

Relation Between Education Attainment and Women's Economic Empowerment in Rural Areas of Bankura District, West Bengal, India: A Systematic Study

Mrs Rina Mahato¹, Dr. S.K. Tripathi²

¹ *Research Scholar (Education) Shri Venkateshwara University in Gajraula, Uttar Pradesh, India*

² *Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Shri Venkateshwara University in Gajraula, Uttar Pradesh, India*

Abstract—This study investigates the relationship between educational attainment and economic empowerment of women in rural areas of Bankura District, West Bengal, India. It highlights the importance of women's economic empowerment and the challenges they face. The research design is descriptive, employing a purposive sample of 100 women from various educational backgrounds across different areas of the mentioned district. The findings reveal a statistically significant positive correlation between education level and economic empowerment of women.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is the key to women's empowerment; it gives knowledge, skills development, thinking power, and good health and wellbeing.

The year 2030 marks a critical point in time for humanity. In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a comprehensive agenda for a sustainable world by 2030, comprising a total of 17 goals. Among these 17 ambitious goals, achieving gender equality is designated as SDG 5. It is not only a fundamental human right but also an important driver for progress across all other goals. At the heart of SDG 5 lies the economic empowerment of women — a powerful tool to achieve a more prosperous and sustainable future for our world.

Economic empowerment of women is important for everyone. Women represent half the world's population and a significant portion of the workforce. Yet, they continue to face significant barriers to economic participation. Gender gaps persist in areas like access to education, skills training, finance, and

ownership of assets. This not only limits women's individual potential but also hinders overall economic growth and development.

It is true that empowering women economically brings about the following outcomes:

Increased Productivity and Economic Growth: Studies by the World Bank and International Labour Organization demonstrate that increased female labor force participation significantly boosts a nation's economic output. When women have access to education, training, and financing, they can become entrepreneurs, innovators, and skilled workers, driving economic diversification and growth.

Reduced Poverty: When women earn an income, they have greater control over household resources, leading to improved family well-being. They are more likely to invest in their children's education and healthcare, creating a ripple effect of positive change across generations. According to the World Economic Forum, closing the gender gap in labor force participation could add trillions of dollars to global GDP.

Improved Health and Well-being: Economic empowerment allows women to invest in health services and nutritious food for themselves and their families, leading to better health outcomes. They gain a stronger voice in household decision-making regarding healthcare, sanitation, and hygiene practices, contributing to a healthier and more resilient society.

Sustainable Development: Women are crucial stewards of natural resources, playing a vital role in managing water, food, and energy. Their economic empowerment allows them to participate in decision-

making processes around resource management, leading to more sustainable practices. For example, women farmers often possess traditional ecological knowledge crucial for sustainable agricultural practices.

II. KEY CHALLENGES TO ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Despite the compelling benefits, women face numerous hurdles in achieving economic empowerment. These include:

Gender Gap in Education: Globally, girls continue to have lower literacy rates and access to secondary education compared to boys. Limited education restricts their future employment opportunities and career choices.

Skill Mismatch: Traditional gender roles often steer women towards certain professions, creating a skills gap that doesn't align with current labor market demands.

Lack of Access to Finance: Women are often denied access to loans and credit due to discriminatory practices in society, or sometimes lack of collateral. This hinders their ability to start businesses or invest in income-generating activities.

Unpaid Care Burden: Women disproportionately shoulder the burden of unpaid care work, such as childcare and housework. This limits their time and energy available for paid employment and professional development.

Discrimination in the Workplace: Women often face wage gaps, as well as discrimination in employment and promotion, and lack of access to maternity leave and childcare facilities in the workplace.

Legal and Regulatory Barriers: Restrictive laws and regulations regarding land ownership, inheritance rights, and business registration can further impede women's economic participation.

III. STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Closing the gender gap in economic opportunities necessitates a multi-pronged approach at various levels:

Investing in Girls' Education: Ensuring access to quality education, particularly secondary education

and STEM fields, equips girls with the knowledge and skills necessary for future success.

Promoting Skills Development: Providing women with relevant vocational training programs and job-specific skills empowers them to compete for higher-paying jobs in growing sectors of the economy.

Financial Inclusion: Implementing policies that promote access to credit, microfinance, and financial literacy programs can support women entrepreneurs and businesses.

Reducing Unpaid Care Burden: Investing in childcare facilities, promoting shared parental responsibility, and recognizing the value of unpaid care work are crucial steps towards a more equitable distribution of household tasks.

Promoting Workplace Equality: Enacting legislation promoting equal pay for equal work, paid parental leave, and creating a safe and supportive work environment is essential for retaining women in the workforce.

Legal and Regulatory Reform: Reviewing and revising discriminatory laws and regulations related to land ownership, business registration, and inheritance rights is necessary to ensure women's equal participation in the economy.

IV. TECHNOLOGY AS A CATALYST

The increase of digital technologies presents a powerful opportunity to accelerate women's economic empowerment (SL. Boateng, et al., 2023; Maharishi, et al., 2024).

V. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To find out the relationship between education level and economic empowerment of women in rural areas of Bankura District, West Bengal.

VI. HYPOTHESIS

There is no relationship between education levels and empowerment of women.

VII. LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive research often includes a meticulous examination of research journals, books, articles, theses, and other relevant sources of information that

pertain to the research topic. By conducting literature reviews, researchers can effectively gain valuable insights from the recommendations and findings of previous investigations, which can subsequently guide their own research.

In the *Journal of Strategic and Global Studies* (2020), Mia Siskawati, Shelley Adelina, Ruth Evelyn, and Septiani Angriani explore the current state of gender equality and women's empowerment in Indonesia and its implications for national development. Despite Indonesia's commitment to gender equality, significant gaps persist in terms of women's participation in education, the economy, and political decision-making power.

Najibi et al. (2023) critically explore the theme of "Inclusion, Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice in Education" and examine the sustainable development goals. Their comprehensive review reveals the potential for increasing women's tertiary education participation in Afghanistan as a means of promoting sustainable development and gender equity. However, gender equality and higher education opportunities for women remain significant challenges in developing countries like India.

Kumar et al. (2023), in "Indian Women's Empowerment in the Twenty-First Century: Some Troubles and Barriers" in the *Journal of Pharmaceutical Negative Results*, identify obstacles that hinder women's empowerment in India, providing an in-depth analysis of cultural, social, economic, and political factors that impede women's access to education, employment, healthcare, and political representation, and propose potential solutions and strategies for overcoming these barriers.

In "Education as an Instrument for Women Empowerment in Assam," Masrong et al. (2023) highlight the significance of education in empowering women in Assam, India, contextualizing the historical and cultural background where women have traditionally faced marginalization and encountered multiple barriers in accessing education. The authors argue that education serves as a key instrument for women's empowerment, leading to improvements in economic opportunities, healthcare, and social status. Krishna, et al. (2023) suggest promoting ICT for rural development and women's empowerment in India to facilitate better quality services at lower cost and effective marketing of products through social media platforms such as electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM),

noting that women remain far behind in terms of access to such computer-based platforms.

Voumik, L. C., Rahman, et al. (2023) conducted a study on the impact of female education, trade openness, per capita GDP, and urbanization on women's employment in South Asia using the CS-ARDL model, finding that female education, trade openness, and urbanization had a significant positive impact on women's employment, while per capita GDP had a negative impact. The study recommends policies aimed at increasing female education, promoting trade openness, and urbanization to boost women's employment opportunities in the region.

R. Srinivasulu and S. N. Sugumar (2022), in "Impact of Literacy and Education on Earning Capacity of Tribal People with Special Reference to Kodaikanal District, Tamil Nadu," focus on the unique challenges faced by tribal communities in India, measuring the impact of literacy and education on the earning power of tribal people in the district. The authors point out that tribal people in India are frequently cut off from the mainstream of society and face multiple challenges due to their heterogeneous demography, and argue that literacy and education can play a crucial role in improving their economic status, though significant gaps remain.

Wei, W., Sarker et al. (2021), in "The influence of women's empowerment on poverty reduction in the rural areas of Bangladesh: Focus on health, education and living standard," explored the link between women's empowerment and poverty reduction in rural Bangladesh, collecting primary data from 914 married women. The findings revealed that improved access to education, ownership of assets, decision-making power concerning children's health and education, and access to medical facilities have significantly contributed to a decrease in income poverty and multidimensional poverty.

The study "Caste matters: perceived discrimination among women in rural India" sheds light on the experiences of discrimination among pregnant women from Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and Other Backward Class (OBC) communities in rural western India, finding that lower-caste women were more likely to experience and report discrimination compared to women from the General Caste, emphasizing the importance of understanding caste-based discrimination and inequality.

Malarvizhi, V. et al. (2024) suggest that economic empowerment of women is important for achieving Sustainable Development Goals through skill development, noting that increasing women's earning capacity definitely develops women's empowerment.

VIII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design: The research design adopted for this study is a descriptive research design.
2. Variables: (a) Dependent Variable — Economic Empowerment of women. (b) Independent Variable — Educational Attainment of women.

3. Population: The population for this study consists of women residing in Bankura District, West Bengal, India, aged 20 to 55 years, across different educational backgrounds and socio-economic statuses.

4. Sample: A purposive sampling technique was used to select a representative sample of women from different educational levels. The sample size is 100 women in rural areas of Bankura District.

Data Collection: Data were collected through surveys/questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions with the selected sample.

IX. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Education Level and Economic Empowerment Scores

Education Level	Number of Candidates	Mean Score	Standard Deviation (SD)
Primary (PE)	20	2.30	0.76
Secondary (SE)	40	2.35	0.88
Higher Secondary (HSE)	30	3.03	1.14
Graduate & Higher (GH)	10	4.00	0.55

ANOVA Test (using software): F-statistic value is 9.4865; p-value is 0.000015285.

We reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between education level and economic empowerment of women. At a significance level of 0.05, there is a statistically significant relationship between education level and economic empowerment scores.

Based on the ANOVA analysis of the economic empowerment scores for 100 rural women in Bankura District, West Bengal, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Positive Relationship: There is a statistically significant relationship between education level and economic empowerment scores ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$). This suggests that, on average, women with higher education levels tend to have higher economic empowerment scores in this research.

Increasing Trend: The mean score increases consistently with each higher education level (Primary < Secondary < Higher Secondary < Graduate & Higher), further supporting the observed positive relationship.

Limited Causality: While the analysis shows a correlation, it does not necessarily imply causation. Higher education might be associated with higher economic empowerment, but it does not definitively prove that education directly causes it. Other factors such as experience, skills, access to resources, and job market conditions might also play a role.

Data Representativeness: The conclusions are based on primary data collected by the researcher, representative of the population of rural women in Bankura District, drawn using a purposive sampling technique spread across 4 blocks of the district with women aged 20 to 60 years. A larger and more diverse sample might be needed for broader generalizations.

X. EXPLANATIONS FOR THE RELATIONSHIP

Education and Skills: Higher education can equip women with knowledge, skills, and qualifications that are valuable in the job market, potentially leading to better job opportunities and higher incomes.

Confidence and Negotiation: Education can boost a woman's confidence and negotiation skills, allowing her to negotiate for better pay and working conditions. Entrepreneurship: Education can empower women to start their own businesses, giving them greater control over their income and economic well-being. Access to Resources: Higher education can open doors to resources like financial aid, training programs, and professional networks, contributing to economic empowerment.

XI. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

It would be interesting to explore the specific skills and knowledge gained through different education levels and how they translate into economic empowerment. Examining the role of other factors, such as access to childcare, transportation, and technology, could provide a more comprehensive picture. Investigating regional variations within Bankura District, or comparing these findings to other rural areas in West Bengal, might offer broader insights. By considering these additional factors and conducting further research, a deeper understanding of the relationship between education and economic empowerment for rural women in Bankura District can be gained, potentially leading to strategies to empower them further.

XII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The study acknowledges the importance of women's economic empowerment for achieving sustainable development goals. It highlights the challenges women face in achieving economic empowerment, such as limited access to education and skills training.

XIII. CONCLUSIONS

The study acknowledges limitations in causality and data generalizability. The conclusion emphasizes education's role in empowering women economically and proposes further research to explore the specific skills gained through education and their impact on economic empowerment.

REFERENCE

- [1] Bhat, T. (2014). Women Education in India Need of the Ever. *Human Rights International Research Journal*, 1, 3.
- [2] Chen, M. A. (1995). Engendering world conferences: the international women's movement and the United Nations. *Third World Quarterly*, 16(3), 477-494.
- [3] Cornwall, A. (2007). Myths to live by? Female solidarity and female autonomy reconsidered. *Development and Change*, 38(1), 149-168.
- [4] Hashemi, S. M., Schuler, S. R., & Riley, A. P. (1996). Rural credit programs and women's empowerment in Bangladesh. *World Development*, 24(4), 635-653.
- [5] Hazarika, D. (2011). Women empowerment in India: A brief discussion. *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration*, 1(3), 199-202.
- [6] Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435-464.
- [7] Masrong, B., & Borah, B. (2023). Education as an instrument for women empowerment in Assam. *Initiative*, 54.
- [8] Mahmud, S., Shah, N. M., & Becker, S. (2012). Measurement of women's empowerment in rural Bangladesh. *World Development*, 40(3), 610-619.
- [9] Najibi, P., & McLachlan, C. (2023). Moving towards a sustainable future for women in Afghanistan through increased tertiary education participation: challenges and possibilities. *Inclusion, Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice in Education: A Critical Exploration of the Sustainable Development Goals*, 245-259.
- [10] Narasimhan, S. (1999). Empowering women: an alternative strategy from rural India.
- [11] Pal, B., & Mondal, T. K. (2022). Gender gap in rural literacy: a spatio-temporal analysis of Bankura district in West Bengal, India. *GeoJournal*, 87(6), 5007-5026.
- [12] Parvin, A. Role of Education in Women Empowerment — A Study on Indian Context.
- [13] Sen, A. (1989). Women's survival as a development problem. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 43(2), 14-29.

- [14] Shindu, J. (2012). Women's Empowerment through Education. *Abhinav Journal*, 1(11), 3.
- [15] SL. Boateng, Penu, O. K. A., Boateng, R., Budu, J., Marfo, J. S., & Asamoah, P. (2024). Educational technologies and elementary level education — A bibliometric review of Scopus indexed journal articles. *Heliyon*.
- [16] V. Malarvizhi, Gandhimathi, S., & Annapoorni, R. (Eds.). (2024). *Economic Empowerment of Women for Sustainable Development*. EduBubs Publishing House.