

Employment As a Pathway to Self- Worth and Poverty Reduction Among Rural Women

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Abstract—The study examines the role of MGNREGA in enhancing self-worth, building confidence, ensuring food necessities and reducing poverty among women beneficiaries. The study adopts a descriptive research design and utilizes both primary and secondary sources of data. The study identified that regular employment opportunities enhanced women's self-esteem and confidence in their decision making. The programme also helps to reduce economic vulnerability. MGNREGA also promotes social inclusion and empowers women to contribute actively to household and community development.

Index Terms—MGNREGA, Rural women, Self-worth, confidence, food security, poverty reduction, women empowerment

I. INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act is one of the significant programme that aims social security to the rural women. By providing guaranteed wage employment, it contributed to improving the socio-economic status of the rural women. Involvement of MGNREGA helps the women to earn an independent income and thereby reducing poverty at the same time improving household food security also. The programme also promotes self-worth, self-confidence and increasing their decision-making capacity among the women. As a result, MGNREGA serves as an important tool for women's empowerment.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is various development programme aimed at empowering rural women, poverty, food security. MGNREGA was introduced to employment

opportunities in rural areas and at the same time improve the socio-economic conditions of the rural households. However, the programme enhances the women self-worth, improves food consumption pattern and reduce poverty also. Therefore, the study is mainly focused on women's empowerment that means their economic independence, food security and poverty reduction among the rural beneficiaries.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the role of MGNREGA in improving self-worth among rural women
- To examine the impact of MGNREGA on food security and poverty reduction among rural women.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the descriptive research design to examine the impact of MGNREGA. The primary data were collected from the women beneficiaries of MGNREGA through A structured questionnaire. The 383 respondents were selected using simple random sampling from the study area. Kottayam district in Kerala is selected as the study area. Secondary data also collected from the government records, publications etc. the collected data were analyzed using percentage analysis and statistics.

V. FINDINGS

The opinion of women respondents regarding poverty reduction in households and villages. Among the respondents, 74.4 percent expressed their belief that MGNREGA has successfully reduced poverty in their

households. They mentioned that through the wages earned, they are able to fulfill basic needs such as food, house maintenance or repairs, and clothing expenses. On the other hand, 18.7 percent of women respondents stated that MGNREGA has not effectively reduced poverty in their households. Additionally, 6.9 percent of respondents expressed uncertainty about the impact of MGNREGA on poverty reduction in households and villages.

Based on these findings, the study concluded that MGNREGA has contributed to poverty reduction in households to some extent. Table No. 18 provides further details regarding the respondents' perception of poverty reduction in households through MGNREGA wages.

The opinions of respondents regarding the availability of work in the villages. According to the responses, 18.0 percent of women respondents believe that there is an insufficient availability of work in the villages. During the interviews, they expressed that in the absence of MGNREGA work in their villages, they struggle to find employment locally and often have to relocate to other places or villages. This aligns with the findings presented in table no. 4.12, which explores opinions on migration and the availability of work in the villages.

On the other hand, 71.5 percent of women respondents expressed their belief that there are sufficient job opportunities available in the villages, including those provided by MGNREGA. They further mentioned that there are no delays in the allocation of jobs for MGNREGA workers. Additionally, 10.5 percent of women respondents stated that there is an abundance of job opportunities in the villages, including the allocation of MGNREGA work.

The ratings given by respondents regarding the quality of life in villages with basic amenities. According to the responses, 18.8 percent of respondents rated their quality of life as less than adequate. They attributed this to the low number of working days and wages provided under MGNREGA. On the other hand, 70.8 percent of women respondents rated their quality of life as adequately improved, stating that their basic amenities were fulfilled by the wages received from MGNREGA. Furthermore, 10.4 percent of women respondents mentioned that their quality of life had improved more than adequately due to receiving a higher number of working days and wages.

These results suggest that individuals who have more working days and higher wages under MGNREGA experience a significant improvement in their quality of life, including the fulfillment of basic needs such as food, water, clothing, and housing in the villages. Consequently, we can conclude that MGNREGA has had a substantial impact on addressing the basic needs of rural women in households by providing wage employment opportunities in the villages.

The respondents' perception regarding poverty reduction with MGNREGA, encompassing various aspects such as basic amenities, education, health, bargaining power, and financial burdens. These perceptions were measured using a Likert five-point scale, capturing respondents' level of agreement or disagreement with the statements.

Regarding the statement on MGNREGA wages helping to improve food situations in households, 40 respondents strongly agreed and 239 agreed with the statement. However, 58 women workers in MGNREGA disagreed, stating that wages did not contribute to proper eating, and 14 respondents strongly disagreed. Based on these responses, the study concluded that MGNREGA has had a significant impact on improving food situations in households by providing wage employment in the villages.

In terms of buying new clothes with MGNREGA wages, the majority of women respondents (225) agreed or strongly agreed that the wages facilitated such purchases. They mentioned that during festivals like Onam, Vishu, and Christmas, MGNREGA wages were particularly helpful in buying clothes for their children. On the other hand, 113 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, stating that both MGNREGA wages and other sources of income influenced their clothing purchases. Additionally, 45 respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed, citing low income due to fewer working days or occasional non-participation in MGNREGA.

When it came to maintaining or repairing houses with MGNREGA wages, many respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the wages were helpful. However, some respondents disagreed, indicating that MGNREGA wages did not assist in maintaining their houses. Similarly, the majority of women respondents stated that MGNREGA wages supported their children's education and healthcare needs, such as hospital visits and buying medicines. However, a few

respondents disagreed due to fewer working days or wages received.

The study also explored perceptions regarding bargaining power in the job market, poverty reduction in households, and alleviating financial worries. Most respondents mentioned that MGNREGA wages reduced financial worries and increased their bargaining power in the labor market. However, some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with MGNREGA wages, citing difficulties in managing financial burdens and experiencing low bargaining power in the labor market. In conclusion, based on the above statements, it can be inferred that MGNREGA has had a significant impact on reducing poverty through wage employment opportunities in the villages.

The perceptions of women respondents regarding self-confidence resulting from MGNREGA wage employment. The statements aim to capture the respondents' self-worth or self-esteem using a five-point scale, ranging from "agree" and "strongly agree" to "neutral," "disagree," and "strongly disagree."

In relation to feeling proud as MGNREGA participants, the majority of women respondents (264), accounting for nearly 69%, agreed or strongly agreed that MGNREGA had instilled a sense of pride in them as earning members of their families. However, a few respondents (58), approximately 15%, disagreed with this statement, indicating that MGNREGA did not generate a feeling of pride in their families. Additionally, 61 respondents remained neutral, expressing uncertainty about whether MGNREGA had created a sense of pride or not.

Regarding people's response to their conversations, a significant proportion of women respondents (260), representing around 67%, stated that people now responded to what they said because of their involvement in MGNREGA. Prior to the implementation of MGNREGA, these women did not receive much consideration during conversations with others, including family members in the villages. Now, as earning members of their households, their opinions and voices carry more weight.

Moreover, the statement concerning MGNREGA's impact on self-confidence and self-esteem revealed that a majority of respondents (311), approximately 80%, believed that MGNREGA helped them progress to the next level of livelihood. They mentioned

improvements in their financial conditions, savings, assets, and overall confidence.

During interviews, some respondents mentioned that MGNREGA wages provided them with the confidence to seek better job opportunities and negotiate in the labor market. However, a few respondents stated that MGNREGA had not influenced their decision to move to the next level as they were content with their current MGNREGA wage and had not actively pursued further advancement.

The statements pertaining to positive mindset and self-criticism regarding wrong decisions also indicated an improvement in self-talk due to MGNREGA wages, fostering a positive attitude among rural women. Based on these statements, it can be concluded that MGNREGA has had a significant impact on self-confidence among rural women in the villages.

The respondents' perception regarding self-care with MGNREGA. The table includes statements related to well-being, motivation, physical appearance, love and belonging, connections for help, sharing values, and behavior. A total of 311 respondents strongly agreed that the MGNREGA wage helps them take care of their basic needs such as food, water, and sufficient sleep. However, 34 respondents disagreed, indicating that they do not prioritize self-care in terms of food, water, and sleep despite the MGNREGA wage. Additionally, six respondents neither agreed nor disagreed about getting enough sleep, water, and food due to the MGNREGA wage.

The statement concerning physical appearance and self-care elicited different responses from MGNREGA workers. The majority of them (228) stated that their physical appearance had improved as a result of the MGNREGA wage. Conversely, 86 respondents expressed a lack of focus on their physical appearance, indicating their disagreement with the statement. This could be attributed to their limited communication or interaction with others in the village, resulting in less emphasis on personal appearance.

Regarding the sense of love and belonging, the majority of women workers in MGNREGA expressed a feeling of worthiness in this aspect. This indicates that the MGNREGA has significantly impacted the self-care of rural women in the villages by fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance. Furthermore, respondents agreed with the statement that

MGNREGA facilitated the sharing of feelings and issues with others, thereby reducing their stress levels. This suggests that MGNREGA has provided a platform for individuals to connect with various segments of the population in their worksites and villages, fostering support networks and stress reduction. Based on these statements, it can be concluded that MGNREGA has had a significant impact on the self-care practices of rural women in the villages.

The respondents' perception of self-confidence with regards to MGNREGA. The statements in the table include strength, choice, trust, capability, and worthiness, which are used to assess the respondents' self-confidence. The majority of respondents (299), accounting for nearly 78 percent, agreed or strongly agreed that they can seek better job opportunities when MGNREGA is not available in the villages. During interviews, they mentioned that prior to the implementation of MGNREGA, they were unable to venture outside their villages and relied solely on their family members or husbands. However, with MGNREGA, they now have the ability to seek alternative job opportunities. Conversely, 66 respondents disagreed with the statement, indicating that they cannot find employment when MGNREGA is absent. Based on these responses, it can be concluded that MGNREGA has had an impact on job-seeking ability during its absence among rural women in the villages.

In terms of capability, which contributes to a sense of worthiness within the family, the majority of respondents (319), accounting for 83 percent, agreed or strongly agreed that MGNREGA has enhanced their capability and worthiness within the family. They mentioned that being wage earners through MGNREGA has led to their family members recognizing them as contributing members of the household. This statement reveals that MGNREGA has improved the capability and worthiness of women workers within their households and villages.

Moreover, 272 respondents agreed that MGNREGA has instilled courage in rural women, enabling them to solve problems independently. This indicates that MGNREGA wages have had an impact on enhancing courage and improving strength by providing wage employment opportunities. Furthermore, 318 respondents agreed that MGNREGA wages have improved their ability to make choices and decisions,

while 40 respondents disagreed, attributing it to their family circumstances. Additionally, the majority of respondents agreed that they could express their opinions in household decision-making processes. Based on these statements, it can be concluded that MGNREGA has had a significant impact on self-confidence among rural women in the villages.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has had a significant impact on various aspects of the lives of rural women in the villages. The findings from the tables and statements demonstrate that MGNREGA has brought positive changes in poverty reduction, access to basic amenities, quality of life, self-esteem, self-care, self-talk, and self-confidence. It has provided wage employment opportunities, improved livelihoods, and empowered women to participate in decision-making processes.

MGNREGA has played a crucial role in reducing poverty by providing wage employment to rural women. It has helped fulfill basic needs such as food, clothing, and housing, leading to an improvement in the overall standard of living. Through MGNREGA, women respondents have reported increased access to basic amenities like food, water, and healthcare. The wages earned have enabled them to meet these essential needs and enhance their overall well-being. MGNREGA has empowered rural women by providing them with a sense of self-worth and dignity. The opportunity to earn wages and contribute to their family's income has boosted their self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-talk. The MGNREGA wages have enabled women to take better care of themselves and their families by ensuring access to proper nutrition, sufficient sleep, and other self-care practices. It has also contributed to improvements in physical appearance and overall well-being.

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