

SOCIO- ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENTIALS IN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN SRI LANKA

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INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is a one of the important topics discussed in economics, political sciences, demographic and sociology. In developing countries women's empowerment is considered as one of major strategies for eliminating poverty. Further, the third Goal of Millennium Development is to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Therefore women's empowerment is essential in order to fulfill global commitments. According to (Kabeer, 2003) women's empowerment is also important to achieve other Millennium Development Goals (MDG) like reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, achieving universal primary education, combating HIV/AIDS and reducing poverty. Even though the concept of women's empowerment is popular, it has no single accepted definition. In the literature various terms were used such as women's status, female autonomy, gender inequality, access to and control over resources. Considering the dictionary meaning of the word empower is "to give somebody the power or authority to do something or to give somebody more control over their life or the situation they are in." According to the UNICEF 1994 Women's empowerment involves welfare, access to resources, awareness-rising and control. The World Bank also defines empowerment as "the process of increasing capacity of individual or groups to make choices and to transform these choices into desired actions and outcomes" (WHO, 2006). Considering the modern view the women autonomy could be divided into different categories such as women's participation in decision making, their access to resources, their physical freedom to movement and ability to visit their relatives or friends (Balk, 1994; Morgan and Niraula, 1995).

The prime objective of the study is to identify the nature of women empowerment and factors affecting them in Sri Lanka. In many empirical studies the education of women and their economic status is used as a measurement of empowerment. However some researchers like Kishor, (2000); Govindasamy and Malhotra, (1996) criticized those indicators and considered those variables as indirect variables. Therefore, the present study focuses on new variables such as spending ability, access to health and purchasing ability of major household item and daily needs. Further considering Sri Lankan context, it is difficult to find research related to women's empowerment. Therefore, this study can be helpful for policy makers and future researchers.

Considering the empirical studies, Ahmad and Sultan (2004) identified a positive relation between education and women's empowerment. A study was conducted by Sridevi (2005) found that higher level of education leads to higher level of empowerment. Heaton et al, (2005) indicates that educated and literate women have greater access to information and knowledge that increase their chances for paid jobs, other benefits and resources. Mostofa et al. (2008) in their study in Bangladesh found that women under 20 years of age had less empowerment than the women who were between the ages 40-44. Tareque et al. (2007) concluded that younger wives in Bangladesh were kept under influence of their husbands as compared to elder wives. Ahmad and Sultan (2004); Elizabeth and Thomas (2001) and Jejeebhoy (2000) also considered age as one of the important determinant of women's empowerment. Heaton et al. (2005) indicated that in Nicaragua, employment was most important variable in promoting women's autonomy. Roy and Niranjan (2004) explored that urban women enjoy more freedom than the rural women. Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2002), showed that autonomy was greatly influenced by region in their study both in Pakistan and India. Parveen (2005:176) stated that exposure to media has significant influence on women's empowerment in Bangladesh.

METHODOLOGY

This study used secondary data of Sri Lanka Demographic and Health Survey (SLDHS) conducted in 2006/2007 by Department of Census and Statistics for analyzing. The study used 13,751 married women aged 15-49 years. The data base was merged according to the key for individual persons. Women's work and husband's background characteristics, respondent's background, were merged to an individual identification data file. Binary logistic regression was used for analyzing the data. A logistic regression model was fitted to a binary outcome, coded as 1, if women have decision making power and 0 if women have no such power.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Binary logistic regression is derived by using the sample of females according to their decision making power. The sample consisted with 13,751 females including women who have decision making power about their facility activities and personal life and those who have no such power. That is the dependent variable of the all of the following binary logistic regression. The regression results for the above model (involving the variables listed in the paragraph above) are as follows.

Table 1: Binary Logistic Regression Model- Determinants of being women with personal autonomy

Note: Dependent variable is women have decision power or not

Source: Author calculations by using DHS, 2006

Explanatory variables	Self Earnings			Health care			Visit family members		
	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	B	Sig.	Exp(B)
husband 'sage		.375			.006			.147	
15-24	-.283	.563	.754	.302	.098	1.353	-.181	.413	.834
25-34	-.146	.686	.864	.381	.007	1.464	.088	.620	1.092
35-44	.107	.718	1.113	.277	.018	1.319	.019	.901	1.019
45-54	-.128	.638	.880	.059	.580	1.061	-.044	.754	.957
Residential Sector		.000			.000			.001	
Urban	.149	.443	1.161	.105	.079	1.111	-.102	.155	.903
Estate	-.861	.000	.423	-.791	.000	.454	-.424	.000	.654
Religion		.000			.000			.000	
Hindu	-1.240	.000	.289	-.380	.000	.684	-.588	.000	.555
Muslim	-.826	.001	.438	-.647	.000	.523	-.962	.000	.382
Other	-.111	.916	.895	-.804	.000	.448	-.834	.002	.434
Being a employee				.094	.040	1.099	-.254	.000	.776
Wealth index		.632			.020			.001	
Poorest	.257	.294	1.293	-.085	.295	.919	-.327	.001	.721
Poorer	.168	.481	1.183	-.056	.465	.946	-.287	.002	.750
Rich	.107	.657	1.112	.123	.106	1.130	-.122	.193	.885
Richest	-.099	.648	.906	.076	.288	1.079	-.011	.908	.990
Current age of Women	.021	.118	1.022	.030	.000	1.031	.025	.000	1.025
No of years of education- Husband	-.021	.059	.979	-.003	.637	.997	-.010	.151	.990
No of years of education- Women	.049	.009	1.050	.041	.000	1.041	.043	.000	1.044
Constant	1.990	.007	7.317	-.298	.281	.743	1.292	.000	3.642

According to UNRISD (2007), studies in developing countries show that religion significantly influences the life of people. This study also concludes that religion plays a significant role in decisions regarding their earnings. Being in a Hindu woman or Muslim woman has a negative relationship with personal autonomy in three categories relative to Buddhist women. However, Offenbauer(2005) stated that recent studies do not confirm the relationship between women's empowerment and religion. Residential sector is also one of the important factors in women's autonomy. According to Roy and Niranjana(2004) urban women enjoy more freedom than the rural women. Furthermore, Furuta and Salway(2006) explored significant difference with respect to residential sector in Nepal on decision on their health, large purchase, employment and own earnings. Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2002) conducted the study in Pakistan and India and concluded that women autonomy was greatly influenced by region. Considering the above model, estate women have negative relationship with decision of women earnings, health care and visiting family members. Females in the estate sector have .423 times odds less than the females in rural sector regarding decision about their own earnings. Therefore, education and job opportunities should be expanded in estate sector because still estate sector is under developed and neglected by government. However women in urban sector recorded insignificant in the model. Considering the above model, women's personal autonomy regarding health care and visit by family members are statistically significant with wealth index. Current age of the women and number of years of education are statistically significant in this model since this shows a positive relationship. Therefore expanding the education opportunities for women is very important to increase their personal autonomy and gender equality.

Table 2: Binary Logistic Regression Model- Determinants of being women with family decision making

Explanatory variables	Purchasing major Household item			Purchasing Daily household item		
	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	B2	Sig.	Exp(B)
husband 's age		.013			.000	
15-24	.146	.459	1.158	-.011	.954	.989
25-34	.276	.071	1.318	.363	.013	1.438
35-44	.293	.021	1.341	.391	.001	1.478
45-54	.081	.490	1.084	.129	.253	1.137
Residential Sector		.000			.000	
Urban	.034	.603	1.034	.175	.005	1.191
Estate	-.540	.000	.583	-.536	.000	.585
Religion		.000			.000	
Hindu	-.641	.000	.527	-.245	.003	.782
Muslim	-.994	.000	.370	-.661	.000	.516
Other	-1.104	.000	.331	-.822	.000	.440
Being a employee	-.156	.003	.855	-.010	.832	.990
Wealth index		.288			.540	
Poorest	-.055	.537	.947	-.044	.597	.957
Poorer	.035	.676	1.036	.052	.509	1.053
Rich	.058	.478	1.060	.035	.644	1.036
Richest	.107	.174	1.113	.065	.371	1.067
Current age of Women	.022	.000	1.022	.034	.000	1.034
No of years of education-Husband	-.001	.857	.999	-.014	.017	.986
No of years of education- Women	.035	.000	1.036	.018	.021	1.019
Constant	.597	.048	1.816	-.009	.974	.991

Note: Dependent variable is women have decision power or not

Source: Author calculations by using DHS, 2006

Women's involvement in income generating activities increase the women's status. The empirical studies provide many evidence. Roy and Niranjana(2004) explored the women who engage in income generating activities and found they have greater autonomy. Heaton et al (2005) concluded that employment is the most important factor in increasing women's empowerment in Nicaragua. Bulmberg(2005) proposed to increase women economic productivity to reduce gender inequality. According to the above table 1 and 3, the women empowerment increased between women employees. Therefore, it is important to expand the education of women. Mason(1986) pointed out long life experiences create opportunities to speak about their rights. Solomon and Adekoya (2006) indicated that elderly women generally show more involvement than others in Nigeria. Mostofa et al (2008) also considered age as an important determinant of women's empowerment. Their study in Bangladesh showed that women under 20 years were less empowerment than the women who were between 40-44 years. According to this study women age has a positive relationship with making decision about daily and major household needs purchases.

Table 3: Hosmer and Lemeshow Test

	Chi-square	df	Sig.
Major household item	7.022	8	.534
Daily household item	6.126	8	.633
Self Earnings	4.481	8	.811
Health Care	8.178	8	.416
Visit family member	5.896	8	.659

Based on Wald statistics all the independent variables in the fitted model are significant. According to Hosmer and Lemeshow Test, The probability value is larger than 0.05 allowing that the overall fitted model is adequate at 95% confidence as given in Table 3.

Conclusion

Generally the women's empowerment can be identified as the decision making power of women regarding their personal life and family life. This study identifies the determinants of women's empowerment in Sri Lanka by using binary logistic regression model which uses the dependent variable of women who have decision making power in her personal life and family life used as 1 in the dummy variable. According to the binary logistic models, being an employee, no of years of education, current age of the husband, religion, residential sector, education and age of the husband are statistically significant. Further expanding employment and education opportunities is important factor to increase the women's decision making power

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