

ROLE OF EMPLOYMENT IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: EVIDENCE FROM KHULNA CITY OF BANGLADESH

AFRIN SULTANA* ; SK. SHARAFAT HOSSEN**

*BSS (HONS) IN ECONOMICS,
ECONOMICS DISCIPLINE,
KHULNA UNIVERSITY,
KHULNA-9208, BANGLADESH

**ASSISTANT PROFESSOR,
ECONOMICS DISCIPLINE,
KHULNA UNIVERSITY,
KHULNA-9208, BANGLADESH

ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to examine the condition of women empowerment and the role of employment in women empowerment in Khulna City of Bangladesh. The sample size was restricted to 120 employed and unemployed women of Khulna City and random sampling technique was followed. For measuring empowerment level, cumulative empowerment index (CEI) was constructed and multiple linear regression model was used to reveal the causal relationship between women empowerment and its important determinants. The study found that the employed women are more empowered than those of unemployed women in Khulna City. The study also found that age, educational qualification, household income and employment have a statistically significant positive effect on women empowerment. The result shows that the empowerment level is increased by 5.278 units for changing the occupational status of women (from unemployed to employed) which is statistically significant. Therefore, based on the empirical result, it can be concluded that employment has a positive effect on women empowerment.

KEYWORDS: Women empowerment, employment, cumulative empowerment index.

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment is one of the most important issues in the present day of the world. Though women have a great contribution in the development process, they have low status as compared to men, specifically in the developing world (Khan et al., 2010). The situation is almost same in Bangladesh. As a resource limited and overpopulated country, the society of Bangladesh is highly stratified; services and opportunities are resolute by gender, class and location. Women comprise about half of the total population. The overall sex ratio is 105 male per 100 female. Bangladesh development process will not get pace without the further involvement of the women (Al-Hossienie, 2011). But the women of this country are very much mistreated than men through the rules, regulations, customs and ancient nature of the society. This irrational behavior gives women lower status in terms of men socially, culturally, religiously, economically and legally (Haque et al., 2011). They are deprived of education, decision making power in the family; control of their own assets, decision of change in household properties etc.

But I recent time situation is changing day by day because they are receiving educational facilities, training facilities and other socio-economic facilities. Among different determinants of women empowerment like education, employment status, age, family status, contribution to household income etc. employment plays the vital role. The women who are involved in any income related activities or who contribute in the family income they are more empowered than the women who are not engaged in any income related activities (Hossain and Jaim, 2011; and Khan, 2006). The women who earn and contribute a little to the family expenditure are able to exercise their rights and power that increases their self esteem and self- confidence (Kabeer, 2001; Hultberg, 2008; and Banu et al., 2001).

The southern part of Bangladesh like Khulna, Satkhira, Bagerhat, and Barisal, districts are considered as backward cities. One of the reasons is that the rate of women employment in these areas is very low. Based on this fact, this study examines the role of employment in women empowerment in Khulna city of Bangladesh. If women are become empowered in socially, culturally, politically, and economically it can be expected that the development process of a country will be accelerated within a very short period of time.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- i. To know the status of women empowerment in Khulna City
- ii. To know the role of employment in women empowerment in Khulna City

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term ‘empower’ means to give lawful power or authority to act (Parvin et al., 2004). It is the process of acquiring some activities of women. The main elements of empowerment have been defined as agency (the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them), awareness of gender power structures, self-esteem and self- confidence (Kabeer, 2001). Empowerment is a process which enables women to meet both their practical and strategic needs and increases women’s political power, consciousness about them and strengthens women’s self confidence (Khan, 2006; and Mason and Smith, 2003). Kabeer et al. (1999) said that empowerment means the process which requires change at different levels and in different dimensions: change at the individual level and change in their ‘inner’ sense of self or in their access to material resources and relationships within the family and household. Empowerment also refers to the equitable representation of women in decision-making structures, both formal and informal, and their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their societies (Lopez-Claros et al., 2005).

Women empowerment 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 (GU, 2005). Women empowerment means the participation of women in household decision making process and contribution to the family income (Hossain and Jaim, 2011; and Yusuf, 2010).

Khan et al. (2010) state that education is the imperative way to be empowered of women. An educated woman is more aware of her rights and adopts to pay a job, which leads to increase empowerment of women. Microfinance has been considered as a development tool for tackling poverty and reducing gender inequalities. Giving credit to women increases their personal incomes and brings other benefits like better education and health, livelihood diversification,

reducing violence, increases self-confidence and self-esteem etc. (AL-Amin and Chowdhury, 2008). Microfinance through Self-help Group (SHG) is such type of activities which are very effective in reducing poverty and empowering women and creating awareness among them (Sudan, 2007; and Reddy and Manak, 2005). Micro-finance not only give credit and saving to women but also give the power to contribute in her family expenditure by which they are being empowered (Mayoux, 2006). Microcredit has the power to improve the productive capacity and development in income generating activities to the women and that's why they become empowered (Alhassan and Akudugu, 2012). Microfinance helps women to meet their practical needs and increase efficiency in their traditional roles which lead to increase esteem and self-confidence (SWAIN81, 2007).

Parveen and Leonhäuser (2005) have said that education, skill acquisition training and exposure to information media help women to be empowered. In Bangladesh, women have full and equal access to ICT based economic and educational activities supports their contribution in business and home-based activities and helps them become more empowered (Laizu et al., 2010). The women who are engaged in any self earning activities are more empowered because they have a great role in decision making, access to assets and their control over the self earnings in Bangladesh (Parvin et al., 2004). The level of women empowerment in decision making (both economic and household) is satisfactory but the empowerment in physical movement is very low and the empowerment level of women in Bangladesh is the least (Haque et al., 2011). The women who are entrepreneur or engaged in the development of entrepreneurship activities in Bangladesh are more socially, politically and economically empowered (Al-Hossienie, 2011).

DATA AND METHODS

This study has collected data from a total of 120 employed and unemployed women in Khulna City. Among all the respondents 60 are employed women (Treatment group) and another 60 women are unemployed (Control group). Random sampling technique has been used to collect data from these two groups of respondent. Data and information has been collected through questionnaire survey, interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). The field survey was conducted during April-June in 2012. A Cumulative Empowerment Index (CEI) was developed to have a picture about the status of women empowerment in Khulna city. A multiple linear regression analysis has been used to show the role of employment on women empowerment.

Cumulative Empowerment Index (CEI): Dependent Variable

The Cumulative Empowerment Index (CEI) was constructed by combining seven key empowerment indicators - contribution to household income, access to resources, ownership of assets, participation in household decision-making, perception on gender awareness, coping capacity to household shocks and access to the political or development activities to get a complete idea of women empowerment. Each indicator again has a number of sub-indicators. The quantitative part correspond to five categories e.g., 1 = very low and 5 = very high. Each indicator assigned a quantitative rank from 1 to 5 according to the total score for each empowerment indicator received from its sub-indicators based on the field survey. The qualitative dimension was formed to rank the key seven indicators from total scores assigned by thirteen focus group participants where 7 represent 'very important' and 1 represents 'less important'. The rank order was made based on total scores attaining from ranking of the

individual indicator in focus group. Maxwell (1995:13) followed this procedure to measure the food insecurity by developing a cumulative food security index. Parveen and Leonhäuser (2005) also followed the same process to measure women empowerment by developing a cumulative empowerment index. This CEI is constructed based on the cumulative food security index of Maxwell (1995:13) and the cumulative empowerment index of Parveen and Leonhäuser (2005). Table no. 1 represents the way of constructing the CEI:

Table No. 1: Cumulative Empowerment Index (CEI)

Indicator	Quantitative Rank	Qualitative Rank	CEI Range: 28-140
Contribution to household income	1 to 5	7	$(1-5) \times 7 = 7-35$
Access to resources	1 to 5	6	$(1-5) \times 6 = 6-30$
Ownership of assets	1 to 5	5	$(1-5) \times 5 = 5-25$
Participation in household decision-making	1 to 5	4	$(1-5) \times 4 = 4-20$
Perception on gender awareness	1 to 5	3	$(1-5) \times 3 = 3-15$
Coping capacity to household shocks	1 to 5	2	$(1-5) \times 2 = 2-10$
Access to the political or development activities	1 to 5	1	$(1-5) \times 1 = 1-5$

Source: Authors' Compilation

This CEI varied from 28 to 140 in which 28 denote the lowest level of empowerment and 140 denote the highest level of empowerment. The CEI range is further divided into five categories and labeled as very low empowerment (28-50), low empowerment (51-72), medium empowerment (73-94), high empowerment (95-117) and very high empowerment (118-140) for better understanding about the level of empowerment posses by the respondents.

Multiple Linear Regression Model

The multiple linear regression model was used to estimate the effect of independent variables (education, age, household income, occupational or employment status) on dependent variable (women empowerment or CEI). Haque et al. (2011) considered respondent's age and education as indicators to construct the different empowerment and autonomy index. Khan et al. (2010) also considered education as an independent variable to know its influence on women empowerment. As age and education have a remarkable influence on women empowerment these two variables are included as explanatory variable in the model. It is also generally expected that household income also influences the level of empowerment of women. So, total household income (BDT in thousand per mounth) was also considered as an independent variable. Finally the variable, occupational status, was included in the model as dummy variable (employed =1 and unemployed =0) to estimate the effect of employment on women empowerment. So the multiple regression model of this study is:

$$CEI = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Age + \beta_2 Edu + \beta_3 Inc + \beta_4 Occ + u$$

Where,

CEI	=	Cumulative Empowerment Index
Age	=	Age of the respondents (year)
Edu	=	Education of the respondents (level)
Inc	=	Total household income of the respondents (in thousand)
Occ	=	Occupational status of the respondents (dummy variable)
β_0	=	Intercept term
$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$	=	Regression co-efficient
u	=	Stochastic disturbance term

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extent of Women Empowerment

According to the result of field survey, the distribution of total respondents (both the unemployed women and employed women) on the basis of CEI is represented in Table no. 2. The result shows that 10.83% of the respondents possess very low level of empowerment whereas less than 1% possesses very high level of empowerment. 40% of the respondents enjoy low empowerment, 39.17% have medium empowerment and 9.17% have high empowerment. The result also shows that about 50% respondents fall under very low to low level of empowerment and 90% of the respondents fall under medium empowerment and its below categories. And only 10% have high to very high level of empowerment. The mean CEI score is 72.075 and the standard deviation is 18.487 which indicates that the on an average the respondents enjoy near about medium level of empowerment.

Table No. 2: Distribution of Total Respondents on the Basis of CEI

Category	Number	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very low empowerment (28-50)	13	10.83	10.83
Low empowerment (51-72)	48	40.00	50.83
Medium empowerment (73-94)	47	39.17	90.00
High empowerment (95-117)	11	9.17	99.17
Very high empowerment (118-140)	1	0.83	100
Total	n = 120	100	100
Mean CEI = 72.075 and Std. Dev. = 18.487			

Source: Authors' Compilation Based on Field Survey, 2012

Extent of Women Empowerment by Employment

The women empowerment in the study area is also measured by dividing the women into two categories. One category includes the women who are not employed (generally housewife) and the other one comprises of the women who are employed (generally in business or service). The level of women empowerment is described below on the basis of their occupational (employment) status:

Extent of Empowerment of Unemployed Women

The descriptive statistics on CEI of the unemployed women and its distribution are represented in Table no. 3. Based on the survey result, it shows that 11.67% of the unemployed women's empowerment level is very low, 51.67% have the low level of empowerment and 36.67% enjoy medium level of empowerment. The surprising result is that no unemployed women enjoy high or very high level of empowerment. The result also shows that 63.33% of the unemployed women have the very low to low level of empowerment. The mean CEI score of the unemployed women is 65.97 and standard deviation is 13.94. This result indicates that on an average the unemployed women fall under low empowerment category. The women who are fallen down in the low level of empowerment have less power to decision making process in the family or society. Those women have a little access to resources and a low control over their assets. So, they feel less secured, lack of dignity and own a life of powerlessness in the family and society.

Table No. 3: Distribution of the Unemployed Women on the Basis of CEI

Category	Number	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very low empowerment (28-50)	7	11.67	11.67
Low empowerment (51-72)	31	51.67	63.33
Medium empowerment (73-94)	22	36.67	100
High empowerment (95-117)	-	-	-
Very high empowerment (118-140)	-	-	-
Total	n = 60	100	100
Mean CEI = 65.97 and Std. Dev. = 13.94			

Source: Authors' Compilation Based on Field Survey, 2012

Extent of Empowerment of Employed Women

The empowerment level of women who are employed and contribute to the family by their own income is also measured by the main variable of this study, CEI. The distribution of employed women on the basis of CEI and related descriptive statistics are demonstrated in Table no. 4. The table shows 10% of the employed women have very low and 28.33% have the low level of empowerment. Majority of the women enjoy medium level of empowerment which is 41.67% of the total respondents. 18.33% enjoy high level of empowerment and only 1.67% enjoy very high level of empowerment. The result also shows that 60% (cumulative percentage of medium, high and very high empowerment) of total employed women enjoy medium to very high level of empowerment and 20% enjoy high to very high level of employment. The mean CEI score of the employed women is 78.18 (Std. Dev. = 20.47) which is greater than the mean CEI score (65.97) of the unemployed women. So, in a very simplistic way it can be concluded that employed women are being more empowered than those of unemployed women in the study area which also support the findings of the previous research on this issues. The probable explanation of this result could be due to the financial contribution in the family, the employed women are more empowered than those of unemployed women. The employed women generally have more power in their family decision making and they have more capacity to face sudden problems and/or shocks in household and societal level.

Table No. 4: Distribution of Employed Women on the Basis of CEI

Category	Number	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very low empowerment (28-50)	6	10.00	10.00
Low empowerment (51-72)	17	28.33	38.33
Medium empowerment (73-94)	25	41.67	80.00
High empowerment (95-117)	11	18.33	98.33
Very high empowerment (118-140)	1	1.67	100
Total	n = 60	100	100
Mean CEI = 78.18 and Std. Dev. = 20.47			

Source: Authors' Compilation Based on Field Survey, 2012

Result of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

In this study, the multiple regression model was used to examine the effects of four key determinants of women empowerment on women empowerment. The result of the regression analysis is presented in Table no. 5. It shows the positive and highly statistically significant effects of age, educational qualification (years of schooling), total household income (BDT in thousand per month), and occupational status on women empowerment (CEI). This results hold up the proposition that women empowerment depends on the aforesaid variables. Age is an important variable that in increasing the level of women empowerment. The women who are employed have the opportunity to contribute in their household income and generally they do it. Therefore, they had greater control over household economic resources and decision making than unemployed women. Thus the employed women enjoy relatively higher level of empowerment than those of unemployed women. So, based on the empirical result, it can be concluded that employment has a positive effect on women empowerment.

Table No. 5: Effects of Determinants on Women Empowerment in Khulna City

Independent Variables	Dependent variable: Cumulative Empowerment Index (CEI)			
	Co-efficient	Standard Error	t-value	Significance Level
Constant	33.281	6.499776	5.12	0.000
Age	0.498***	0.173744	2.87	0.005
Educational Qualification	1.314***	0.390556	3.36	0.001
Household Income	0.371***	0.087883	4.22	0.000
Occupational Status(dummy)	5.278**	2.609915	2.02	0.045
N= 120; Adjusted R ² = 0.46; F= 26.24 (Significance Level: 0.000)				

Source: Authors' estimation Based on Field Survey, 2012

[Note: *** represents significant at 1% level of significance and ** represents significant at 5% level of significance]

CONCLUSION

The participation of women is crucial for the growth of an economy. The involvement of women in income related activities increases the level of empowerment. An empowered woman can exercise her power in her own choice in making household decision, contribution to household income, and control over resources and political or development activities. She can enjoy more benefits or rights in access to resources, control over her assets, and participation in household decision making. An employed woman has more capacity to face sudden household shocks. In this study, based on the CEI score it has been seen that employed women are more empowered than those of unemployed women. On the other hand, the regression results show that age, household income, educational qualification and occupational status have positive effect on CEI and these are statistically significant. The most highlighted result is that the change in employment status causes 5.278 unit changes in CEI. It means that change of occupational status (from unemployed to employed) helps women to be more empowered. So, based on the empirical result, it can be concluded that the employment plays a positive role for the women to be empowered in Khulna City.

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