fourth of the food

production is accounted for by women. It is observed that women live longer than men and have lower mortality rate in comparison to men at any age but this does not indicate that women are healthier or better able to access health-care resources. Mortality rates reveal extreme damages to health and do not take into account other, large health differences between men and women. In addition, women usually prepare meals for family members and take care of children. Women face different environmental issues than men because of their greater involvement in domestic work inside the home. Air pollution and access to sanitation and clean water are the key indicators in this category. In general, one of women's main responsibilities is water collection for daily use at home. Exposure to air pollutants (e.g., tobacco smoke and air particles from using solid fuels to heat and cook) can lead to chronic health ailments. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that women must be physically well and knowledgeable about her health first then only she can fulfil all her duties.

Thus, gender equity in health does not necessarily mean equal rates of mortality or equal resources for both genders. Rather, gender equity should be the elimination of preventable health-related differences between genders and the proper allocation of health resources based on gender-sensitive needs. An increase of 1 year in life expectancy of the population leads to a real GDP increase of 4%²⁴.

If women take a front step to make decisions regarding childbearing, childrearing, sexual relations and use of contraceptives then, a broad change within communities and regions can be seen.

Media: Media plays a significant role in shaping women's importance in society. By perpetuating gender inequalities and stereotypes, media can play an important role in empowering women. Women access to communication systems, such as media does not guarantee that their opinions will be expressed equally or that their participation in the media will be mainstreamed. Stereotyping and alienation of women by the media are still remarkably widespread phenomena.

According to the international federation of journalists, "If we continue at the current rate of progress, it will take another 75 years to achieve gender equality in media". Indicators pertaining to 20 gender equality measure the extent to which women participate and are fairly represented in the media.

Media reflects social and cultural values of society and does have the capability to empower women through purposefully voicing their opinions and perspectives among the population. According to UNESCO, the diversification of

media workers (e.g., females writing news items, presenting all types of news stories and making top-level decisions in news organizations) promotes fair gender portrayal in the media.

The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women, highlighted the key role of media to promote gender equality. In 2010, UNESCO, as part of International Women's Day celebrations, launched a global exchange on gender sensitive indicators for media organizations. Two years later, in 2012, UNESCO published its report on gender-sensitive indicators for media, the most comprehensive listing of such indicators. In November 2013, UNESCO will hold the first global forum on media and gender.

But mass media into economic emancipation of women is quite inconsistent. On one hand, the TV and the newspapers with the use of the female figure as a stereotype of male desire, the object woman and on the other, the presence of many women who are well established, successful and renowned for their commitment. The mass media, however, like all social media are good and practical means to increase, through the dissemination of healthy concepts of being woman, of what is the role of women in modern society, by good examples that women give us every day. Mass media had made a strong contribution, with the implementation of media campaigns, to the dissemination of the concept of gender equality. If people see in the media the overcome of the differences between men and women will bring him back into everyday life. The mass media have always unconsciously affected and influenced the thinking and behaviour of masses.

RESULTS

Relationship between determinants, indicators and outcome of women empowerment: This study presented important indicators of women empowerment. While, these indicators make an important subject of study with regard to women empowerment, it is even more relevant to understand the factors that determine the empowerment of women. Literature seems to be treating determinants of women empowerment as similar to the indicators of the same²⁵⁻³⁰.

However, a thorough introspection coupled with focussed discussion suggests that the determinants of women empowerment are not the same as its indicators. Indicators of women empowerment as presented by the literature are not the independent variables by themselves. Rather, those are impacted-not merely by some of the other indicators per se, but also by some other independent variables in the form of

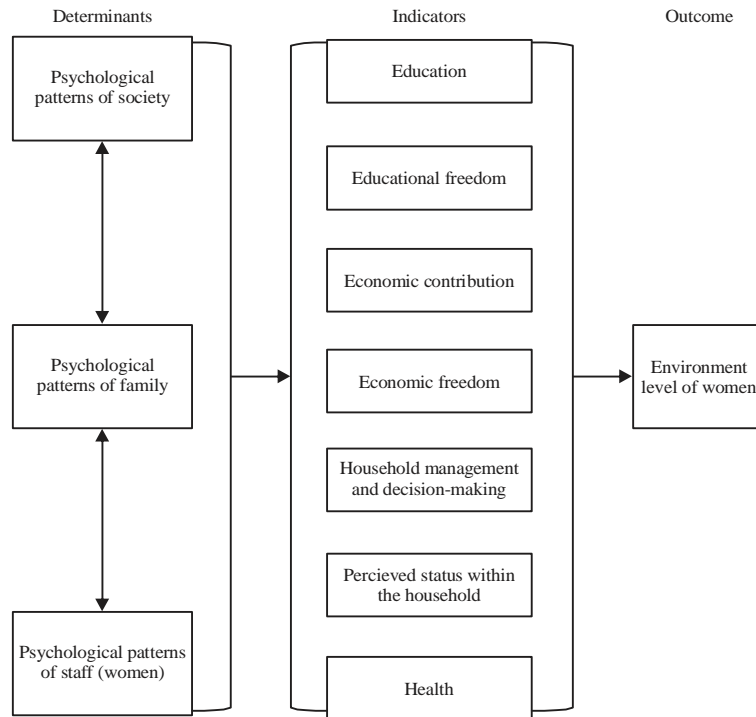


Fig. 1: Determinants, indicators and outcome of women empowerment

psychological patterns of the society, family and the woman under reference. Therefore, it is important to study the relationship of these indicators inter-se, as also the impact of psychological factors on these indicators. Figure 1 exhibits this relationship.

Determinants of women empowerment: The determining variables leave an impact on the level of women empowerment either directly or through the indicators as presented in Fig. 1. All the three determining variables are rooted in psychological patterns of society, family and the woman under reference. The inter-relationship of these determining variables forms an important subject of study.

Over the years, the psychological patterns of the society have shaped-up the psychological patterns of the family, which in turn has impacted that of the women. The conditioning about gender discrimination stems from the societal psychology. This discriminatory thinking against women has over the time, travelled from society to families. In turn, family's thinking with regard to such conditioned thinking has created a pressure on women. This has led to a number of major patterns in behaviour with respect to women including restrictions on the women moving outside the house, limited opportunities to women in terms of education

and work, women being considered as less important members of the family therefore, lesser concerns about health and safety of women.

Psychological patterns of society: The origin of discriminatory thinking against women in societal thinking roots back to the mythology, scriptures as well as historical literature. Right from the era of Ramayana, the cases of discrimination against women are evident, which of course, played a lead role in shaping-up the psychology of society against the women.

For example, the life of the following characters portrays the classic cases of women exploitation either at the hands of others or by themselves.

Sita: Tulsidasa presents Rama and Sita as incarnations of Vishnu and Lakshmi respectively. Vedas consider Sita as 'the Furrow', personified goddess of the female principle of fertility. Due to her utmost obedience and dedication to her husband, Sita is considered to be the ideal wife who accompanies him during his wanderings also. During the wanderings only, Sita is kidnapped by Ravana. Rama eventually saves her. However, when Rama is restored to his throne, Sita's "virtue" is questioned and proved by ordeal.

Draupadi: The scripture of Mahabharata describes that the five pandavas end-up sharing one wife in the form of Draupadi as their mother Kunti asked them to share whatever they have got. The Pandavas end-up accepting the unintentional instructions by their mother, without caring for the feelings of Draupadi.

Gandhari: Gandhari was the wife of Dhritarashtra, the eldest prince of the Kuru kingdom, Pandu's brother. When she learned from her maid that he was blind, Gandhari voluntarily blindfolded herself saying that she decided to deny herself the pleasure of sight that her husband could never relish.

These three cases present varied ways of biased thinking without caring for interests of the women. While in Sita's case, it is the fear of questioning by masses, which causes women exploitation; in case of Draupadi, it is blind following of mother's words and in Gandhari's case, it is sheer 'dedication' towards the husband in which the woman readily considers sacrifice as a bliss for herself.

The mythological examples of women exploitation are established even further through societal patterns including Sati, Jauhar, Devadasis, Dowry, etc.

Such cases helped create perception in the minds of the society with respect to men and women. In a longer-run, these perceptions facilitated the creation of biased psychology among society. Since ancient times, gender bias has been rooted thoroughly in the social psychology. This has created pressure on families to further the cause of gender discrimination, which has in turn been passed on to the individual women.

On one hand, discriminatory psychology of the society has blocked the women from being active professionally. On the other, this has also been a major reason for physical, mental and other exploitation of women by males.

Psychological patterns of family: The male-biased psychological patterns in the society have largely been reflected in the family behaviour as well. Family-level psyche has been caused and dominated by the psyche of society at large. It can clearly argued as a strategic (intentional) intervention. An understanding of the following factors shall help to establish this strategy.

Patrilocality: As part of a cultural system, married couples start living with or near the male partner's family particularly in Asia, middle East and North Africa³¹. Ebenstein³¹ established that the male-female sex ratio is directly and positively correlated with the rate of co-residence. The anticipation of

living with male children for a longer duration causes parents to invest more in the male children as against the females. As an illustration of this, Ramakrishnan *et al.*³² reported that 405 parents were advised to get their children operated upon to correct a congenital heart condition. Out of these, 70% of the boys had undergone surgery as against only 44% of the girls within the period of 1 year.

Patrilineality: As part of the socially-caused male-dominance system, the names, properties and other family assets pass on to the male child in a patrilineal system. Families look up to their sons to carry forward the legacy of their families. Daughters are assumed not being able to carry their family legacies, rather carry those of their in-laws. Worse, is the fact that in countries like India, widows traditionally do not inherit their husband's ancestral property, they rely on their sons as their conduit for holding onto the family property and maintaining their standard of living in widowhood.

Patrilineality does not extend merely to the assets. Rather, the impact of patrilineality is also visible on importance given to the sons while performing the rituals. The belief systems of Confucianism in China and Hinduism in India are specific examples of this. Confucianism assigns major role to a son in the rituals. Ancient Hindu texts (Vedas) also prefer sons to daughters. Further, a son lights a deceased person's funeral pyre and brings him or her salvation. In an interesting observation, it is found that the upper castes adhere to the Hindu kinship norms more strictly than lower castes³³. More skewed sex ratio for upper castes than lower castes by Chakraborty and Kim³⁴.

Dowry system: Dowry system is another creation of the society for strengthening the male-bias. Interestingly, it has been observed that the prevalence of dowry has increased in some countries over the past few decades and the real value of dowry payments has also risen^{27,35}. However, the system has faded away from societies such as the European societies. The dowry system in South Asian societies and families has been much worse as compared to the European system. In the European system, the bride held the rights to the dowry and it was her pre-mortem inheritance from her parents²⁷; whereas, in South Asia, the groom typically controls the money.

Female purity and safety: The social pressure has also increased the families' intention to protect the purity by ensuring safety of the female child by not letting her be as open as the male child, thereby depriving her of the opportunities. So much so, that it has become very difficult to

understand as to how much of this deprivation is due to the genuine concern for women's welfare by protecting them from harassment and sexual violence and how much is as part of the strategy to restrict their autonomy. Restrictions on female mobility may easily be related to keeping unmarried women chaste and married women faithful. Making a very interesting observation, Buss³⁶ found that in India, China, Indonesia, Taiwan and Iran, men put more weight on their spouse's sexual inexperience at marriage than on physical appearance, while the opposite prioritization was seen in European, North American, South American and Sub-Saharan African countries. Such social pressures certainly reflect upon the families and the families marry off their daughters early in societies where female chastity is prized by men, which leads to early school dropout. Further, disallowing women from working outside the home is perceived as one way of maintaining their purity. Such restrictions apply more strictly to upper caste women in India since lower caste women often have more professional flexibility and autonomy. In Islam also, female seclusion (purdah) is an important feature. Muslim women also report low market participation and low freedom of choice. However, many of the societal and family such as dowry are much weaker among Muslims. As a result, the sex ratio at birth and child survival in India has less pro-male bias among Muslims than Hindus³⁷.

Psychological patterns of individual women: An understanding of the psychological patterns of the women themselves is very critical in identifying the women empowerment dynamics. It is important to check if the will to liberate (from psychological conditionings) and thereby to empower does exist among the women. Miller³⁸ proposed that women's psychological patterns are fundamentally different from that of the men. The study observes that women place special emphasis on building and maintaining connections with others. Women are able to appreciate their worth when their actions arise out of connection with others and lead back into, not away from, connections. The experience of psychological connection is based on empathy and mutuality in relationships. Connection is experienced as a feeling of mutual presence and joining in a relational process. The "Relationship" develops a new, unique and always changing existence that can be described, experienced and nurtured.

For maintaining the relationship, women begin to change themselves when they feel that mutuality may not be achieved. Miller³⁸ described this as basic relational paradox. Making similar observations. Stiver³⁹ discussed that women

turn to substances to alter themselves to adapt to the disconnections within the family, thus giving the illusion of being in relationship when one is not or is only partially in relationship.

The above points lead to the fact that women psychology places more relevance to other's happiness as compared to their own happiness. Such thinking followed by similar behaviour is not natural for any human. Therefore, the psychological patterns of the women appear to be caused or conditioned through a long-term politics of conditioning. Over the ages, woman has been made to believe that after marriage she is dependent on her husband. Sati paratha is one prime example of this, where after the death of husband wife has to accompany him on his funeral pyre and be burnt alive. The cultural conditioning specifically in Asian countries where woman has to shift to husband's house after marriage has a deep impact on her psychological pattern of thinking in making her believe that she does not belong to family where she is born and treated as the wealth of others (Paraya dhan). Further, aforesaid gender roles that define woman has to nurture the kids and take care of all household work has significantly conditioned her to find her worth through others no matter anyone is bothered about her. The traditional system of dowry can be treated as politics to condition the family of a daughter to follow the rule with an understanding that the worth of women in family is assessed through the amount of dowry she bought at the time of marriage.

Over the years, these factors have essentially conditioned the psychology of women in a way that they accept being deprived of empowerment with a smile and do not really long for being empowered. The psychology of women, conditioned in this way, forms the base for the behaviour of women at large as also for them to accept the male-dominated patterns without questioning.

Indicators of women empowerment: All these societal patterns helped establish gender biases in the psychology of society, family and women themselves. These psychological factors act as major determinants of the level of women empowerment. It is important to study the indicators of women empowerment as discussed in the light of these three determinants. This study helps establish that the indicators are impacted by the determinants.

Education: As discussed in this study also, education is a very significant indicator that not only by itself, impacts women empowerment, but also leaves an impact on most of the other variables. On the other hand, access to educational facilities

depends largely on the psychology of the society, the family and the woman herself. Education is, without doubt an indicator of women empowerment. Also, it appears to be a determinant of women empowerment. However, this study proposes that education is by itself, determined by the psychological patterns of the society, family and the woman herself. Therefore, the study of education as a variable is not restricted to the education of women alone, but that of the whole family, or for that matter, of the society as a whole.

Women's access to education has remained a function of the way society, family and the woman herself think about it. In less developed and developing countries where the spread of education to society has not yet reached the desired level, women are still restricted from educational facilities. For example, in rural India, women hardly had an access to educational facilities till eighties. It was only after the spread of education to society at large, which resulted in change in the psychological patterns of the society, that the society started realizing the importance of women education in shaping-up the social systems. This paved the way for women education gaining strength.

The education level of the family is even more critical for the spread of educational facilities among women. Till the time that the family was not educated enough, it was thought that sending girls out for education may lead to the exploitation of the girls, which may in turn cause embarrassment for the family. Again, it was only with the spread of education among masses that the psychological dimensions of the families started changing for the better. With these changed psychology dimensions, the families started thinking logically and understanding that providing access to educational facilities helps solve problems rather than causing those. Even today, in most parts of the world, the decision to send or not to send a girl child to School/College/University is taken differently at the level of different families depending upon their own levels of education.

Most importantly, education of women plays a lead role in shaping their psychology and helping spread or restrict provision of educational facilities to themselves as also to the younger females in their families.

The impact of education on other variables discussed in this study needs to be studied. First, the ability to make economic contribution is dependent mainly on the education level of the woman. In general, women with higher and more qualitative education are capable of making greater economic contribution to the family.

While the problematic situation in psychology of society, family and the women has its roots in the limited spread of education in older times; its solution has also got to emerge from education only. The spread of education, which is not to be confused with schooling alone can help relieve the psychology from perceptions and base it on reality. Therefore, education as an indicator of women empowerment gains all the more relevance.

Educational freedom: Educational freedom is an important indicator of women empowerment. Again, this indicator is also determined largely by the psychological patterns of the society, family and the woman herself. Besides, this is also impacted by the education level of the three as discussed in this study.

Though education opportunities are available to women in the present era, the freedom to take educational decisions oneself can still not be taken for granted. These decisions are still largely driven by the public perception and social pressure, family opinions and perception levels of the woman under reference. The factor of women not being allowed to stay outside for long hours, even if the education needs it, augurs from the social pressure. As a result, the families accept such pressure and decide to dictate rather than leave to themselves the decision regarding field of education of the girls.

Not only does the social pressure play a role in shaping the family psychology, it also shapes the psychology of the woman concerned. So much so that the females start fearing from being exploited on staying outside for longer hours. As a result, they sacrifice their freedom in this fear and go with the safer disciplines. This, of course, prevents the educational freedom of women.

This trend is continuing despite the fact that women of the modern era are more connected than ever, as also the fact that their families are more educated than before. This raises the concern that the education of families has not made them free from the perceptual biases prevalent in the society.

Economic contribution: The spread of formal education is leading the women of modern times to contribute economically towards the family. This is leading to the economic well-being of their families.

The results of economic contribution are not similar in all the cases. There are varied results depending upon the three determinants, i.e., psychological patterns of the society, family and women themselves. In the families that are not driven by the typical social perceptions, women continue to enjoy

enough empowerment irrespective of their economic contribution to the family. In families with limited reach to education, women have still not been able to enjoy the empowerment even despite making economic contribution. In still other families, empowerment level is directly tied to the economic contribution to the family.

Economic contribution by women can also be seen as arising out of compulsion of nuclear families where the earnings of one member cannot suffice at all. Depending upon the three psychological patterns as above, the economic contribution from women has been found to result in, (a) Domestic work being outsourced, (b) Male members of the family starting to contribute more towards the domestic work as a gesture of returning favours to women starting to contribute economically and (c) Women performing household responsibilities in addition to the economic contribution. The first two cases may indicate reduced role of women in household management as compared to the earlier scenario. The third scenario is even more miserable where the responsibility of economic contribution comes as an additional burden to the women while they continue to be responsible for the entire household work. In such situations, economic contribution cannot be seen as an indicator of women empowerment at all. Rather, this happens to be a demonstration of women exploitation where they are supposed to work tirelessly in professional careers as well as household.

Thus, the economic contribution of women has a clear impact of the determinants as also of the other indicators of women empowerment. Hence, the economic contribution as an indicator cannot be looked at in isolation at all.

Economic freedom: Economic freedom (knowing where to spend) is not naturally tied to economic contribution towards the family. The women contributing economically towards the family are not necessarily able to attain economic freedom. It depends largely on the psychology of the family, which in turn, stems from the psychology of the society. It is also dependent upon the woman in question as freedom, at times, is to be attained oneself.

Economic freedom of women can broadly be classified into three types. One, there are women who are enjoying economic freedom to spend their earnings by their own choice. Two, there are also women who don't have any freedom to take a call on where to spend their earnings. Three, there are also women who enjoy freedom to spend even if they don't contribute economically to their families.

In which of the above categories does a woman fall under, is a function of other factors that the freedom itself. In

this way, economic freedom is indeed dependent upon some other factors. For understanding these factors, a look at the determinants of women empowerment and the other indicators may help.

Among the determinants, psychological patterns of the family prominently impact the economic freedom. The category under which a woman falls, is largely determined by the psychological patterns of the family, which, as discussed earlier in this study is not independent of the societal and women psychology.

Education has got the potential to undo conventional reservations at all the levels. It can also help eliminate the psychological drawbacks hindering economic freedom and thereby women empowerment. Hence, economic freedom is related with education as well.

Household management and decision-making: The roles of household and outside world are equally important to run the family system. These roles, in total, are to be performed by male and female members of the family taken together. The division of these roles among male and female members could have been done on the basis of biological structure of these. Historically, however, the domestic work related roles were left for the women while outside roles were taken by the men. Worse is the fact that though the household related works were done by the women, the decision-making in those matters is not necessarily with them. The household-related decisions were largely taken by the male members, while the 'Doing' part is with the women. Society has evolved greatly over the centuries. However, the roles still remain to be historical only. The major reason behind this is again in the form of family psychology, which is determined largely by the social psychology.

Particularly in the modern and post-modern era, it is required to share both the works given the increasing resource requirements and time constraints and this can only happen if the society and the families are able to get rid of their typical mindset.

On the other hand, it has also been observed that after having been assigned only the household work for so long, some women have started retaliating and totally refusing the household work. In doing so, they have been confusing 'Household work' with 'Household management'. While household work includes doing the domestic jobs at home, household management also includes managing the relations of the family. Managing the relations comes naturally to the women because of them being emotional enough to understand and fulfil the same. However, obsession with so-called education and the willingness to retaliate has led to

creation of the complex to refuse household management also in the name of household work. This is clearly a result of the pressure created by social and family dynamics over the years and also by the limited understanding at the level of the women in question. Also, education is the only way to undo this complex.

Perceived status within the household: Perceived status of women in the household also indicates the level of women empowerment. The perception of women's status has also travelled through the social patterns that are the reflection of societal psychology. Also, this perception has got rooted deeply due to the family psychology about women. Familie's opinion about giving women enough space and rights is not similar all across. This may broadly be categorized into three types.

First, there are families where women enjoy equal rights whatever the case may be. Such families are indeed the civilized and advanced ones. Whatever be the formal education levels of such families, their lifestyles demonstrate the real education. Second, there are families where women do not enjoy any freedom, rights or space at all irrespective of the other indicators, e.g., economic contribution towards the family. These are the families where male-dominated psychology has got rooted very deeply. Thirdly, there are families where perceived status within the household is closely tied with other indicators such as education level and economic contribution being made by the women. In such families, the women who contribute more enjoy being viewed as with higher status and vice-versa.

Not merely does the society and family keep perceptions about the status of women, women themselves are also found to be perceiving the same about themselves. Due to less economic value attached to the household management, women dealing mainly with household management perceive themselves to have lower status as compared to other men and women making economic contribution towards the family. In this way, the perceived status of women within the household is also dependent mainly on the determinants.

Health: The concern about health of the family is dependent largely upon the psychology and thinking of the society, family and women (themselves). Historically, due to their greater contribution towards the economic well-being of the family, health of the men has got greater attention. This had largely been accepted as an unwritten law by the society, families and the women. Undoing this thinking has been a real challenge in all ages. Over the years with the women starting to make greater economic contributions towards the families,

women's health has started gaining more attention. However, there are still societies and families that have not started considering the health of women to be as important as that of men. This is despite the fact that women are neither less educated than men nor are they making any less economic contribution towards the family. Even more concerning is the fact that priority towards health of male members has been rooted very deeply in the female psychology too. This is primarily the reason why at the younger age, an average woman considers her own health as less important than her father and brothers; at somewhat higher age, less important than her husband; at further higher age, less important than her male kid(s). The only reason for this is the psychological patterns of women, families and the society.

DISCUSSION

So far, literature^{25,27,30} seems to be treating determinants of women empowerment as similar to the indicators of the same. However, a thorough introspection coupled with focussed discussion suggests that the indicators of women empowerment as presented by the literature are not the independent variables by themselves. The indicators, rather, are themselves impacted by some other independent variables in the form of psychological patterns of the society, family and the women. The model presented in this study covers the issue of women empowerment at three levels. At the first level, the model enlists the determinants of women empowerment, while the indicators of women empowerment are discussed at the second level and the outcome (in the form of women empowerment) at the third level. The model portrays that the three determinants of women empowerment are related to the psychological patterns, i.e., psychological patterns of society, family and woman. The psychology of woman is shaped by that of society and family. The study highlights the conditioning of women psychology as a planned outcome. It is argued that the thinking of society towards women has, since ages, been biased. Mythological references of Draupadi, Gandhari and Sita are prominent in this regard. At the end of the family, the study largely agrees with the views put out by Anderson and Eswaran²⁷, Ebenstein³¹, Ramakrishnan *et al.*³², Mandelbaum³³ and Rao³⁵. Similarly, at the level of individual women, the findings of the study are in agreement with Miller³⁸ and Stiver³⁹. Seven indicators of women empowerment are also presented in the model. These range from economic indicators to family and individual indicators. The study argues that these indicators are pointers to the level of women empowerment in a society.

The major contribution of the study vis-à-vis the literature already available in the field, is that of presenting the indicators of women empowerment as different than its determinants. This study has not been touched upon by most of the literature already existing.

CONCLUSION

This study brings out that indicators of women empowerment are not actually the determinants of women empowerment. Determinants of women empowerment drive the indicators of women empowerment. In order to move towards the world of empowered women, the study highlights some critical points. Mobility will help women to explore the world and expand their horizons of knowledge while financial dependence will embolden them to take decisions on their own. Learning self-defence will enable the women to protect themselves. Making motherhood a choice, rather than a compulsion will give women the right to decide whether and when does she want to have a child and when. Being a mother brings in drastic changes in the life of a woman and she should plan it ahead. Women also need take initiative to discourage their parents from giving dowry. Detailing out the psychological patterns as major cause of the current state of women is the biggest contribution of this study.

SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

- So far, the literature about women empowerment has not distinguished between indicators and determinants of women empowerment
- There is a need to understand the determinants of women empowerment as different from the indicators. While the determinants are the real factors that may help facilitate women empowerment, the indicators are merely the points that indicate the level of women empowerment
- This study makes an important contribution by clearly distinguishing between the indicators and determinants of women empowerment

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