

Women Empowerment in Socio-Economic Aspects through Garment Industries in India

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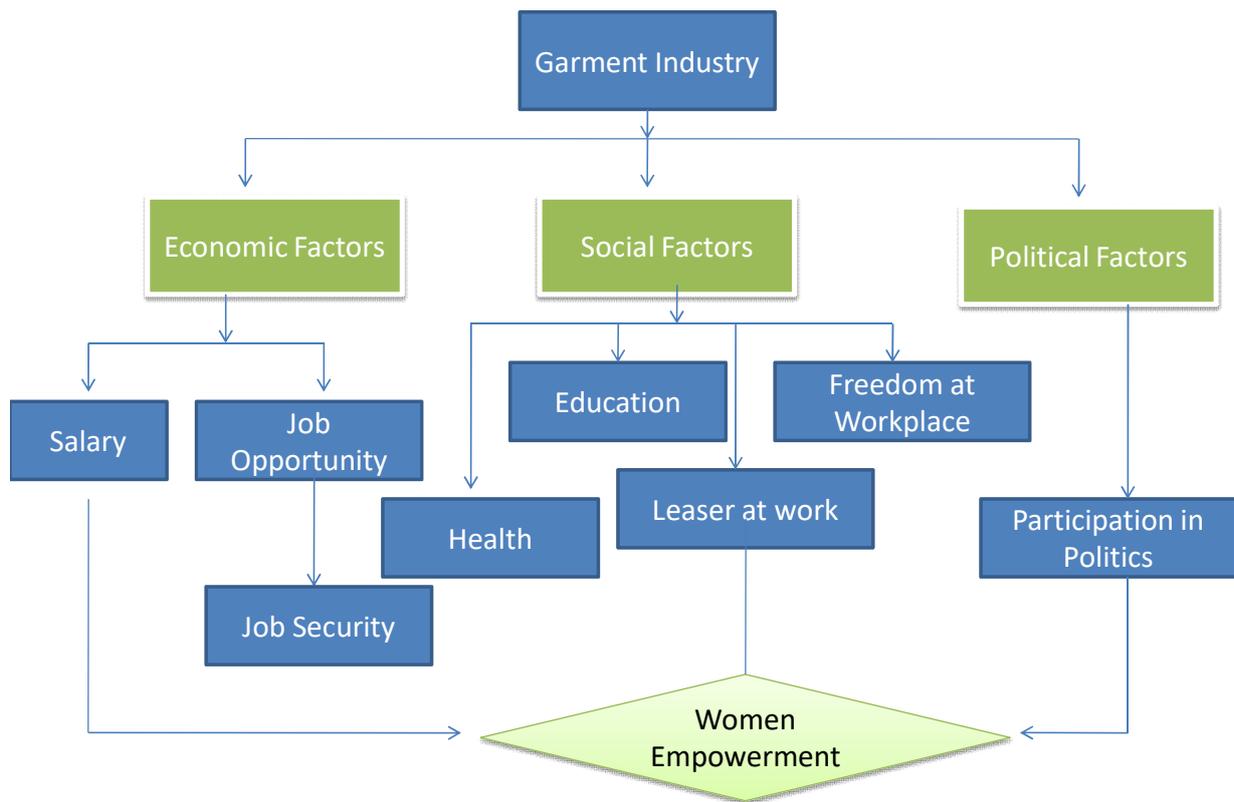
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Abstract: *Nowadays, women are working in garments sector, education sector, banking sector, different NGO's and government organizations but the single garment sector where the majority of them are in garment industry and most of them are less educated, unskilled and from rural areas. These women have neither decision making power and nor access to resources before getting the job in the garments sector. The job creates ample opportunity for female workers by giving economic freedom, keeping them near the resources and facilities in the city area, and making them knowledgeable, and skills through training, counselling, and sharing problem with co-workers. The study reveals that empowerment of women vastly depends on four variables which are women's financial contribution to family, women's access to resources, women's participation in household decision making and their perception of coping capacity to shocks. It has been found that garments sector significantly contribute to enhance the female worker's ability to contribute financially, to participate in decision making, to access resources, and to cope with risks which ultimately increase their empowerment in the society as a whole.*

Keywords:

Introduction: Empowerment is the process that creates power in individuals over their own lives, society, and in their communities. People are empowered when they are able to access the opportunities available to them without limitations and restrictions such as in education, profession and lifestyle. Feeling entitled to make your own decisions creates a sense of empowerment. Empowerment includes the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment is all about equipping and allowing women to make life-determining decisions through the different problems in society.

Conceptual Framework of Women Empowerment



Economic Empowerment

Economic Empowerment basically relates to the economic freedom that women have and the increasing share of economic activity that they are performing. Women in India have started participating in the economic scenario of the country which gives a clear indication of the women empowerment. If women are economically empowered they can earn their living and support the family also which results in improving the standard of living in the society. In this way they can generate self-respect, self-esteem and other forms of benefits. Economic empowerment is however more than just financial stability for women. It has addressed the issues like property rights, household relations, and educational rights in the society. This is also supposed to improve the savings and credit which in turn strengthens women's say in decision making in their family. It is seen that when women control decision regarding credit and saving they improve the overall welfare of the family also. Women's income in a family is very important for educational, nutritional and economic improvement for the family. Governments have tried their level best to attempt strategies for financial independence of women. The investment in women's economic activities will improve employment

opportunities for women. The microfinance program is providing an appropriate platform for initiating and sustaining income generating activities.

Social Empowerment

Social empowerment means that women should get an eminent place in her family and society and should have a right to enable her to make use of available resources. SHGs are one such organization that mobilizes social empowerment among women. The members of SHGs are mostly women. The women save money in SHG for future gains in times of need. Although it is a gradual process but economic and political empowerment is not possible without social empowerment. Gender equality also plays a major role in this. Microfinance programs pursued through SHGs are a collective effort of group participants. The members co-operate with each another, it improves the social behavior. SHGs are giving opportunity to women to come out of the four walls of their houses and meet other members of the society; it leads to their socio-cultural empowerment. Microfinance acts as an entry ticket for women to enforce socio-economic empowerment which finally brings gender equality awareness. In these days the presence of women has increased in the public financial institutions such as banks and gram panchayat etc. But the development is slow in this field. For that the whole society needs a change.

Political Empowerment

If women are participating in the process of decision making in the political issues, then it can be an indicator of politically empowered women. According to Batliwala (1994) any approach that addresses the issue of empowerment and transformation of the existing power structures can be done through organized mass movement. Women's political empowerment can take place both within and outside the formal politics. It has been proved that microfinance programs have empowered the women participants socially, economically as well as politically. Women with self-confidence and alertness are capable of taking part in the election process properly.

The Changing Face of the Apparel Workforce and Workplace

While demographics vary among countries (see Table 1 in Appendix), the modern apparel sector has always been dominated by female workers. The makeup of those female workers, however, is evolving rapidly in response to a variety of social and economic drivers. Traditionally, a large proportion of garment workers have been young women with limited or no skills, and often rural migrants for whom the apparel sector provides one of few opportunities and likely a first opportunity—for wage-earning employment.⁹ These women

were typically unmarried and childless, and tended to leave the apparel supply chain after a couple of years to return to their villages to marry and/or have children. Today, a growing proportion of women workers are marrying, having children, and remaining in urban areas to continue working within the apparel supply chain. In Bangladesh, for example, a 2015 study by the Asian Center for Development found that 57 percent of female workers interviewed were married.¹⁰ Within this context, apparel sector companies' approaches to women's empowerment should expand to recognize and encompass a more diverse female workforce across different stages of their lifecycle. Beyond the changes within women worker demographics, factors such as the introduction of new technologies and increased automation are changing the overall gender makeup of the global apparel sector. As new technology becomes available and larger firms investing more complete production processes, more men are being hired. While the opportunity for greater skills development and occupational growth exists for women workers, it appears that these opportunities may be going to a larger proportion of male workers and supervisors active in the market as men.

Education, skills development and training

Education and training matter throughout the life cycle. Access to quality education during childhood is important in itself and has important spill-over effects in breaking intergenerational poverty cycles, delaying marriage and childbearing and improving labour market outcomes later in life.

Encouragingly, in recent years the majority of countries have achieved gender parity in education at the pre-primary and primary levels. But, although most people believe that girls and boys should have equal access to good education – according to Gallup, the average across 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) was 96% in 2011 – discriminatory social norms and practices, including early marriage and the gendered division of household labour, reduce the access of girls (OECD, 2012b; Jones et al., 2014b; Purewal and Hashmi, 2015). Equally, in families that do not value education, girls are more likely to marry young and to take on more domestic work. According to Gallup, in 29 SSA countries in 2015, the average share of married girls aged under 18 with a secondary education was 16% compared to 36% of unmarried girls.

Disparities in girls' secondary enrolment persist; in 2012 in SSA and South and West Asia, 84 and 93 girls respectively were enrolled on average for every 100 boys (UNESCO, 2015). Secondary completion can be a challenge for both boys and girls, but the most extreme cases of educational disparity remain at girls' expense (ibid.). Gender intersects with other

inequalities, as girls in the lowest wealth quintiles are often the least likely to ever enrol in school. During the 2000s in Niger and Guinea, approximately 70% of the poorest girls had never attended school – around 10 percentage points higher than the share of the poorest boys (UNESCO, 2015). This is particularly significant given the relationship between educational attainment and eventual employment and earnings.

Norms (and resulting practices) notwithstanding, both macro-level and very practical constraints often inhibit girls' attendance at schools. At a macro level, the availability and quality of jobs influence female labour force participation, and by extension, demand for female education (see Verick, 2014). At a micro level, specific barriers to attendance include a lack of household resources, institutions that are inhospitable to girls who are menstruating, pregnant or have children, curricula that reinforce traditional gender roles and a lack of female teachers (see UNFPA, 2014). Provisions aimed at reducing these specific constraints can help to bolster girls' attendance – as in Western Kenya, where paying for school uniforms led to reductions in dropout rates, adolescent marriage and pregnancy (Duflo et al., 2006).

Girls' access to education can also be severely affected by external shocks, and by economic crises in particular. During periods of national economic contraction, primary school completion rates are estimated to fall by 29% for girls compared with 22% for boys (Stavropoulou and Jones, 2013). Where household-level economic shocks drive mothers to increase their paid economic activity, girls are often the first to be removed from school to take on extra domestic responsibilities, including looking after younger siblings (Stavropoulou and Jones, 2013). Furthermore, crises and emergencies, especially conflict, have a negative effect on girls' education, 'with 4 of the 5 countries with the largest gender gaps in education facing war or insurgency' (Nicolai et al., 2015: 9).

The barriers to female education, whether systemic or temporarily caused by shocks, have serious repercussions for their prospects later in life. The opportunity cost is large: in low-income countries, earnings per year of education are higher for females than males (Patrinos and Montenegro, 2014; Peet et al., 2015). An additional year of primary school for girls can later increase wages by around 10%, rising to 15-25% for each extra year of secondary school, and nearly 17% for tertiary education (Schultz, 2002; Patrinos and Montenegro, 2014, cited in Sperling et al., 2016).

While educating girls is a primary means of increasing economic outcomes later in life, adult training and skills development programmes are also important to women's economic empowerment. Our analysis of Gallup data from 11 Asian countries suggests that large shares

of women (and men) were dissatisfied with their education. However in China, for example, just 10% of women and 13% of men had participated in continued education or training.

Lifelong learning initiatives are a well-established focus of development programmes, and have subsequently been subject to extensive assessment. A recent review of women and girls' economic empowerment programme evaluations found that joint interventions that combine vocational training with life skills (to increase knowledge of rights and capacity to manage challenges, including around sexual and reproductive health) can be beneficial; such programmes are often highly cost-efficient and can be offered effectively in a wide range of contexts with adjustments to fit local context (Taylor and Pereznieto, 2014)

Health

Before getting to the main subject of occupational health and safety, it is important to look at the overall state of garment workers' health in Bangalore, and their access to health care services. Workers come from various suburbs of Bangalore and the villages beyond them, and are generally aged between 18 and 45 years. Their lower socioeconomic status, coupled with the lack of other viable livelihood options, puts them at a particular disadvantage while dealing with health related problems. In a random survey conducted by the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) in 2014, it was found that 60.6% workers of those surveyed were anaemic.

1 Various occupational health issues, such as breathing problems and respiratory illnesses that result from inhaling cotton dust, are common in the industry. According to an ESIC official, 80 per cent of all tuberculosis (TB) cases registered in 2009 were from garment workers.

2 Silicosis, an incurable lung disease also affects workers engaged in sand blasting. To make matters worse, garment units where these processes are involved are not classified under hazardous industries, according to an official from the Department of Factories, Boilers, Industrial Safety & Health. Musculoskeletal problems like back aches, body, hand and leg pain are reported by the majority of workers as a result of repetitive work.

Although major accidents are not common, minor accidents such as puncture wounds from needles are a daily occurrence.

Health needs to be looked at from the broader context of a worker's daily routine. Workers wake up early to cook for the family, commute long distances to get to work and back, skip breakfast and other meals to save time, drink less water to avoid visiting the restroom and work without pause to meet high production targets. Stress caused by abusive behaviour from

supervisors, the repetitive nature of their work and the occupational hazards that they face daily, coupled with minimum wages of less than INR 300 per day (\$4.61) that barely allow them to make ends meet and the resulting low nutrition status, have a deeply negative impact on their general health. for mismanagement and poor delivery. Privatization is indirectly present in the form of tertiary care tie-ups that bleed the state exchequer and affect the quality of services that could otherwise have been used to boost primary and secondary care centers run by the ESI.

Workers' health issues are treated in a matter of fact manner. Obtaining leave through ESI is still difficult, and often involves bribing the doctor in charge. Irregular periods, excessive bleeding and white discharge are the most commonly reported reproductive health issues among workers, according to trade union activists working in the sector. Paid maternity leave, at three months, is woefully inadequate, with an extra month in case of complications. Many garment workers are forced to leave their jobs altogether to take care of their young children as factory often fail to meet their statutory duty to provide a crèche.

The nutritional status of garment workers is generally poor, as a result of low pay, the poor quality of food provided in factory canteens, and societal attitudes that are generally discriminatory towards women. A pediatrician working with the State ESI informed us that malnutrition, growth retardation and behavioural problems are often found in the children of these workers as a result of low nutritional status.

For Safety:

- Not enough fire exit doors and ventilation for air circulation of industry building
- It is found that most of the garment industries do not use safety sign according to the ILO conventions.
- Most of the fire and smoke alarm bells does not work in garment industries and
- Many garment industries does not have fire and smoke alarm systems.
- Routes are blocked by storage materials.
- Machine layout is often staggered.
- No provision for emergency lighting.
- Doors, opening along escape routes, are not fire resistant.
- Doors are not self-closing and often do not open along the direction of escape.
- Adequate doors as well as adequate staircases are not provided to aid quick exit.
- Fire exit or emergency staircase lacks proper maintenance.
- Lack of proper exit route to reach the place of safety

- Parked vehicles, goods and rubbish on the outside of the building obstruct exits to the open air.
- Fire in a Bangladesh factory is likely to spread quickly because the principle of Compartmentalization isn't practiced.
- Lack of awareness among the workers and the owners

Baby care center for the female worker: As most of our garment workers are women, they have to carry their small new born child to the factories as there is no one to look after these children at home. As there are no baby care facilities in most of our factories these workers have to face untold sufferings; carrying their children in their lap in severe cold and severe heat during hot season, exposing the children to severe health hazard. Management has to look into this particular problem by making special facilities so that these particular workers have this facility for their uninterrupted routine work in their factories.

Conclusion: The concept of women empowerment is very much essential for the developing country like India which can be a precursor of poverty elimination and uplifting human rights. Social oppression and economic inequality creates unfavourable situations for rural women who are actually belonging to extremely poor income group. As a patriarchal society, men have supreme authority to control both households and society whereas women are generally kept in their house. Women are becoming vulnerable in India because of their less access to household resources, poor knowledge and skills, huge domestic workloads, and limited part in household decision making (Sebstad and Cohen 2002). Women are unequally treated by the family members and sometimes restrict them to go outside such as to join garment sector which means women have no voice in the family.

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