

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN BANGLADESH: A STUDY

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Abstract

Bangladesh is an over populated developing country. But it is a small country. Shailkupa Pouroshova is in south western Bangladesh. It is a part of the Jhenaidah District. This study was based on the primary data. Statistical tools such as percentage, frequency table, arithmetic mean and chi- square statistic were applied for analyzing data. The study reveals that the average income of the women is 4119.26 taka per month. Only 2% of the women are illiterate. 40% of the women are housewife. They are dependent on their husbands for economical purposes. Very poor number (2%) of the respondents (women) is taking decision by her. Only 34% respondents reported that attitude of the male members of the study area was negative to do their politics. In true sense empowerment of women is still a long distance. This paper will help the Govt. NGOs and International Organizations to improve the empowerment of women. This paper draws some recommendations.

Key words: Empowerment, Education, Occupation, Decision, Income.

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Introduction

Empowerment of the women is a well discussed issue all over the world in recent time. Empowerment can ensure the salvation and liberty of the women in true sense. It can reduce the dependency of the women. Empowerment ensures the social honour and participation of the women in the development activities. Participation of the women in development is essential for the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. But women are neglected in almost all the spheres of their life. And the need for empowerment of women in Bangladesh arises from this harsh social scenario. In a word, we need to ensure women's empowerment in order to hasten the overall development of the country. However, in recent years many steps have been taken so as to increase the participation of women in the political system. The government has passed many laws so as to empower the women. These rules have empowered them socially, legally, economically and politically. Now women have successfully challenged social and religious prejudices. They are now playing a vital role in various sectors in the public arena.

Actually if we want to ensure women empowerment, we should ensure women education. In recent years, female school enrollment has improved but unfortunately our predominant patriarchal system doesn't provide enough chances for women to have higher education even if they wish. Girls should be motivated to take up higher education. Employment opportunities have been stronger for women than for men in the last decade. Women in decision making level are increasing day by day. True empowerment will only be reached when women take part actively in the decision making process of our country. Mainstreaming and women empowerment is central to human development which will bring our national development too. Empowerment of women could only be achieved if their education and employment are improved. We are hopeful education and employment of women in Bangladesh are developing gradually.

Literature Review

(BBS, 2009) According to WMS-2009, the literacy rate of male was observed 58.9% while female literacy rate was 50.4%. It was also found that 70.7% reported that the decision is taken by the husband and wife jointly, 20.1% reported that it is done by husband and 9.2% reported that it is done by wife. According to Monitoring of Employment (Labor Force) Survey (MES)-2009, Employment rate for male was 94.9% and female was 92.5% at the national level. So the employment rate of male was higher than the rate of female. Unemployment rate for male

was 4.3% and female was 7.5% at the national level. So the unemployment rate of female was higher than the rate of male.

(Begum, Zaman and Khan, 2004) expressed their views on Role of NGOs in Rural Poverty Eradication of Bangladesh. They found that in 2003 42.3% of the people living in villages are poor while 18.7% are termed ultra poor. They also found that the NGOs have taken some significant initiatives to handle the poverty situation in Bangladesh like humanitarian progress and structural development of organizations for rural poor, Employment Generation, Organizing Groups and Participation of the Beneficiaries, Micro Credit, Targeting Poor Rural Women as Beneficiary, Creating Facilities for Poor to Enjoy Government owned Khas Land and Properties, Health, Nutrition and Hygiene, Relief and Rehabilitation Projects, Informal and Non-formal Education, Innovating Appropriate Technology for small and seasonal Farmers. Further they saw that till December 2001, PKSF has provided loans to several eligible NGOs, 104089 crore taka for micro credit scheme. Almost 96% of the credit facility holders of NGOs were women in 1995. Swanirvar Bangladesh has 71% women as credit holder. Till the year 2001, 99% of total beneficiaries of BRAC were women. PKSF has 86.43% women credit holders. ASA had 93.41% women credit holders till 1998. Grameen Bank also provided loans. Most of them were women. As a whole NGOs placed women to eradicate rural poverty. In this study they draw some recommendations like: expansion of loan amount, expansion of government-NGO partnership activities, knowledge sharing, ensuring accountability etc. need to be taken for the successful rural poverty eradication.

(Habib, 2008) discussed about Women's Entrepreneurship in Dhaka City: Push or Pull Factors in Bangladesh. In this study he draws some findings with recommendations. Women entrepreneurs can play a vital role in economic development. Now a day, a large number of women are coming into business sector but their number is not enough. A majority of the women entrepreneurs (80%) had no previous experience in business. 96% women who participated in this study were married. More than 70% women entrepreneurs commenced their business when their age was between 20 to 30 years. After age 30, the women who want to do something; their number is negligible. 28% women entrepreneurs have started their business for doing their desire type of task and 22% of them for money making. Most of the women are coming to be an entrepreneur for getting pull factors, and very negligible numbers of women have started their personal business for removing push factors. He draws some suggestions like Government initiative to

extend the credit limit, banking facilitation, providing training facilities by Government and NGOs, arranging annual fair and exhibition to encourage the women entrepreneurs etc.

(Hornby,2005) defined Empowerment, Literacy and Education. Empowerment means the empowerment of the individual. Empower means to give somebody more control over their own life or the situation they are in: the movement actively empowered women and gave them confidence in themselves.

Literacy means the ability to read and write: a campaign to promote adult literacy; basic literacy skills.

Usually Education is the subject of study that deals with how to teach: a college of Education. Education is a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools or colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills: Primary/elementary education, secondary education, further/higher /post secondary education, students in full-time education, adult education classes, a college/university education. Education is also the institutions or people involved in teaching and training: the Education Department.

(Peter and Mia, 2006) discussed about Women's Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation of Jamalpur district. In this study they showed that the number of population below poverty line income were 35.49% , 33.85% and 40.41% in the year 1996, 1997 and 1998 respectively and the income shortfalls from poverty line of individual respondents' household were 20%,17% and 17% in the respective years. The overall economic status of respondents, households improved 60%. The households achieved 53% improvement in their social status. The overall women's decision making power increased by about76%.In this study they put some suggestions like proper credit supervision, implementing informal education with training in income generating activities etc.

(Rashid, 2007) discussed about Socio- Economic Development of Ethnic Community of Rangpur and Dinajpur. The author observed that the major occupation of the ethnic people is agriculture. 60% of them have some land. 40 and 54 percent respectively in Rangpur and Dinajpur are land less. 96% of the homesteads are kutchha muddy structures. 2.2% are semi-pucca and 1.8% pucca. More than 54% of the ethnic people are illiterate. 77% of male and 81% of female of the school going age are enrolled in the primary school but only 22% of male and 18% of female are enrolled in the secondary level. They live in a very poor and unhygienic environment. They hardly call in a well-trained doctor. Most of them go to the Hekim, Quack and homeopath people.

4% of total Households use latrine. 4.5% of them (4% of total Households) have pucca or semi pucca latrines whereas the remaining people use muddy latrines. She suggested that government and non- government organizations need to come forward with action-oriented programs.

Rationality of the Study

women empowerment has remained a much researched and debated area .The arguments for women's empowerment is the first requisite for moving towards gender equality. Due to low status of women, approximately half of Bangladeshi population is left behind in darkness it is in this context this study is very necessary.

Objectives of the Study

The study was undertaken with a view to achieving the following objectives:

1. To investigate level of education of women.
2. To evaluate the income status of women.
3. To examine the empowerment of women.

Methodology

The study was based on one set of interview schedule designed in the light of the objectives of the study. The set of schedule was used for the married women. A total number of 50 married women of Shailkupa Pouroshova under Jhenaidah district were taken on a random basis as subjects for the present study. The data were collected during the period from 06 April to 13 May in 2011. Statistical tools such as percentage, frequency table, arithmetic mean and chi- square statistic were applied for analyzing data. Where $\chi^2 = \sum \frac{O - E}{E}$ with degrees of freedom (df) =N-1 Here N, is the number of classes or Groups .Further in this study analysis of data (results) is presented using the software Ms-word and Calculator.

Analysis and Findings

Table 1: Age wise distribution of the respondents

Age (in years)	No. of the respondents	%
16-20	2	4
21-25	7	14

26-30	9	18
31-35	9	18
36-40	11	22
41-45	8	16
46-50	4	8
Total	50	100

Source: Field Survey 2011

Table 1 indicates that the highest percentages (22%) of respondents are in the age group of 36 to 40 years. Only 18% are in age group of 31 to 35 years, again 18% are in the 26 to 30 years. Therefore, it is evidently clear that the young women are playing a dominating role for the empowerment of women.

Table 2 : Marital status of the respondents.

Particular	No of respondents	Percentage
Married	50	100%
Un married	00	00%
Total	50	100%

Source: Field Survey 2011

Table 2 reveals that 100% of respondents are married. It is clear from the table that unmarried women are not in a position to do the various types of works and restricted to go outside and undertake public activity (like interview) freely because women have to abide by the cultural and religions practices of the society. (Hossain and Matubber1998) found in their study that 100% of rural women entrepreneurs were married which is consistent with the present study. So it can be said that socio- cultural barrier restricts unmarried women to be involved in the development process.

Table 3 Size of the family of the respondents

children	No. of the respondents	Percentage	Average	χ^2	LS
0	06	12	1.84	24.88	p<.01
1	16	32			
2	17	34			
3	05	10			

4	03	6			
5	03	06			
Total	50	100			

Source: Field Survey 2011 [Here, DF=5]

Table 3 presents that the average number of children of the respondents is 1.84. The highest percentage (66%) of the respondents had children in between 1-2. 12% of the respondents had no children. Only 10% of the respondents had children 3, 6% of the respondents had children 4 and 6% of the respondents had children 5 respectively. So it can be said that it might be due to positive attitude of the respondents towards family planning (Matubber and Hossain 1998).

Table 4: Level of education of the respondents

Level of education	No of the respondents	%	χ^2	LS
Illiterate	1	2	25.04	p<.01
Literate	3	6		
Primary	5	10		
Secondary	15	30		
Higher Secondary	14	28		
Graduate	04	8		
Post Graduate	08	16		
Total	50	100		

Source: Field Survey 2011 [Here, DF=6]

Table 4 reveals that only 2% of the respondents are illiterate. The Table implies that only 16% of the respondents received education up to primary level. A good number (30%) of the respondents received education at the secondary level. Only 28% of the respondents received education at the higher secondary level. The rest 24% of the respondents received higher education (such as: graduate and post- graduate).

Table 5: Level of education of the respondent's husbands.

Level of education	No of the respondents	%	χ^2	LS
Illiterate	00	00	26.72	p<.01
Literate	05	10		

Primary	1	2		
Secondary	11	22		
Higher Secondary	09	18		
Graduate	08	16		
Post Graduate	16	32		
Total	50	100		

Source: Field Survey 2011 [Here, DF=6]

Table 5 presents that only 48% of the respondents' husbands received higher education (like Graduate, Post-graduate). The rest 52% had education levels varied from primary to higher secondary. There is no illiterate person.

This means (in Table 4 and 5) that women are in better position than their husbands in primary, secondary and higher secondary level. On the other hand, men are in better position than their wives in higher education (like Graduate and Post- graduate). Gender disparity remains in higher education very much (Rahman 2008). It was also found that as education level is higher, education gap between male and female is becoming more and more (Paul- majumder 2008). True empowerment and employment can only be achieved if women can ensure higher education.

Table 6: Occupations of the respondents

Occupation	No. of the respondents	Percentage
Service	18	36
Business/Trade	02	04
Housewife(Unemployed)	20	40
Poultry	01	02
Tailoring	03	06
Dairy	03	06
Fisheries	01	02
Small Industry	02	04
Total	50	100

Source: Field Survey 2011

Table 6 reveals that only 36% of the respondents are engaged in service. The highest percentage (40%) of the respondents is housewife. The rest 24% are engaged in self employment activities

like poultry, Tailoring, Dairy, Fisheries, Small industry and Business etc. Self employment can play an important role in reducing the unemployment of women (Hossain and Matubber 1998).

Table 7: Occupations of the respondent's husbands

Occupation	No. of the respondents	Percentage
Service	25	50
Agriculture	04	08
Rickshaw/Van Puller	01	02
Business/Trade	20	40
Total	50	100

Source: Field Survey 2011

Table 7 indicates that Majority(50%) of the respondents are engaged in services and the rest are engaged in self employment activities like Agriculture, Rickshaw/ Van puller and Business/ Trade etc.

If we compare between Table 6 and 7, we observe gender disparity remains between male and female in all occupation. Yet in all occupation and employment the position of male labor force is much higher than that of female (Abdullah 2008).

Table 8: Monthly income of the respondents.

Income Range	No of the respondents.	%	Average	χ^2	LS
No income	20	40	4119.26	49.32	p<.01
Up to TK. 2000	07	14			
2001-4000	05	10			
4001-6000	02	4			
6001-8000	02	4			
8001-10000	07	14			
10001-12000	04	8			
12001-14000	02	4			
14001-16000	01	2			
Total	50	100			

Source: Field Survey 2011

[Here, Degrees of Freedom (DF) =8]

Table 8 presents monthly income of the respondents. It is seen in the table that higher percentage (40%) of the respondents was no income. Only 14% of respondent's monthly income was TK. 2000 or less. Only 18% of respondent's monthly income was TK. 2001-8000. Only 22% of respondent's monthly income was TK 8001 -12000 and only 6% of the respondent's income ranged was TK. 12000-16000. Their average income was TK.4119.26 per month. This low income was not enough to meet their basic needs. Especially The respondents who have no income source are fully dependent on their husbands.

Table 9: Monthly Income of the respondent's husbands

Income Range	No. of the respondents	%	Average	χ^2	LS
3000-6000	17	34	9956/=	32.24	p<.01
6000-9000	05	10			
9000-12000	10	20			
12000-15000	05	10			
15000-18000	07	14			
18000-21000	05	10			
21000-24000	00	00			
24000-27000	01	02			
Total	50	100			

Source: Field Survey 2011

[Here, DF=7]

The results in Table 9 indicate the average income of the respondent's husbands was 9956 taka although the highest percentage (34%) of the respondent's husband's income was in between 3000-6000 taka. Only 10% of the respondent's husband's income ranged was TK. 6000-9000. Only 20% of the respondent's husband's income ranged was TK. 9000-12000. The rest 36% of the respondent's husband's income ranged was TK. 12000-27000.

Now if we compare Table 8 and 9, we observe income status of men is better than that of women. There is a difference between men and women monthly income. Only 6% of women monthly income was 12000-16000 taka, on the other hand, 36 %of men monthly income was 12000-27000 taka.

Empowerment of Women

Table 10: Family dependent of the income of the respondents

Particular	No. of the respondents	Percentage	χ^2	LS
Properly	05	10	9.04	p<.01
Roughly	13	26		
Some	12	24		
Not at all	20	40		
Total	50	100		

Source: Field Survey 2011 [Here, DF=3]

Table 10 shows that a good number (40%) of family is not dependent on the income of the respondents. It was also found that only 26% family is dependent roughly, 10% dependent properly and 24% dependent some, respectively. Therefore it is evidently clear that empowerment of women is achieving slowly.

Table 11: Taking decision for the family

Particular/Outcome	No. of the respondents	Percentage	χ^2	LS
Own	01	02	43.95	p<.01
Husband	11	22		
Together	38	76		
Total	50	100		

Source: Field Survey 2011 [Here, DF=2]

Table 11 reveals that very poor number (2%) of the respondents reported the decision for the family is taken by her. A poor number (22%) of the respondents stated that the decision for the family is taken by their husband. The highest percentage (76%) of the respondents told, the decision is taken by husband and wife together. All these are statistically significant. So it can be said that most of the women is dependent on their husband in terms of family decision directly or indirectly (Fathema and Rahman 2006).

Table 12: Equal opportunity for boys and girls in the family

Outcome	No. of the respondents	Percentage	χ^2	LS
Yes	43	86	25.92	p<.01
No	07	14		

Total	50	100		
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Source: Field Survey 2011 [Here, DF=1]

The results in the table 12 show that a significantly higher percentage (86%) of the respondents had equal opportunity for boys and girls in the family. It is a significant change in the society.

Table 13 Member of the club or social organization

Outcome	No. of the respondents	Percentage	χ^2	LS
Yes	05	10	32	p<.01
No	45	90		
Total	50	100		

Source: Field Survey 2011 [Here, DF=1]

Table 13 reveals that only 10% of the respondents are the member of the club or social organization .It was also found that majority (90%) of the respondents are not the member of the club or social organization.

Table 14: Protest any illegal action of the respondents husbands

Outcome	No. of the respondents	Percentage	χ^2	LS
Yes	40	80	18	p<.01
No	10	20		
Total	50	100		

Source: Field Survey 2011 [Here, DF=1]

Table 14 indicates that a significantly higher percentage (80%) of the respondents can protest any illegal action of their husbands. It was also found that only 20 % of the respondents replied in negative. So it can be said that empowerment of women is developing day by day.

Table 15: Voting independently of the respondent

Outcome	No. of the respondents	Percentage	χ^2	LS
Yes	50	100	50	p<.01
No	00	00		
Total	50	100		

Source: Field Survey 2011 [Here, DF=1]

The results in table 15 indicate that 100% of the respondents participated in vote independently. It is also a significant change in the society.

Table 16: Attitude of the male member of the study area for doing politics of the respondent

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Particular	No. of the respondents	%	χ^2	LS
Properly in favor	09	18	8.4	p<.01
Roughly in favor	18	36		
Some in favor	06	12		
Not at all	17	34		
Total	50	100		

Source: Field Survey 2011 [Here, DF=3]

Table 16 reveals that 36% respondents told attitude of the male members is roughly in favor for doing their politics, 34% answered negative, 18% told properly in favor and 12% told some in favor. Therefore it is evidently clear that empowerment of women is still a long distance.

Table 17: Society takes the income of women cordially

Outcome	No. of the respondents	Percentage	χ^2	LS
Yes	35	70	30.28	p<.01
No	08	16		
No Answer	07	14		
Total	50	100		

Source: Field Survey 2011 [Here, DF=2]

Table 17 reveals that majority (70%) of the respondents stated income is taken by society cordially. It was also found, 16% of the respondents stated that income of women is not taken by society cordially. Only 14% of the respondents did not give any answer.

Recommendations

On the basis of the above findings in this study, the following recommendations may be drawn.

1. Inspiring the female education (specially higher education) by various programs in the electronic media
2. Increasing the social security of the women
3. Increasing the participation of women in every sector of employment
4. Working for social mobilization
5. Change and implementation of laws.
6. Change of our mentality.
7. Ensuring participation of women in decision making.
8. Creating the women leadership

9. Protecting and preserving the rights of the women
10. Increasing the social awareness.

Conclusion

Bangladesh is an over populated developing country. It is striving hard to achieve a positive change of its economy. So we should include the women in the race of development. For this, we must make them educated. In this study, it was found that the average income of the respondents (married women) is 4119.26 taka while the respondent's husbands are 9956 taka. Only 2% of the respondents are illiterate. On the other hand, respondent's husbands are not illiterate. 24% of the respondents received higher education (such as: graduate and post- graduate).Whereas, 48% of the respondents husbands received higher education.40% of the respondents are housewife. They are unemployed. But all of the husbands of the respondents are employed or self- employed. It is a difference between them. It was also found that very poor number (2%) of the respondents is taking decision for the family by her. On the other hand, 22% of the respondents stated that the decision for the family is taken by their husband. A poor number (34%) of the respondents reported that attitude of the male members of the area was negative to do their politics. A good number (70%) of the respondents stated income of women is taken by society cordially. However; the socio- cultural practices are drawing limits to their opportunities in education, employment and participation in the overall development process. (Chowdhury1994) found despite growing rate in education and economic self reliance, Women could not attain freedom due mainly to religious misinterpretation and conservative social values. However, in recent years many steps have been taken by the Govt., NGOs and Civil society against these problems. For this the position of women is developing gradually. Good policy and commitment is needed to ensure the empowerment of the women in our country. Empowerment of the women can ensure the development of the women which will bring our national development too.

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