

"Empowering Women in Baramati (Pune, India): Challenges and Opportunities"

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Abstract—This study investigates women's empowerment and the challenges they face in Baramati City, Maharashtra. Based on responses from 43 women of diverse backgrounds, the research assesses awareness of rights, participation in family decision-making, economic independence, and engagement with government schemes. Using statistical analysis and correlation methods, findings reveal high awareness of reproductive rights and family planning, widespread participation in family decision-making, but limited financial independence and low participation in empowerment programs. The study concludes with suggestions to bridge gaps through skill development, economic support, legal protection, and localized empowerment initiatives.

Index Terms—Women empowerment, Baramati, family planning, financial independence, government schemes, gender equality

I. INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is a key indicator of a nation's progress and human development (UNDP, 2020). In India, despite several legal safeguards and progressive policies, gender disparities continue to manifest in various forms, especially in areas of education, employment, decision-making, and freedom from violence (NFHS-5, 2021; Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2020). Baramati, a growing urban centre in Maharashtra, reflects many of these challenges while also offering opportunities for positive change. This study investigates the current status of women in Baramati City, focusing on their empowerment, participation in education and employment, awareness of rights, involvement in family decision-making, and the major societal challenges they face.

Women's empowerment has been at the heart of global development discourse for decades, recognized not only as a basic human right but also as a vital driver of economic growth, social progress, and political stability (UN Women, 2015). Across the world, empowering women involves creating an environment where they can make life choices, exercise their rights equally, and participate fully in every sphere of life—education, health, employment, governance, and personal autonomy (Kabeer, 1999). However, the status of women, their access to opportunities, and the challenges they face vary widely between regions, shaped by cultural traditions, historical developments, economic structures, and political ideologies (World Bank, 2012).

At the global level, significant advances have been made toward gender equality. International initiatives such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5 (UN, 2015) underscore the importance of eliminating gender disparities. Improvements in women's literacy rates, maternal health, participation in the workforce, and political representation demonstrate substantial progress (UNDP, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2023). Yet, gender inequality persists in many parts of the world. Women continue to experience systemic discrimination, underrepresentation in leadership positions, gender-based violence, wage gaps, and socio-cultural restrictions that limit their potential (OECD, 2020; UN Women, 2021).

In developed countries, although women have gained significant ground in terms of education and employment, issues like the "glass ceiling," unequal pay, underrepresentation in politics, and work-life balance challenges remain pressing concerns (ILO,

2018; WEF, 2021). In contrast, in many developing and underdeveloped nations, women face compounded challenges of poverty, illiteracy, child marriage, health disparities, and entrenched patriarchal norms that restrict their basic freedoms (UNICEF, 2019).

In the context of India, the narrative of women's empowerment is marked by both inspiring achievements and persistent challenges. India has a rich history of strong women leaders in politics, business, academia, and the arts (Chakravarti, 2003). Legislative and policy measures such as the Right to Education Act (2009), the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act (2017), and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme (2015) have been pivotal in promoting women's rights (Government of India, 2021). Increased female literacy rates, greater enrolment in higher education, growing political participation, and the rising presence of women in various professional sectors reflect positive transformations (NFHS-5, 2021; Ministry of HRD, 2019).

The study conducted among women in Baramati City aimed to evaluate their empowerment status and the challenges they face in contemporary society. The findings reveal several important insights into their family structures, rights awareness, participation in decision-making, safety perceptions, and engagement with empowerment initiatives.

II. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this study is to assess the status of women's empowerment in Baramati and to identify the challenges that impede their full participation in society. The specific objectives are:

To assess women's awareness of rights related to family planning, education, employment, and safety.

To examine women's participation in family and social decision-making.

To evaluate women's access to government empowerment schemes and educational opportunities.

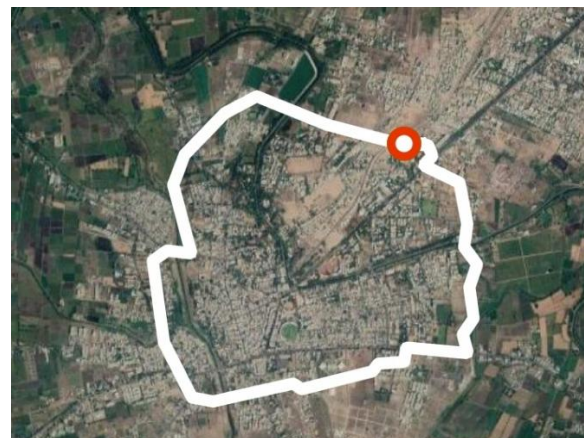
To identify major challenges faced by women in Baramati such as financial dependency, workplace harassment, and limited decision-making power.

To suggest measures for enhancing women's empowerment based on the findings.

Study Area

Baramati is a prominent city located in the Pune district of the state of Maharashtra, India. Geographically, Baramati lies at approximately 18.15° N latitude and 74.58° E longitude. The city is situated on the banks of the Karha River, a tributary of the Nira River, and enjoys a semi-arid climate with moderately high temperatures and relatively low rainfall.

According to the Census of India 2011, Baramati had a population of approximately 54,000, though current estimates place it closer to 75,000 due to rapid urbanization and industrial expansion. The city exhibits a sex ratio of 938 females per 1000 males and a literacy rate of over 85%, significantly higher than the national average, reflecting the region's emphasis on education.



Not to Scale

Baramati has developed into a semi-urban hub with a mix of rural and urban characteristics. It is known for its agricultural productivity, particularly sugarcane and grapes, supported by irrigation from nearby dams. At the same time, the city has emerged as an industrial and educational centre, housing institutions like the Vidya Pratishthan College and the MIT College of Engineering. The Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) has also facilitated industrial growth in the region, promoting employment and economic diversification.

The city has seen significant social development in recent decades, particularly in education, women's health, and small-scale entrepreneurship. Yet, gender disparities persist in areas such as financial independence, access to employment, and decision-making roles—making Baramati a relevant and

insightful case for studying women's empowerment and the socio-cultural challenges they face.

The presence of both modern institutions and traditional family systems in Baramati provides a unique environment to observe the transition of women's roles in a transforming Indian society. Its semi-urban status bridges rural traditions and urban modernity, making it a representative site for examining the complexities of gender relations, empowerment initiatives, and public perception of women's rights in emerging urban India.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on women's empowerment in India reveal that access to education, employment opportunities, and legal rights significantly influence women's status. According to Dyson and Moore (1983), women's autonomy is strongly linked to kinship structures, economic participation, and educational attainment. Basu (1992) emphasized that female literacy is a strong predictor of fertility decline and family welfare. Recent studies (NFHS-4 and NFHS-5) have shown increasing awareness among women regarding health rights and decision-making, but participation in empowerment schemes often remains low, especially in smaller urban centres.

Workplace harassment, limited financial independence, and restricted access to decision-making spheres continue to be critical barriers even among educated women (Patel, 2014).

This study builds upon existing literature by focusing specifically on Baramati City, where urbanization and traditional values intersect uniquely.

IV. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The present study, "Empowerment and Challenges: A Study on Women's Status in Baramati City," was undertaken to assess the degree of women's empowerment and the hurdles they continue to encounter in contemporary urban life. Through a structured questionnaire and detailed responses from 43 women across different socio-economic backgrounds, various dimensions of their lives—including family structure, reproductive rights, education, financial independence, awareness of government schemes, public safety, and experiences of violence—were systematically analysed. We have use

different types of graphs to represent the situation of women in Baramati. We have also use linear correlation regression method to corelate women education and number of children, spouse gap and number of children and age at marriage of women and number of children.

V. ANALYSIS

The following sections provide a detailed interpretation of each aspect revealed through the study.

1. Family Structure and Its Impact on Women's Autonomy

The data reveals that a majority of the respondents (36 out of 43) reside within joint family structures, while only 7 women live in separate (nuclear) families. The prevalence of joint families indicates the persistence of traditional social organization in Baramati City. Joint families, while offering social and emotional support, often present mixed implications for women's autonomy. In such households, decision-making is typically collective, often influenced by senior male or elder female members, potentially restricting women's individual agency. Women living in joint families may have lesser control over personal, financial, and family-related decisions compared to those in nuclear families. However, the study also indicates that women have managed to secure substantial influence in family planning and education-related decisions, suggesting a gradual shift in gender dynamics even within traditional family settings.

2. Awareness of Reproductive Rights and Family Planning Decisions

An overwhelming 100% of women reported awareness of their family planning rights, and significantly, all respondents confirmed that their opinion is considered during family planning decisions.

This is a critical indicator of empowerment in the private sphere. Reproductive rights form the bedrock of women's health and autonomy, and the full inclusion of women in reproductive decision-making reflects progressive attitudes in Baramati. It marks a significant departure from past decades where reproductive decisions were often dominated by male authority or extended family consensus.

Moreover, the high acceptance and adoption of family planning operations (with 30 women having undergone sterilization procedures) further reinforce the active role women are playing in controlling their reproductive health.

3. Educational and Employment Opportunities

When questioned about equal opportunities in education and employment, 38 women responded affirmatively, while 5 acknowledged partial opportunities. This finding reveals commendable progress in the domains of education and workplace access for women in Baramati.

However, the existence of even a small group reporting partial access suggests lingering systemic inequalities. These could stem from cultural expectations, early marriages, limited career counselling, or gendered assumptions about “suitable” careers for women. Nevertheless, the broader trend points towards a significant societal transformation where women's aspirations are increasingly supported by families and the community.

Education is often regarded as the most critical lever of empowerment. The high level of encouragement for women's higher education (with all 43 women reporting strong family support) underscores the broad cultural acceptance of women's right to academic advancement in Baramati.

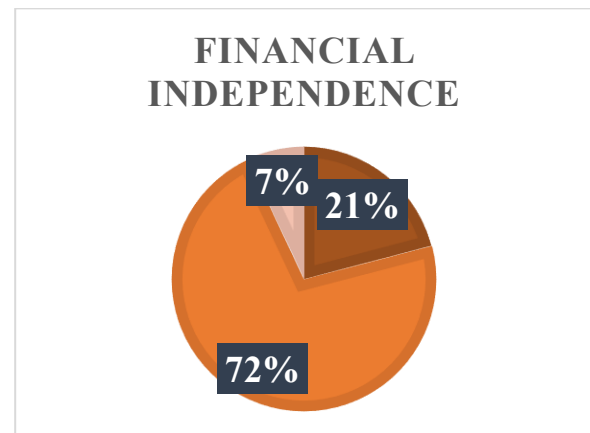
4. Awareness and Utilization of Government Schemes

An encouraging 42 out of 43 women were aware of government schemes aimed at women's empowerment. This finding suggests that awareness campaigns, information dissemination through media, Anganwadi centres, self-help groups, and local governance mechanisms have been largely effective in Baramati.

However, a striking gap emerges between awareness and participation. Only 6 women reported having actively participated in any government-run women's empowerment programs, while 37 women had not. Several factors could explain this disjunction: limited time due to domestic responsibilities, lack of confidence or social permission to attend programs,

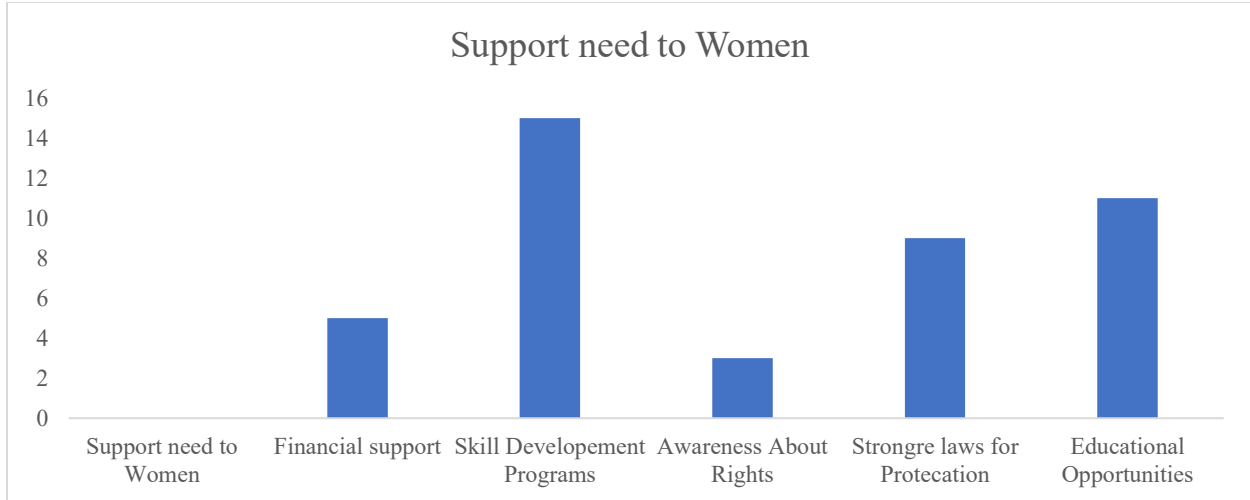
unavailability of programs nearby, or lack of clarity on eligibility and benefits. This underlines the need not only for better publicity but also for designing programs that are accessible, flexible, and sensitive to women's everyday realities.

5. Financial Independence and Economic Challenges



Financial autonomy is central to women's empowerment. The study finds that only 9 women described themselves as fully financially independent, 31 women were partially dependent on family, and 3 women were completely dependent. This is a crucial area where Baramati's women still face challenges. Partial dependence implies that while women may earn, they are either not earning enough to sustain themselves independently or are socially conditioned to hand over their income to male family members. Economic empowerment is further complicated by the cultural emphasis on women's primary role in caregiving and household management. Even when women work, societal pressures and limited career mobility restrict their financial autonomy. Programs that offer skill development (cited by 15 women as a key support need) and easier access to credit and employment opportunities could significantly bridge these gaps.

6. Support Needs: Skill Development, Education, and Protection



When asked about the kinds of support women in Baramati needed most, skill development programs emerged as the most common response (15 respondents), followed by educational opportunities (11 respondents). Stronge laws for protection were also highlighted (9 women), along with financial support and awareness about rights.

This response pattern indicates that women are not seeking mere financial handouts; rather, they are demanding the tools and opportunities to empower themselves sustainably. Skill development and education are viewed as gateways to self-reliance and dignity, while the demand for legal protection reflects an acute awareness of vulnerabilities, even in relatively safe environments like Baramati.

7. Public Safety and Experiences of Violence

A positive highlight of the study is that 23 women felt very safe, and 20 women felt safe in public spaces, with none reporting feeling unsafe. Additionally, no women reported experiencing gender-based violence

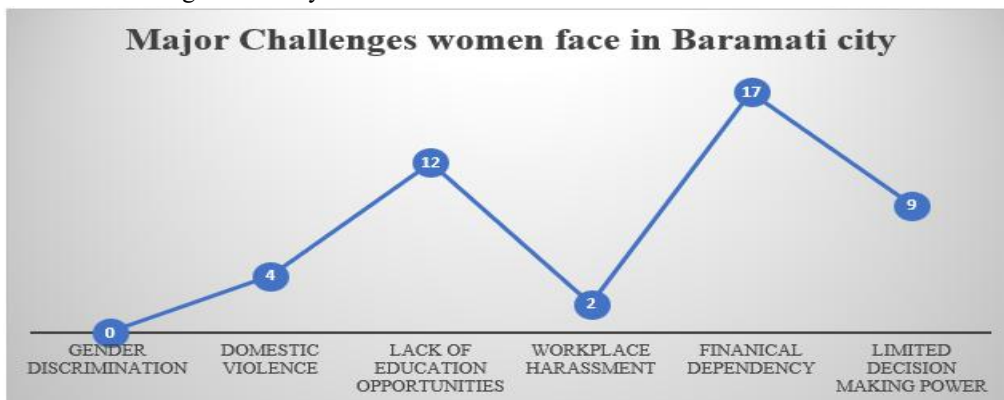
9. Challenges Faced by Women

or harassment, nor were there any reports to authorities regarding such incidents.

While this suggests that Baramati offers a relatively safe environment for women, it is important to be cautious. Social stigma, fear of retaliation, and normalization of certain forms of harassment might still lead to underreporting. Therefore, continuous education about women's rights and community sensitization remains important.

8. Family Decision-Making

All 43 women reported equal participation in family decision-making. This is a strong indicator of empowerment at the household level. It shows that women in Baramati are not merely silent contributors to the family but active agents in shaping family dynamics, financial decisions, children's education, healthcare choices, and even investment or property decisions. Such participation fosters self-confidence, negotiation skills, and greater respect from family members.



Financial dependency was the most frequently cited challenge, with 17 women mentioning it, followed by limited decision-making power (9 women), domestic violence (4 women), and workplace harassment (2 women).

These findings emphasize that while public safety and rights awareness are improving, economic and intra-household power structures continue to pose barriers. Notably, domestic violence and harassment, though cited by fewer women, must not be overlooked. Even a small incidence rate indicates systemic issues that require long-term cultural change, legal enforcement, and community vigilance.

10. Engagement in Family Planning Operations

Thirty women reported that they or their spouse had undergone family planning operations, showing a high level of reproductive autonomy and acceptance of contraceptive methods. This aligns with the earlier finding of full reproductive rights awareness and further strengthens the picture of empowered family-level decision-making.

VI. CONCLUSION

The women of Baramati City represent a community in transition—moving steadily toward modern notions of gender equality, yet still grappling with deeply entrenched socio-economic structures that constrain full empowerment. High levels of awareness about rights, safety in public spaces, and active participation in family decisions are laudable achievements. However, challenges related to economic independence, social participation in empowerment programs, and overcoming traditional gender norms remain significant.

The findings of the study highlight that women in Baramati have made significant progress in terms of awareness of rights, family planning, and encouragement toward higher education. However, gaps remain between awareness and actual participation in empowerment programs. Financial independence is yet to be achieved by a majority of women, and financial dependency, limited decision-making power, and socio-cultural restrictions persist as notable challenges.

Overall, while there is a strong foundation of rights awareness and support for women's education, greater

efforts are needed to translate awareness into active participation in empowerment programs and economic activities.

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