

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC VARIABLES AFFECTING
EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN NEPAL:
A STATISTICAL INVESTIGATION
(A CASE STUDY OF KANCHANPUR)**

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ABSTRACT

The idea of Women Empowerment came forward when the Third International Women's Conference at Nairobi in 1985 introduced and defined "women empowerment- as a redistribution of social power and control of resources in favor of Women" (Goswami, 2013). According to lexicon empower means to make or cause power, to give power or authority to someone, to provide ability or to enable. Hence meaning refer to power as given granted or permitted. The main point behind empowerment is that, it seeks to change society through a rearrangement of power. Empowerment is an active, multidimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. Power is not a commodity to be translated; nor alms to be given away. Power has to be acquired and once acquired; it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved. A women's power-her decision-making role and influence and control over resources is almost negligible in many households of the Mid and Far west regions of Nepal. Denmark and Norway are considered the happiest nation of the world because of the equal status enjoyed by the women and also by improved access and control of resources by women. The main objective of this study is to know the status of women's empowerment and their socio-economic status in Nepal in the background of various socio-economic and cultural variables.

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Women empowerment mostly depends upon their education and decision making. Factors affecting the empowerment of women are also shown in this paper. It also observed that women empowerment depends on their present age. This study has shown that education of women is the most important factor which affects the empowerment of women in the society.

Key words: Empowerment, socio-economic status, women welfare, gender justice, self-reliance, Nepal etc.

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Introduction:

"There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing." - **Swami Vivekananda**

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional process, which should enable woman or a group of women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life (Surekharao and Rajamanamma, 1999). Empowerment represents the ability of women to handle responsibilities, to envision a better future and to work to overcome the obstacles that confront them. Empowerment can be measured by using selective indicators, such as active contribution in the household, the workplace and the community. The United Nation Conference on population and development (ICPD) held at Cairo in 1994, brought to the fore of the population community the concept of women's empowerment. The ICPD had considered that the empowerment and autonomy of women helps to improve their political, social economic and health status. The ICPD's plan of action also stated that, improving the status of women also enhance their decision making capacity at all levels of life, especially in the area of sexuality and reproduction.

It consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making to enable them, to have greater ability to plan their lives, or to have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and free from shocks imposed on them by custom, belief and practice. Generally development with justice is expected to generate the forces that lead to empowerment of various sections of population in a country and to raise their status especially in case of women.

In the present century, the terms women empowerment, women welfare, gender justice have come to light in the social, economic and political development perspective of both developed and developing nations. Traditionally, women in almost every society have remained a second grade citizen. Hence, neither they are allowed to get themselves educated nor they are given legal rights in the property, government and in administration. “Empowerment comes from Women’s groups who seek to empower themselves through greater self-reliance. They have right to determine their own choices in life. They also seek to gain control and access to resources”. Empowerment is process, which helps people to gain control of their lives through raising awareness, taking action and working in order to exercise greater control. Empowerment is the feeling that activates the psychological energy to accomplish one’s goals (Indiresan, 1999). Women’s empowerment denotes the process of gaining power or developing one’s power or even to take or seize power. The concept of empowerment was introduced by women from south in International women’s conference in Nairobi 1985, as a counter project to the integration project for the advancement of women. The empowerment concept makes clear the political and economic gap between men and women. It aims at redistribution of social power and control over resources in favor of women based on development strategy. The World Bank suggested that empowerment of women is the key agent of sustainable development.

Women Empowerment

- Increase in self-esteem, individual and collective confidence;
- Increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness on health, nutrition reproductive rights, law and literacy;
- Change in roles and responsibility in family & community;
- Visible increase on decrease in violence on women and girls;
- Responses to, changes in social customs like child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows;
- Visible changes in women's participation level attending meeting, participating and demanding participation;
- Increase in bargaining and negotiating power at home, in community and the collective;
- Increase access to and ability to gather information;
- Formation of women collectives;
- Positive changes in social attitudes;

- Awareness and recognition of women's economic contribution within and outside the household;
- Women' decision-making over her work and income.

Women's empowerment perspective is a political project. The key factor is women's say in decision making process and participation in domestic as well as community power structure. Women empowerment is both the objective and the process of obtaining the objective. The Hard ward framework for women's empowerment entails five levels of gender equality namely: 1) Welfare 2) Access 3) Concretization 4) Participation and 5) Control. This framework covers social, economic, psychological and political dimensions. While welfare signifies social dimension, access to resources refers to economic dimension, concretization implies psychological and participation and control political dimension. Access denotes access to resources such as educational of critical awareness about the structural discrimination, exploitation and oppression in which one is placed. In the first instance it involves awareness generation among women about gender gaps in respect to material welfare, access to resources, participation in decision making process and control over resources. The second aspect of concretization involves sensitization that the gender gaps are not God given or natural. They are men made and hence subject to alteration. The third aspect is organizing women to achieve the goal of gender equality. Participation implies women's participation in decision making process within the family, community and society at large including political parties. Control implies power over their lives, labor, income and choices. Empowering women is prerequisite for creating a good nation as their thoughts and value system leads the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation moreover, there is a need to bring about total change.

Objectives:

- To study the status of empowerment of women in kanchanpur.
- To study the association between empowerment & various socio-economic characteristics of women.

Methodology:

This study is primarily based on the primary data. The primary information is collected from the field survey which was inducted field observation and individual interviews to the selected respondents with the help of structured questionnaires. A pre-tested questionnaire was prepared

in English (explain to women in Nepali or Local language) to obtain the information about them. Some of the questions are like; age of women, age at marriage, education, employment, income of the family, interaction with media, autonomy in decision making etc.

In this study the eligible respondents were 15-49 years of age of ever married women. The necessary household information was collected from the head of the household. The sample size for this study is 950. The study area for the proposed research work is Kanchanpur district of far-western development region of Nepal. The district comprises of 19 VDCs and one municipality (at the time of survey) and in total there are 190 wards in Kanchanpur. From each ward five households are selected at random. Finally one woman is taken from each household. In this way 950 women are selected for this study. The main factors that affect the empowerment of women are education, employment, income of family, autonomy in decision making, current age, caste, nature of family, interaction with media. Therefore on the basis these variables women empowerment in this study is divided into three categories viz. low medium and high.

Age-composition of the respondents

The age structure plays a significant role in demography whether it influences the values, roles, social mores, responsibilities, social relation and fundamental social hierarchy. In the study from the 950 sampled respondents, their ages were broadly grouped as 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44 and 45-49 years of age.

In the sampled population, 26.6 percent respondents were found in age group 25-29 years, where 19.2 percent respondents were in age group 30-34 years followed by age group 35-39 years (18.6%). Only 15 respondents were in age group 15-19 (1.6 %) while 9.3% of the respondents were in the age group 44-49 and the mean age of the respondents was recorded to be 32.52 years.

Distribution of the respondents by broad age-group

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
15-19	15	1.6
20-24	124	13.1
25-29	253	26.6
30-34	182	19.2
35-39	177	18.6

40-44	111	11.7
45-49	88	9.3
Total	950	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Age at marriage of the respondents

The age at marriage is also an indicator of status of the women. In this study, the age at marriage of the respondents were categorized into 4 groups such as; <15 years, 15-19 years, 20-24 years, and 25 and above. It was observed that majority of the respondents (63.8%) had got married at the age 15-19 years followed by age group 20-24 years (24.9%). Only 17 respondents (1.8%) got married at the age of 25 and above whereas 9.5% of the respondents got married below 15 years of age. This study had shown that almost three quarters of female had got married within their teenage period and the mean age at marriage was found to be 17.8 years.

Distribution of the respondents by their marital age-group

Marital age-group	Frequency	Percentage
Below 15	90	9.5
15-19	606	63.8
20-24	237	24.9
25 and above	17	1.8
Total	950	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Empowerment and Present age

The distribution of women empowerment and their present age is shown in the given table. It is clear from the table that 75%, 17%, and 8% women have low, medium and high empowerment respectively. Further 6.7%, 16.1%, 24.1%, 20.3%, 11.3%, 13.5% and 9.1% women of age group (15-19), (20-24), (25-29), (30-34), (35-39), (40-44) and (45-49) respectively have Medium empowerment.

Distribution of women according to empowerment and age groups

Empowerment	Age of women														Total	
	15-19		20-24		25-29		30-34		35-39		40-44		45-49			
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		

Low	14	93.3	100	80.7	163	64.4	125	68.7	139	78.5	91	82.0	79	89.8	711
Medium	1	6.7	20	16.1	61	24.1	37	20.3	20	11.3	15	13.5	8	9.1	162
High	0	0.0	4	3.2	29	11.5	20	11.0	18	10.2	5	4.5	1	1.1	77
Total	15	100	124	100	253	100	182	100	177	100	111	100	88	100	950

$\chi^2 = 44.82, p < 0.0001$

Further Chi-square test statistic ($\chi^2 = 44.82, p < 0.0001$) shows that there is significant association between women empowerment and present age groups. It means women empowerment also depends on the age of women. Young women have high capacity to fight for their position and empowerment in society.

Empowerment and Education of Women

Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skill and confidence necessary to participation fully in the development process. Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life so that, we can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment. Education is the first step towards empowerment and the most crucial factor in overall development of the individual as well as nation.

The table below gives the distribution of women according to empowerment and their education. The table reveals that 354 illiterate women and 130 women with primary education level belong to low empowerment while 146 women of education level 5 to 12 belong to medium empowerment. 59 women with education level 12 to post graduate and above respectively are in the category of high empowerment. Education level is very important factor for women empowerment. Thus it can be concluded that educated women are more empowered.

Distribution of women according to empowerment and education

Empowerment	Education of women														Total
	Illiterate		primary		Lower secondary		Secondary (SLC)		Higher Secondary		Graduate		PG and above		
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Low	354	99	130	93	130	80	58	38	28	34.5	11	27	0	0	711
Medium	3	1	8	6	31	19	79	52	28	34.5	9	22	4	23.5	162
High	0	0	1	1	2	1	15	10	25	31	21	51	13	76.5	77

Total	357	100	139	100	163	100	152	100	81	100	41	100	17	100	950
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$$\chi^2 = 587.7, p < 0.0001$$

The result of chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 587.7, p < 0.0001$) indicate that there is highly significant association between education and empowerment of women. Education gives them better opportunity to live in the society. It improves their empowerment.

Empowerment and education of husband

Many studies have shown that husband`s education also plays an important role in empowering the women. The table below shows the distribution of women empowerment and education of husband.

Distribution of women according to empowerment and education of husband

Empowerment	Education of women														Total
	Illiterate		primary		Lower secondary		Secondary (SLC)		Higher Secondary		Graduate		PG and above		
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Low	143	100	150	98	148	93.7	171	73.7	83	57.6	9	13	7	13.7	711
Medium	0	0	3	2	9	5.7	54	23.3	47	32.6	34	49.3	15	29.4	162
High	0	0	0	0	1	0.6	7	3	14	9.8	26	37.7	29	56.9	77
Total	143	100	153	100	158	100	232	100	144	100	69	100	51	100	950

$$\chi^2 = 492.9, p < 0.0001$$

The result of chi-square test indicates that women empowerment and education of husband are highly significant which means that education of husband is one of the factors that affect the women empowerment.

Empowerment and Caste

Caste also plays an important role in women empowerment. The table shows the distribution of women according to empowerment and their caste. The table reveals that 94.5%, 4.5% and 1% women of Scheduled caste (dalits) have low, medium and high empowerment respectively while 87.3%, 11.5% and 1.2% tharu women have low, medium and high empowerment respectively. For general caste, these percentages are 40.5%, 35% and 24.5% respectively while for other caste; these percentages are 77.5%, 16.5% and 6% respectively.

Distribution of women according to empowerment and caste

Empowerment	Caste of the respondents								Total
	SC (Dalit)		Tharu		General		Others		
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Low	224	94.5	213	87.3	98	40.5	176	77.5	711
Medium	11	4.5	28	11.5	85	35	38	16.5	162
High	2	1	3	1.2	59	24.5	13	6	77
Total	237	100	244	100	242	100	227	100	950

$\chi^2 = 238.2, p < 0.0001$

The Chi square test statistic ($\chi^2 = 238.2, p = 0.0044$) shows that highly significant association between empowerment of women and their caste. It means that empowerment of women also depends on their caste in the study area.

Empowerment and Income of the Family

Women’s empowerment also depends on income of the family. The next table shows the distribution of women according to empowerment and income of the family. The table reveals that 98.5%, 96.9%, 47.8%, and 17.1% women of monthly family income below Rs.5000, Rs.5000 to 10000, Rs.10000 to 15000, and Rs.15000 to 20000 respectively belong to low empowerment, while 1.5%, 3.1%, 47.8%, 48.7% and 19.2% women of monthly family income below Rs.5000, Rs.5000 to 10000, Rs.10000 to 15000, Rs.15000 to 20000 and above Rs.20000 respectively belong to medium empowerment. Similarly 4.4%, 34.2% and 80.8% women of monthly family income Rs.10000 to 15000, Rs.15000 to 20000 and above Rs.20000 respectively belong to high empowerment.

Distribution of women according to empowerment and income of the family

Empowerment											Total
	Less than 5000		5000-10000		10000-15000		15000-20000		More than 20000		
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Low	193	98.5	406	96.9	99	47.8	13	17.1	0	0	711
Medium	3	1.5	13	3.1	99	47.8	37	48.7	10	19.2	162
High	0	0	0	0	9	4.4	26	34.2	42	80.8	77
Total	196	100	419	100	207	100	76	100	52	100	950

$$\chi^2 = 826.1, p < 0.0001$$

Further the result of Chi-Square test statistic ($\chi^2 = 826.1, p = 0.0001$) shows that the women empowerment and total monthly income of the family are highly significantly associated. It reveals that the women empowerment also depends on monthly income of the family in the study area. Therefore it can be concluded that women belonging to high income family have high empowerment.

Empowerment and Autonomy in Decision Making

The women empowerment also varies with their autonomy in decision making. As their autonomy in decision making increase, their empowerment also increases with it. Now the next table shows the distribution of women according to empowerment and autonomy in decision making. The table reveals that 98.5%, 48% and 2.4% women of low, middle and high autonomy in decision making respectively have low empowerment while 1.5%, 50% and 14.1% women of low, middle and high autonomy in decision making respectively have medium empowerment. Only 2% and 83.5% women with middle and high autonomy in decision making respectively have high empowerment.

Distribution of women according to empowerment and autonomy in decision making

Empowerment	Autonomy in decision making						Total
	Low		Medium		High		
	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Low	573	98.5	136	48	2	2.4	711
Medium	9	1.5	141	50	12	14.1	162
High	0	0	6	2	71	83.5	77
Total	582	100	283	100	85	100	950

$$\chi^2 = 1047, p < 0.0001$$

The Chi-square test statistic ($\chi^2 = 1047, p < 0.0001$) shows the highly significant association between women empowerment and their autonomy in decision making. It means the women empowerment depends on women's autonomy in decision making about them and household affairs in the study area.

Empowerment and Interaction with media

The table shows the relationship between women empowerment and their interaction with media. Media plays an important role to improve the status and empowerment of women. It helps women to know about their rights and values in the society and family. The table reveals that 42%, 46% and 12% women with middle interaction with media have low, medium and high empowerment respectively while 95% and 5% women with low interaction with media have low and medium empowerment respectively. 4%, 11% and 85% women with high interaction with media have low, medium and high empowerment respectively.

Distribution of women according to empowerment and interaction with media

Empowerment	Interaction with media						Total
	Low		Medium		High		
	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Low	594	95	115	42	2	4	711
Medium	31	5	125	46	6	11	162
High	0	0	32	12	45	85	77
Total	625	100	272	100	53	100	950

$$\chi^2 = 737.1, p < 0.0001$$

Further Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 737.1, p < 0.0001$) results that there is highly significant association between women empowerment and interaction with media. It reveals that interaction with media is one of the factors which affect the women empowerment in study area.

Empowerment and Nature of the family

The following table shows the distribution of women according to empowerment and nature of the family. The table reveals that 69.6% and 80.1% women from nuclear and joint families respectively have low empowerment while 19.3% and 14.8% women from nuclear and joint families respectively have medium empowerment. Only 11.1% and 5.1% women from nuclear and joint families respectively have high empowerment.

Empowerment	Nature of the family				Total
	Nuclear		Joint		
	f	%	f	%	
Low	332	69.6	379	80.1	711
Medium	92	19.3	70	14.8	162
High	53	11.1	24	5.1	77
Total	477	100	473	100	950

$$\chi^2 = 17, p < 0.0001$$

Further the result of chi-square test shows that empowerment and nature of the family are statistically significant. Thus it can be concluded that women from joint families are less empowered than that of women from nuclear families in the study area.

Conclusion

We study the different indicators of women's empowerment. Women empowerment mostly depends upon their education and autonomy in decision making. These two factors represent the women empowerment. It is observed that women empowerment depends on their present age. Education of women is an important factor which affects the empowerment of women in the society. Statistically significant association is found between women empowerment and caste of the household as well as it depends on nature of the family. On the other hand it is found that women empowerment is significantly associated with the income of household. To know about women empowerment, women's autonomy in decision making and their interaction with media are also studied and it shows that women empowerment depends on interaction with media and their autonomy in decision making both. Finally, from this study it is observed that the education is the most important factor which affects the empowerment of women.

Suggestions and Policy planning

After studying in depths regarding women's empowerment in the society, one thing comes first and foremost that is to improve the educational level of girls so that they could play a more active role in society. Educational and job opportunities should be created for women. These two factors alone may play a major role in increasing the empowerment of women. Women's empowerment in the era of globalization cannot be imposed from top, rather it is essentially a

bottom up process as women must empower themselves. However, they need assistance and facilitation from above. It promotes women's inherent strength and positive image which enables them to face any difficult situation and encourage them to think independently. Nepal needs to reengineer its policies so that more opportunities are opened up for the female folk. Even though, the government at different levels should formulate many policies and programs for the development of women. Responsibility in decision taking processes should also be given to women. Women also have to respond positively to these government policies and plans.

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