



"A Survey to Determine the Impact of Marital Status on Women's Empowerment and The Disparity in Empowerment Levels Between Married and Single Women in Selected States of India."

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Introduction

Marriage is observed in a variety of communities around the world. It varies in terms of legal, religious, and social practise depending on the individual's legal jurisdiction, religious doctrine, and cultural background. 1. This social practice's primary goal is to ensure that traditional values, economic wealth, and resources are passed down from generation to generation. It also promotes the formation of new kinship ties, social networks, and labour accumulation. Marriage has long been regarded as a significant social event in traditional Indian society, which is dominated by men. According to Sighania, every Indian has been required to marry since the Vedic era, unless they choose to live as 'Sanyashi' (renouncers), and marriage has been regarded as a holy tie in India since then. 2. This could be done to preserve the country's heritage, culture, and patrilineal line of descent. Following that, invasions by outsiders threatened the culture, particularly the lives of the community's women. Increasingly, marriage is the only option available to parents to ensure their daughters' safety, demonstrating the growing importance of marriage in Indian society. Marriage is thus one of the most important social events in India, especially for women. As a result, marriage is essentially compulsory for all women in India, and as a result, single women are not universally accepted. As a result, they can be obnoxious in social situations. Divorced or separated women are the most despised in society because marriage is regarded as a sacred union that is only in vogue for childbirth and passing down family traditions. It is irreversible and cannot be ended by divorce or other means. Divorce is permitted under Hindu civil law in modern India, but it is not universally accepted. The market has come to rule Indian society, culture, and economics during the neoliberal era. As a result of patriarchy, marriage has been transformed into a market-friendly institution. Parents continue to consider both economic and marital stability when making plans for their children's future. According to Indian culture, parents are traditionally responsible for arranging weddings for their children, particularly their daughters. Women's marital status affects their dignity, respect, and ability to be self-sufficient. Because patriarchy expects women to be submissive, working as in-laws is an important role for women in today's society. In the lives of Indian women, reproduction has traditionally been regarded as more important than production. Because their families do not support them, Indian women have no choice but to marry in order to secure their future security and livelihood. It is considered a violation of a woman's given function of reproduction and the transmission of established societal laws and values to future generations if they remain single for an extended period of time (whether married, separated, or divorced). There is a risk of social and economic insecurity in the absence of a sufficient source of income. Based on the foregoing, it is reasonable to conclude that Indian women's marital status has an impact on their entire existence. Whether or not they are married, they have a relationship with their social and familial position. Lone women are frequently mocked and subjected to physical and psychological abuse. People experience insecurity as a result of repression, which drives them to remain isolated from mainstream growth. Economic growth takes precedence over social development in neoliberal India, particularly in terms of women's empowerment. The Indian government has implemented a number of programmes to address gender disparities and improve women's status. All of these programmes were successful in changing society's attitude toward women, but they were all unsuccessful in completely eliminating the impact of married status on women's lives. In general, researchers advocate for historically marginalised groups to be included in a country's development process. Empowerment is recognised as a weapon against inequality as part of the mainstreaming process because it provides power to individuals who do not currently have it. Empowerment, in this sense, refers to giving people the ability to make strategic life decisions when they previously did not have the ability to do so. 3. As a result of the term "empowerment" evolving into a more comprehensive concept, empowerment in one area does not imply empowerment in others. Women's mainstreaming is a regressive component of any implemented policy or programme. In this regard, both state and non-state actors work together. The Indian government has implemented a number of constitutional and humanitarian measures in favour of women, including the establishment of a separate National Women's Commission. The government has devised a number of measures aimed specifically at women in order to achieve the Third Millennium Development Goal (MDG 3). All of these efforts have had only a minor impact on a small segment of Indian society, with the vast majority remaining unaffected. As a result, the achieved and planned levels are out of sync. In other words, does marital status affect women's empowerment and can single women exercise their rights to make decisions both inside and outside the home? A thorough investigation into all possible socioeconomic aspects is required to determine the true causes of the failure. The current study seeks to ascertain the impact of marital status on women's empowerment, the disparity in empowerment levels between married and single women, and the factors that contribute to the disparity in empowerment levels between married and single women.

Methodology

The current analysis is based on unit-level data from the IIPS's third National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), which was conducted in all Indian states in 2019–20. The United Nations Development Programme is the primary source of statistics on women's issues, though it does not include data on women's political participation or earnings. This research focuses on a variety of household-level data points that reflect women's decision-making power at home. It is aimed at married and single women between the ages of 15 and 49. Other elements, in addition to empowering data, are used as explanatory or causal factors to explain or explain away the data.

Result and Discussion

As previously stated, a woman's marital status is an important factor in her empowerment in India. In most cases, only married women who live with their spouses have the right to vote in family matters. The findings suggest that couples make the majority of home-related decisions together, though the extent to which women participate is debatable. If women were actively involved in family decision-making, the percentage of women who make all of their home decisions on their own would reflect this, but this is not the case. The majority of family decisions are most likely made by husbands and must be approved by their wives. As a result, we simply look at women's choices to assess their empowerment. Notably, the proportion of unmarried women in Indian society is low due to societal customs. This is important. Married women make up a sizable proportion of the population. They have varying degrees of home empowerment, but only a few have significant amounts. In a male-dominated culture, social considerations appear to outweigh economic considerations. A key social component influences the respondent's sense of empowerment: his or her relationship with the head of the household. The empowerment of married women varies according to their positional status, whereas the empowerment of single women does not. Women who are married or have children have a moderate level of empowerment, whereas women who are single have a low level of empowerment, regardless of marital or family status. This observation adds to the negative social standing of single women who live apart from their husbands. According to Indian social customs, only a small percentage of women are unmarried, with 91 percent of those aged 15 to 25 stating that they plan to marry soon. Despite this, only about 10% of women aged 26 to 40 and 41% of women aged 41 to 49 are unmarried. Women in their generation's final generation may have remained single out of necessity or married out of choice. Aged 15 to 40, women are almost entirely daughters, sisters, or other family members. They are not taken into account when making household decisions. Even unmarried women's headship status does not provide them with medium or high levels of empowerment. According to additional research, the most important empowerment defining criterion for lone female entrepreneurs was non-response. They can only answer questions about mobility and financial information. Respondents' non-response could be due to a lack of awareness or being denied the authority to make important family decisions. Rather, answers to all of the decision-making questions posed by married women are provided. Every Indian woman, according to this belief, is obligated to marry. It is regarded as a sacred bond that must not be broken under any circumstances. Lone women, as well as their independence in the home and in society, are frowned upon. Giving in is always an appealing option. Financial decisions (spending, significant purchases, and everyday shopping), health and mobility decisions, and other activities that foster confidence are prohibited. However, as the primary source of financial support for the family, the male must allow the female some degree of independence, particularly in terms of mobility. True empowerment, on the other hand, cannot be attained without the ability to move freely. NFHS 3 emphasises the availability of money but not its application. In terms of empowerment, the ability to make financial decisions is more important than mobility flexibility, but it is not the same as making financial or spending decisions. Divorced or separated women are frequently defamed, resulting in a lack of empowerment. In India, widows have a lower social status than divorcees or separated women. It is well documented that marital status influences women's empowerment. As a result, the influence of other socioeconomic determinants on empowerment differs depending on marital status. Relationships with the head of the household and economic status are important determinants of empowerment for divorcees, separated people, and widows. Religion, media exposure, and financial or in-kind compensation all have an impact on their empowerment. Hindu divorcees and separated women have higher levels of empowerment than Muslim and other women. Hindu widows wield more power than non-Hindu widows. Perhaps some Hindu divorced, separated, or widowed women work to maintain their mental health. The empowerment of a woman is determined by her media exposure, age, relationship with the head of the household, occupation, and economic class. Perhaps a large number of single women are of marriageable age, and only a few remain unmarried after the age of forty. Because the majority of this group are daughters and sisters, their occupation does not help them gain moderate or high empowerment.

Religion, family structure, age, media exposure, relationship to the head of the household, education, occupation, type of earning, and economic status all have an impact on married women's empowerment. Married women face numerous challenges in their marriage, so their empowerment is influenced by a variety of factors.

Conclusion

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were established at the turn of the century, have a deadline of 2015. The third Millennium Development Goal promised gender equality and women's empowerment. It is critical to assess how far the third Millennium Development Goal has progressed. In contrast, the report paints a bleak picture of Indian women's empowerment. According to the National Empowerment Survey, nearly half of all women in India have low empowerment, 41% have medium empowerment, and only 7% have high empowerment. We can see in this image of empowerment that many different socioeconomic factors influence women's empowerment in various ways. Due to strict social laws and regulations, social considerations take precedence over economic considerations in India. One of these customs is marriage, which is regarded as a powerful institution and essential for girls. Marriage should provide a woman with stability, security, respect, fulfilment, and confidence. Unmarried women may feel insecure as a result of this concept. They face insecurity and are despised by society. Widows, divorcees, and separated women are also treated disrespectfully. A woman's social standing in India is determined by her marital status. The effect of married status on empowerment effectively negates the importance of education in conservative Indian society. This explains why single women have less influence than married women, even if they are the head of the

family. It is a fallacy to base leadership on logic and social considerations. In Indian society, the senior individual is traditionally the family head, but this does not imply that they are actively involved in decision-making processes. The fact that these women's heads aren't working properly could explain some of their lack of empowerment. To properly construct feminist policy, women who are single, widowed, divorced, separated, or deserted must be given special consideration. Marriage is another societal concept associated with women's well-being. Marriage is a socially constructed traditional concept that is instilled in young girls by their parents from an early age. This teaches women to tolerate their in-laws' sins, particularly those committed by their husband. Because lone women in this society are seen as rebels against patriarchy, they are unable to achieve medium or high levels of family empowerment in their own right. Women who are single, widowed, divorced, or separated may be persuaded or assisted in changing society's perception of their lives and relationships. Because mainstream gender policies are rarely implemented in families, only pro-women policies and initiatives will be able to achieve the twenty-first century goal. Instead of addressing women collectively, unmarried women and married women should be treated as distinct groups of people. Increasing the empowerment of single women and married women (who stay with their spouses) may help women as a group advance.

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