

Investigating Impact of Women Empowerment on Self-Esteem of Women

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Abstract: *The present study explores women's empowerment and its impact on the self-esteem of women through a review of literature. It highlights the key factors that contribute to the low self-esteem of women. It allows an in-depth understanding of the role of women in decision making and the other dimensions of life. In this patriarchal society women face various social constraints and inequalities in different arenas. The study revolves around the various policies and programs that exist for women empowerment. It also determines how the various inequalities lead to reduced self-esteem and negatively affected self-worth.*

Keywords: Women empowerment, self-esteem, role, self-worth, inequalities, patriarchal society

1. Introduction

Women empowerment opportunities refer to the various initiatives, programmes, plans and policies that aim to improve the overall well-being of women in all the sectors of their life. These opportunities help women gain a greater control over their life, make informed choices for themselves and achieve equality in the society. These initiatives range from education to other sectors like profession, healthcare, financial independence and protection and legal empowerment.

Women's self-esteem refers to how women perceive themselves and their self-worth. It can also be explained as their confidence levels in decision making and navigating challenges. Good levels of self-esteem can lead to a positive mental health, reduced stress and improved resilience.

The self-esteem of women might be low due to various reasons such as certain beauty standards set by the society, lack of financial independence, patriarchal society, not receiving enough education which leads to lack of awareness of rights of a person, experiences of trauma and abuse that have not been addressed and lack of support from family and friends.

In India, woman empowerment initiatives have increased in the last few years. These initiatives have emerged with the goal of achieving gender equality and social justice. In the past few years different government policies as well as programmes led by various organizations have also contributed to uplift women and providing them various ways to challenge the social norms, economic barriers and the patriarchal structure of the society.

The goal of these programmes and policies is not just providing them equality but also raising their self-esteem which further plays a significant role in shaping the woman's mental health, increasing their level of confidence and allowing them to work in wider arenas of professional workplaces. In a country like India where women often face problems like limited access to education, jobs and even healthcare such initiatives provide the women with an opportunity to take stand for themselves and overcome these barriers.

Reviewing the ancient literature texts allows us to understand how far women have come. In earlier times women were exposed to much more amounts of torture and abuses (during times of war etc.). In today's world as well, many women are fighting for their rights and it is not like all of the women's issues have been resolved. Rather over time the government and other organizations have come up with various policies and women empowerment programmes that have significantly allowed the improvement of women's lives. These women empowerment initiatives are required because of the following reasons:

- Women are a significant part of the population and hence add immense value in Indian economy.
- Empowering to understand women's rights can allow the woman to seek more education and support her family by being one of the earning members. This could further help in eradication of poverty.
- Empowering women can also decrease the impact of patriarchy on the society.

A few of the government schemes empowering women in 2025 include Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY), Drone Didi Scheme, Mission Indradhanush, Mudra Yojana, Standup India Mission etc. Sukanya Samridhi Yojana is one of the schemes that aims to improve sex ratio by making sure to provide education for girls. The Drone Didi scheme is another such scheme that aims to train 15,000 women and allow them to become drone pilots. These women can further perform various activities such as delivering medicines and groceries using drone. Mission Indradhanush is a scheme that involves proper immunisation of pregnant women and children. The Mudra Yojana scheme provides loans of up to 20 Lakhs for free with a focus of providing loans to women-led enterprises. The Stand-Up India scheme is also similar which provides loans to women entrepreneurs in need of investment.

The government also provides a women's helpline where women can contact in times of need. These helplines are available 24x7 and address various concerns of women including domestic violence and abuse. These initiatives mostly target women from backward or poor sections of the society.

Employment serves as a resource for boosting women's confidence and self-esteem leading to a sense of

psychological well-being as well as economic security. These initiatives can be extremely helpful for the women to seek employment.

2. Literature Review

Kumar (2018) discussed some of the major international studies followed by other studies in India. The study used literature review as its major methodology. Moser (1989) focuses on social-development interrelationships, gender policy formulation and the application of gender strategy and activities. Shield's study offered a structure for examining empowerment from both a theoretical and a realistic standpoint with an emphasis on the understanding of women as to the nature of empowerment. Barkat (2021) said that while women as mothers are highly respected on an individual basis, the advancement of women as a consciousness-building mechanism leading to greater involvement in decision-making and influence over one's own life remains uncertain. The works of Duflo and Chattopadhyay (2001) contribute to the understanding of the advancement of women in India. They observed that if the chief of the village was a woman there were more chances for the women of the village to take part in policy making. Kishore and Gupta (2009) conducted research which displayed that ordinary women in India are powerless in contrast with men and that their empowerment over time has improved. Therefore, the study examines different women empowerment metrics through data from different sources. It was found from research that the influence and free movement of women in the household decision-making process differ considerably with age, schooling and employment.

Reshi and Sudha (2022), aims to provide an overview of the concept of women empowerment, it's historical evolution and its importance in achieving sustainable development goals through literature review. Empowering women can be achieved in several key areas including education, employment, political participation and health. In education, providing girls with equal access to education and ensuring that they stay in school is crucial for their empowerment. In employment, promoting gender equality in the workplace and providing women with equal pay and opportunities for career advancement is essential. In political participation, ensuring women's participation in decision-making processes and promoting their representation in elected bodies is vital. In health, ensuring women's access to quality healthcare services, including reproductive health services is crucial for their empowerment. Governments, NGOs and the private sector all have a crucial role to play in promoting women empowerment. Governments can form and implement various plans and programmes that would possibly promote gender equality, laws which would protect women from getting their rights violated etc. The private sector can also promote gender equality by providing equal pay and opportunities to both the gender roles. Hence, women empowerment is an ongoing process and structural and cultural barriers are required to be removed which prevent women from achieving their full potential. (Reshi & Sudha, 2022)

Bhuvakar S. (2022) aimed to compare the self-esteem and quality of life of working and non-working women. The samples consisted of 50 married working and 50 non – working women of the age range of 25 – 45 years, with educational qualification of Graduates and above, by administering self – esteem scale and quality of life scale questionnaires. Self-esteem is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude toward the self which encompasses beliefs like "I am competent", "I am worthy" which is the most basic need all of us have that is to have a sense of personal worth. Quality of Life relates to the description and evaluation of the nature or conditions of life of people in a certain country or region. From the study it was revealed that the working women and non – working women differ significantly on quality of life. The working women were significantly higher on quality of life than non – working women. Results reveal that significant positive correlation exist between self – esteem and quality of life. According to the result 's higher self-esteem figures, the working women are felt to be confident, organized and practical. Hence, it can also be said that women with high self-esteem would have better mental health compared to women with low self-esteem.

James (2022) mentions that women empowerment can only be achieved if from the very basic stage we nurture our children without any gender bias during their developmental stage by providing appropriate training, education, awareness, building self-confidence to women and girls, also providing them free reign to expand their choices, strengthen their voices and transforming power to claim their true right in the society, community and in their own lives. The impediments and imbalance that women and girls experience frequently arise as they do not have control over their own lives and futures and are mainly due to gender inequalities in power relations. Empowerment on the other hand means the ability to do whatever a person wishes to do. It provides power to people which they can utilize in making important decisions according to their own lives in society and in community. The study mentions the different steps taken by the Indian government including 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao', 'Mahila Shakti Kendra', 'Working women hostel' etc. These schemes aim to educate people against gender bias, provide improved welfare services for girls and women, empower rural women and ensure safety/security for women. In the school education system, various measures and efforts have been implemented like National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 and flagship programme like Samagra Shiksha and later Right to Education Act (RTE). Hence, the study mentions that even though a lot of efforts are being put to reduce gender gap but in order to truly achieve it the children are required to be nurtured without any gender bias during their developmental stage by providing appropriate training, education and awareness.

Stevenson and Allen (2017) aimed to determine whether self-compassion and women empowerment are positively related. For the study 205 women were recruited from a pool of undergraduate students from a university in USA. An online survey system was used to collect data from the participants. The participants were also asked to write about fights in terms of self-compassion as well as in general terms. Empowerment and perceptions of the fight were assessed as dependent measures. A positive relationship was found between self-

compassion and empowerment. Hence, it can be said that self-compassion and empowerment are strongly related. Thus, empowerment increases more in women who are compassionate towards themselves.

Vizheh et al. (2021) aimed to critically evaluate and understand measurement properties of women empowerment scales in sexual and reproductive health of women. A systematic literature review was done without a time limit. The quality assessment was performed through a rating scale. The most common domains investigated were decision-making, freedom of coercion, and communication with the partner. Four studies did not use any conceptual framework. Six criteria were applied to scoring the scales, by which nine of fifteen articles were rated as medium quality, two rated as poor quality, and four rated as high quality. Most scales assessed various types of validity and internal consistency for the reliability. Applying a theoretical framework, more rigorous validation of scales and assessing the various dimensions of women empowerment in diverse contexts and different levels, namely structural agency, are needed to develop effective and representing scales.

Gupta. N (2020) study attempts to convey a clear perception of the welfare approach, idea of women's agency, autonomy and empowerment. The main aim of the study is to evaluate the different theories and approaches that are related to women. The study also discusses gender inequality and its implications on the society. The different approaches that the study mentions in its detailed review of literature includes the welfare approach, developmental approach, equity approach, anti-poverty approach, empowerment approach and efficiency approach.

The welfare approach is mentioned as deep seated in the social welfare model and addresses women in their roles of wives and mothers only while the policies of women are restricted. The developmental approach also sees women as merely recipients of welfare and suitable for the roles of housewives, household heads and mothers. On the other hand, it mentions men as producers. The equity approach is based on equal distribution of benefits and advancements between both men and women. It mentions that women should be able to access marketplaces and workplaces more efficiently and without worrying about anything. The anti-poverty approach focuses on women with low income and the goal of poverty reduction. This approach was mainly designed to boost women's employment and income. The efficiency approach came with the idea that increased income of women could also bring equity among the males and females. This approach mainly considers women as input factor for the economy. The empowerment approach is relatively new and has become a crucial aspect for many feminists and thinkers. The study also reconceptualises autonomy and agency and concludes that all of the theories and approaches are equally important and none of them should be ignored. (Gupta. N, 2020)

Cullen et al. (2024) studies the impact of women empowerment on male back-lash through a series of experiments. In the stage 1 of the study, they developed a new lab in the field to study the back-lash. In this stage men were partnered with anonymous women in the local areas. Then it was checked if the men were willing to punish women at the

cost of themselves under different set of conditions. It was found that men who were informed that their partner participated in an empowerment program were twice as likely to reduce their female partner's income compared with the control; this was termed as retaliation 'backlash'. In the stage two of the study the authors try to understand why this backlash tends to occur. Several theories developed in association with household bargaining models were used to understand male backlash. First comes the status inconsistency theory according to which men feel like their status has been threatened. They use violence or any other form of action to redress the inconsistency. The theories on expressive and instrumental violence both suggest that men may act out in response to women gaining control over resources. (Eswaran and Malhotra, 2011)

To study social image concerns they conducted an additional experiment referred to as 'the main decision maker'. Their results supported that: 18% of men were willing to pay to hide from others that their household participated in a female empowerment program. In summary, norms about the social appropriateness of punishing empowered females was found to be correlated with willingness to punish women. Cullen et al. also find suggestive evidence that female empowerment that increases women's independence has a higher rate of backlash. Finally, evidence of low perceived support for female empowerment among their peers was observed.

Pahwa (2018) aimed to find the relationship between livelihood engagement of women and their empowerment through it. To carry out the study, the parameters to measure empowerment were identified and then the relationship between them was observed. Quantitative research was conducted with a sample of 50 respondents. These 50 respondents were collected for the study from 4 different communities namely Timarpur, Seelampur, Jahangirpuri and Yousufpur.

It was observed that women in their 60s were also working and when asked about the reason behind it, one of them said that she had one child to look after and others who were married got separated with their families. The analysis of the data collected made it very clear that empowerment should not be measured in terms of economics and finances only, the other domains matter as well. The respondents even though were empowered and believed in having decision making rights and equal say in the family, however, at the same time many admitted and submitted at the patriarchal norms that men are not supposed to do household chores. The majority of respondents were reluctant to be a group leader, and also the response to participate in struggle of fellow women was also very low. The data collected answered the research question that being engaged in livelihood activities may not possibly lead to empowerment of women. Empowerment is a process which is achieved gradually. (Pahwa, 2018)

Emirza and Bilgili (2024) conducted experimental research to assess the impact of a mindfulness-based empowerment program applied to women who had experienced violence on their levels of self-compassion, self-esteem and coping with stress. Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental group. The data was collected using the Introductory Information Form, Self-Compassion Scale,

Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and Coping Styles Scale. In the study, a statistically significant difference in self-compassion was found between the experimental and control groups of women exposed to violence who underwent MBEP. Women who had experienced violence often tend to blame themselves in the aftermath of the violent experience. The research found a statistically significant difference in self-esteem between experimental and control groups of women exposed to violence who underwent the MBEP. Women who had been exposed to violence for an extended period may perceive themselves as worthless and harbour feelings of deserving the violence. Diminished self-esteem is associated with various mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. Hence, it was concluded that the program contributes to women's ability to cope with the adverse effects of the violence they have experienced, enhance their problem-solving skills and learn solution-focused coping skills.

3. Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the impact of women empowerment on the self-esteem of women. Through literature review it was examined how the different dimensions of empowerment contribute to the women's sense of self-worth. Women can be empowered in the different dimensions of life including education, health, employment and political participation. Empowering women can not only lead to improvement in economy but overall development. In the current patriarchal society, there are various norms and rules that women seem to abide by without even recognising the injustice that they face. There are various women empowerment programmes which have been there in India for quite some time now with the goal of helping women recognise their potential and the injustice that they might be facing. Various programmes such as 'Beti Bachao; Beti Padhao' help women acquire education so that they recognise any form of injustice happening to them and are capable of becoming financially independent in the future. It was also observed that working women and non-working women had a significant difference in their self-esteem levels where working women seemed to have higher self-esteem while non-working women had a much lower self-esteem. Thus, it was observed that empowering women to go through proper education and allowing them equal access to workplaces and marketplaces significantly boosts self-esteem. One of the problems that women seem to face in the workplace is inequality which could again lead to lower self-esteem. It is also seen that women empowerment is something that is required to be nurtured since childhood itself in terms of education, awareness appropriate training and building confidence among young girls. Various schemes such as 'Mahila Shakti Kendra' aim to educate people about women empowerment and how times have changed. Various NGOs and other government organisations also tend to educate people related to gender equality and how it can lead to the overall development of people as well as the country. Women who are empowered also seem to have higher self-compassion than women who have feelings of 'I am unworthy'. Empowered women also seemed to take their own decisions regarding marriage and any sexual participation. These women also tend to believe in consent. The various approaches including welfare approach, equity approach, empowerment approach and efficiency approach seem to be

important and changing over time. These approaches of the social welfare model addresses women with various roles and their current condition. Women empowerment also seems to cause some males to feel threatened and not manly enough which could possibly lead to violence or any other form of inappropriate action on the part of these men. Thus, empowerment should not be measured only in terms of finances and economics. Rather, the other domains such as household chores, parenting responsibilities etc are also domains that are required to be considered. It was also seen that mindfulness-based empowerment programmes were helpful in improving women's ability to cope with violence and take the right decisions for themselves. It could possibly increase self-compassion as well as self-esteem in women and help them build proper coping mechanisms to deal with difficult situations such as violence and abuse. Without these empowerment programmes women would perhaps feel helpless and worthless and not deserving of anything. The might harbour feelings of deserving the violence which would be very unhealthy. Hence, it can be said that women empowerment has a positive influence on the self-esteem of women. It impacts self-esteem of the women significantly and can further nurture self-compassion in the women as well.

4. Conclusion

The review of literature emphasizes women's empowerment and how it influences the self-esteem of women. While the different studies highlight progress over the years but it also reveals various challenges that seem to persist as well such as unequal power dynamics and other social constraints. The study suggests that various factors and dimensions of life are responsible for a women's empowerment including education, employment, leadership roles etc. It also shows how empowered women tend to have higher self-esteem and self-compassion. Hence, it can be said that women empowerment positively impacts the self-esteem of women.

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