Present Situation of Women Empowerment in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT: *The total development of Bangladesh will undoubtedly be hampered if the empowerment status of women, constituting about fifty percent of the country's population will not be increased or remains as low as it nowadays. In this study an attempt has been made to analyze and determine the nature and extent of women's empowerment and factors influencing it in Bangladesh using the data of Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2007. The findings reveal that the overall mean values of Economic Decision Making Index (EDMI) are 0.661, 0.697, and 0.669 and the overall mean values of Household Decision Making Index (HDMI) are 0.604, 0.646, and 0.613 for rural, urban and combined group respectively. It is observed that lowest age group has lowest mean values of EDMI and HDMI for all three (rural, urban and combined) groups. The mean EDMI is the highest when respondents age at marriage is <14 for both rural and urban areas and for combined groups. It is found that household head has negative significant effect on both EDMI and HDMI. Women living in urban area, involved with income generating activities are more empowered than their counterpart. The mean value of EDMI is larger than that of HDMI which indicates that women are less empowered in household decision making purpose than economic decision making. Between the two dimensions of empowerment, obviously urban women are relatively more empowered than that of rural women.*
KEYWORDS: *Women Empowerment, Economic Decision, Household Decision, Multiple Regression.*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment being the subject of the concern among the policy makers of developing countries, the integration of women into the development process and therefore their participation in economic activities along with men, have been gaining importance in many national development plans. Empowerment facilitates women to access resources such as food, land, income and other forms of wealth, and social resources such as knowledge, power, prestige within the family and community [1]. The empowerment of women has been characterized by considering a multidimensional issue which can be indicated by education, occupation, discussed family planning with partners, household decision making, freedom movement, age at marriage, political representation and legal rights [1-6]. A number of studies have shown that women may be empowered in one area of life while not in others [7-9].

Education enables women to assume more autonomy or power both in traditional gender-stratified family setting and in more egalitarian ones, giving them greater control over their own lives and stronger voice in matters affecting themselves and their families [10-12]. It is a well established fact that in a patriarchal society like Bangladesh, women are ascribed a lower status as men who have the sovereign power to control households and society as a whole, while women are often isolated in their homes [13]. The World Bank study in Bangladesh highlighted that women have had a limited role in the household decision-making, limited access and control over household resources (physical and financial assets), low level of individual assets, heavy domestic workloads, restricted mobility and inadequate knowledge and skills that leading to women's vulnerability [14]. The status of women in Bangladesh has been ranked the lowest in the world on the basis of twenty indicators related to health, marriage, children, education, employment and social equality [15].

Women's economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to strengthening women's rights and enabling women to have control over their lives and exert influence in society. It is about creating just and equitable societies. Women often face discrimination and persistent gender inequalities, with some women experiencing multiple discrimination and exclusion because of factors such as ethnicity or caste.

Evidence from developing countries showed that women's age and family structure were the strongest determinants of women's authority in decision making. Older women and women in nuclear households were more likely than other women to participate in family decisions [16].

Sen and Batiliwala [17] indicated that empowerment is understood not only as an extrinsic control over resources (human, Financial, intellectual), but also as a growing intrinsic capability, seen through greater self-

confidence and an inner transformation of women's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers.

Mason and Smith [18] studied the multiple measures of married women's empowerment in the domestic sphere in five Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand). Findings suggested that gender relations as heavily influenced by community norms and values, community is a far stronger predictor of women's empowerment than individual traits and recommended the primary policy implication of changing community norms and values about gender relations for empowering women.

Study of Egypt established that, for women, more authority in household decision-making is associated with contraception use. It established the relationship was stronger than other measures of female autonomy such as opinions and mobility [19]. Similar results found from Tamil, Nadu, India. Jejeebhoy [20] found that contraceptive use was associated with females who have more power to make household decision but there was no bivariate relationship between mobility and contraception use. Contrary to Jejeebhoy's findings, Kishore [19] established a relationship between mobility and contraception use. Kishore and Gupta [8] revealed that average women in India were absolutely disempowered relative to men, and there had been little change in women empowerment over time.

A study by the USAID [21] found that countless women in the developing world were removed from the information age because of their lower levels of education and deeply ingrained negative attitudes towards other forms of achievement. In another study Susy and Lisa [22] revealed that although women's access to financial services has increased substantially in the past 10 years, their ability to benefit from this access is often still limited by the disadvantages they experienced because of their gender.

Parveen [23] in a study on the empowerment of rural Bangladeshi women found that rural women's empowerment can be attained by fostering their level of awareness of ten selected gender issues including under-valuation, educational gap, inheritance of property rights, timing of marriage, practice of dowry, divorce rights, sex bias, birth registration, political awareness and violence against women.

1.1 Purpose of the study:

During the second half of 20th century, a large number of commendable initiatives have been drawn and international perspective to the study on women's empowerment. A considerable number of studies have also done on it and several studies have taken according to the recommendations of these studies. After that, consensus about what actually comprises women empowerment, and how it is measure, is debated in the development literature. Receiving information on the indicators of empowerment, women grown up as a massive agent of development and the responsibilities of this agency enforce a course of action upon themselves. Taking into account women as active agents rather than passively recipients of development strategies women participation in important decision making is considered as an essential part to achieve development target. Khan and Ara [24] stated that women participation in different types of activities can be developed with the help of education. Government of Bangladesh continuously working to increase women participation in different sector but yet cannot reach to the goal. In this regards an attempt would be needed to explore the cause for non-fulfillment of the required proportion of women participation. The main aim of this study is to analyze and determine the nature and extent of women's empowerment and factors influencing it.

II.   DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes the data extracted from 2007 Bangladesh Demographic and Health survey (BDHS), which were conducted under the authority of the National Institute of Population Research and training (NIPORT) of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Mitra and Associates executed the survey with the technical assistance from ORC Macro and financial support from USAID. Both univariate and bivariate analysis have been used. Construct a women empowerment index and multiple linear regression analyses are used to see the cause and effect of several phenomena on the empowerment.

2.1 Construction of Index measuring women Empowerment:

Women empowerment is a multidimensional process and it is very difficult to measure in a quantitative scale. It comprises the entire interactions of roles, rights and statuses that surround both male and female in a given society or a culture [25]. Several researchers had tried to measure women empowerment in quantitative manner by constructing women empowerment index [18,26-27]. Although women empowerment is multidimensional, the dimensions we consider are economic decision making and household decision making and an attempt has been made to see the pattern of women's empowerment by some socio-economic and demographic settings with

the help of the mean value of the indices. The detailed description of these two dimensions with their relevant indicators is given in Table1.

It was ascertained through a four-point scale having 5 statements which were positively stated. The women's responses were expressed by 'respondent alone', 'respondent and husband together', 'husband alone', and 'with other family member'. A score of 4, 3, 2 and 1 was assigned respectively to each positive statement. The first dimension comprises three indicators and so the minimum score this dimension is 3 and the maximum score of this dimension is 12. The second dimension comprises two indicators and so the minimum score of this dimension is 2 and the maximum score of this dimension are 8. Then an index of each dimension is constructed as follows:

$$Dimension\ index = \frac{Actual\ value - Minimum\ value}{Maximum\ value - Minimum\ value}$$

According to Human Development Index (HDI) the performance in each dimension is expressed between 0 and 1 (UNDP, 2005). These indices provide a measurement of the achievement of empowerment or autonomy of a woman and the achievement is the amount of the proportion of unity.

Table 1: Description of the indicators of two dimensions for constructing women empowerment indices.

Dimension	Description of indicator	Response	Codes
Economic decision making	Who decides how to spend money	Respondent alone	4
		Respondent and husband	3
		Husband alone	2
		Other family member	1
	Decision of purchasing large household goods	Respondent alone	4
		Respondent and husband	3
		Husband alone	2
		Other family member	1
	Decision about household purchases for daily needs	Respondent alone	4
		Respondent and husband	3
		Husband alone	2
		Other family member	1
Household decision making	Decision on own health care	Respondent alone	4
		Respondent and husband	3
		Husband alone	2
		Other family member	1
	Decision on child health care	Respondent alone	4
		Respondent and husband	3
		Husband alone	2
		Other family member	1

III.   EMPOWERMENT IN ECONOMIC DECISION MAKING

Women empowerment in economic decision making refers to the women's ability to share or to control the decision processes regarding domestic financial matter with husband or other family members. The measurement of empowerment in economic decision making is calculated by three components such as participation in spending money about all purpose of the family's requirement, in purchasing a large amount of household goods and in purchasing a small amount of daily needs. This index is indicated as economic decision making index (EDMI).

Table 2 presents the mean values of women's economic decision making index (EDMI) for some selected socio-economic and demographic settings of women. It is revealed that how women are empowered in economic decision making for some variables like respondent's age, age at marriage, educational level, religion, current working status, social status, involvement with NGO, exposure to media and head of household.

The overall mean values of EDMI are 0.661, 0.697 and 0.669 for rural, urban and combined group respectively. It is observed that lowest age group has lowest mean values of EDMI for all three (rural, urban and combined) groups. It elucidates higher educational categories hold the highest mean value except higher educational category for urban areas.

The mean EDMI is the highest when respondents age at marriage is <14 for both rural and urban areas and for combined groups. Mean EDMI is higher for Muslim respondents, respondents who currently working and those respondents whose family heads are females. The mean value of EDMI is also highest for women who involvement in NGO, exposed any media. For urban, women with high social status have high economic

decision making power whereas for rural areas women with middle social status have highest mean value of EDMI (Table 2).

So, we can infer that urban women have more economic decision making power in comparisons to the rural counterpart. Moreover, young women have less control in taking economic decision in comparison to aged ones. Further it is revealed that more educated women have more power in taking economic decision than their counterparts (Table 2). Again currently working women, Muslim women and women whose family's heads are females have more economic decision making power than theirs corresponding counterparts. Moreover, for early age at marriage is negatively associated with economic decision power.

Table 2: Mean values of economic decision making index (EDMI) by selected demographic and socio-economic characteristics of women.

CHARACTERISTICS	RURAL		URBAN		TOTAL	
	MEAN	S.D	MEAN	S.D	MEAN	S.D
Current age						
<25	0.624	0.197	0.637	0.206	0.623	0.199
25-30	0.648	0.179	0.696	0.168	0.660	0.177
30-35	0.682	0.152	0.728	0.141	0.692	0.151
35-40	0.681	0.158	0.721	0.157	0.691	0.159
≥40	0.681	0.172	0.743	0.167	0.695	0.173
Age at marriage						
<14	0.668	0.178	0.713	0.164	0.676	0.176
14-16	0.658	0.171	0.696	0.187	0.667	0.175
16-18	0.650	0.169	0.692	0.177	0.661	0.172
≥18	0.657	0.191	0.682	0.186	0.666	0.189
Education level						
Illiterate	0.660	0.169	0.719	0.163	0.671	0.169
Primary	0.654	0.177	0.686	0.18	0.662	0.179
Secondary and above	0.667	0.184	0.686	0.185	0.673	0.185
Religion						
Non-Muslim	0.621	0.184	0.655	0.182	0.628	0.185
Muslim	0.665	0.175	0.700	0.177	0.673	0.176
Social status						
Poor	0.658	0.161	0.687	0.172	0.661	0.163
Middle	0.673	0.184	0.689	0.194	0.675	0.186
Rich	.657	0.199	0.701	0.176	0.677	0.191
Involvement with NGO						
Yes	0.672	0.163	0.712	0.161	0.679	0.163
No	0.645	0.189	0.685	0.189	0.658	0.189
Exposure to media						
Yes	0.671	0.174	0.701	0.173	0.679	0.174
No	0.648	0.178	0.679	0.197	0.651	0.180
Currently working status						
Yes	0.663	0.174	0.702	0.179	0.671	0.176
No	0.643	0.195	0.646	0.167	0.644	0.188
Household head						
Male	0.648	0.165	0.689	0.170	0.658	0.168
Female	0.825	0.219	0.800	0.235	0.819	0.223
Total	0.661	0.176	0.697	0.178	0.669	0.177

3.1 Factors Affecting Women Empowerment in Economic Decision Making:

Multiple linear regression analyses are used to see the cause and effect of several phenomena on the empowerment of economic decision making dimensional index. Here, the dependent variable is the value of economic decision making index of the corresponding dimensions.

The quantitative independent variables used in this section on the basis of -respondent's age and age at first marriage and the qualitative independent variables are education level, religion, place of residence, media exposure, NGO involvement, social status and currently working status. Household head is also considered as a qualitative variable. The results from multiple linear regressions are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that the quantitative variables respondent's age have positive effect, whereas age at first marriage have negative effect on respondent's economic decision making power. Here respondent's age, media exposure, religion, NGO involvement, place of residence, household head and respondent's currently working status have significant effect on economic decision making power.

Table 3: Economic decision making index (EDMI) by some selected variable through multiple linear regression model.

Variables	Coefficients	Std. Error	t-value	P value
Current age	0.003	0.000	8.158	0.000
Age at first marriage	-0.002	0.001	-1.517	0.129
Education (illiterate as reference)				
Literate	0.005	0.007	0.659	0.510
Religion (Non-Muslim as reference category)				
Muslim	0.036	0.011	3.221	0.001
Household head (Female headed family as reference category)				
Male	-0.164	0.012	-13.177	0.000
Respondents currently working (Not working as reference)				
Yes	0.028	0.012	2.304	0.021
Place of residence (Rural as reference category)				
Urban	0.036	0.008	4.421	0.000
Exposure to mass media (no as reference)				
Yes	0.033	0.007	4.420	0.000
Involvement with NGO (no as reference)				
Yes	0.023	0.006	3.507	0.000
Social status (poor as reference)				
Not-poor	-0.008	0.007	-1.133	0.257
Constant	0.651	0.031	21.254	0.000

The result expresses that if age increases one year then economic decision making power increases by 0.003 on a scale of 0 to 1. On the other hand, if one year increases in respondent's age at marriage economic decision making power decrease by 0.002 on a scale of 0 to 1 respectively. Muslim women are 0.036 times more empowered than that of their counterpart on economic decision making power (Table 3). Women who come from male headed household are 0.164 times less empowered than female headed household. According to currently working status of the respondents, working respondent are 0.028 times more empowered than that of their non working women on economic decision making power. Women with urban areas are 0.036 times more empowered in economic decision making than rural areas women. Women education level and social status have no significant effect on EDMI. Involvement with NGO and exposed to media have a positive significant effect on EDMI.

IV. EMPOWERMENT IN HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING

Empowerment of women regarding household decision-making refers to the extent of women's ability to participate in formulating and executing decisions on domestic affairs such as child-welfare and own health care in coordination with other family members. Measurement of empowerment of women in household decision making is calculated on the basis of two indicators such as women's control over decision on their own health care and child health care. The detailed description of the construction process of this index is given is earlier in the present section.

Table 4 presents the mean values of women's household decision making index (HDMI) for some selected socio-economic and demographic variables. It is described that how women are empowered in household decision making for the characteristics such as respondent's age, age at marriage, educational level, household head, religion, currently working status, NGO involvement, social status, media exposure and Household head. The overall mean values of HDMI are 0.604, 0.646 and 0.613 for rural, urban and combined group respectively. It is observed that lowest age group have lower mean value of HDMI for rural, urban and combined group.

Table 4: Mean values of household decision making index (HDMI) by selected demographic and socio-economic characteristics of women

CHARACTERISTICS	RURAL		URBAN		TOTAL	
	MEAN	S.D	MEAN	S.D	MEAN	S.D
Current age						
<25	0.557	0.234	0.594	0.224	0.566	0.233
25-30	0.613	0.219	0.659	0.191	0.623	0.214
30-35	0.641	0.203	0.662	0.179	0.646	0.198
35-40	0.639	0.199	0.679	0.197	0.649	0.199
≥40	0.609	0.208	0.659	0.199	0.621	0.207
Age at marriage						
<14	0.609	0.214	0.643	0.206	0.615	0.213
14-16	0.609	0.219	0.649	0.200	0.618	0.217
16-18	0.583	0.227	0.632	0.202	0.595	0.223
≥18	0.604	0.218	0.656	0.205	0.623	0.216
Education level						

Illiterate	0.604	0.209	0.634	0.200	0.608	0.209
Primary	0.605	0.222	0.628	0.201	0.609	0.218
Secondary and above	0.603	0.227	0.662	0.205	0.621	0.222
Religion						
Non-Muslim	0.575	0.215	0.629	0.195	0.586	0.213
Muslim	0.607	0.219	0.647	0.204	0.616	0.217
Social status						
Poor	0.594	0.206	0.628	0.212	0.596	0.207
Middle	0.601	0.220	0.625	0.204	0.604	0.219
Rich	0.621	0.236	0.651	0.201	0.634	0.223
Involvement with NGO						
Yes	0.615	0.204	0.648	0.189	0.622	0.202
No	0.596	0.229	0.644	0.211	0.607	0.226
Exposure to media						
Yes	0.614	0.221	0.651	0.201	0.625	0.216
No	0.590	0.217	0.616	0.211	0.593	0.216
Currently working status						
Yes	0.618	0.199	0.673	0.189	0.629	0.198
No	0.597	0.228	0.635	0.208	0.606	0.224
Household head						
Male	0.584	0.203	0.632	0.192	0.595	0.201
Female	0.798	0.274	0.807	0.261	0.795	0.272
Total	0.604	0.219	0.646	0.203	0.613	0.216

Age group 30-35 and 35-40 years have larger mean value of HDMI for rural and urban areas respectively. It elucidates higher educational categories has the highest mean value for urban and combined group. Female headed and working women have greater mean value of HDMI. Muslim women have greater mean value of HDMI than that of their counterpart Non-Muslims. Women who involve with NGO, exposed to media and currently working have greater mean value of HDMI than their counterparts for all three groups (Table 4).

4.1 Factors Affecting Women Empowerment in Household Decision Making:
Multiple linear regression analyses are used to see the cause and effect of several phenomena on the empowerment of household decision making dimensional index. Here, the dependent variable is the value of household decision making index of the corresponding dimensions. The quantitative independent variables used in this section are respondent's current age and age at marriage and the qualitative independent variables are education level, religion, place of residence, media exposure, NGO involvement, social status and currently working status. Household head is also considered as a qualitative variable. Regression results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5 shows that the quantitative variables respondent's age has positive effect whereas age at marriage has negative effect on household decision making. Here Respondent's age, education, religion, household head, working status, media exposure, NGO involvement and place of residence have significant effect on respondent's household decision making power. The result expresses that if respondent's age increase one year then household decision making power of women increases by 0.003 on a scale of 0 to 1. On the other hand, if one year increases in respondent's age at marriage women's household decision making power decrease by 0.001 on a scale of 0 to 1. Comparing religion, Muslim women are 0.026 times more empowered than that of their counterpart non-Muslim respondent on household decision making power. Respondents with male headed household are 0.208 times less empowered in household decision making than that of their female headed households. According to currently working status of the respondents, working respondent are 0.025 times more empowered than that of their non working women on household decision making power. This table also indicates urban respondents are 0.037 times more empowered in household decision making than that of their rural women.

Table 5: Household decision making index (HDMI) by some selected variable through multiple linear regression model.

Variables	Coefficients	Std. Error	t-value	P value
Current age	0.003	0.000	12.436	0.000
Age at first marriage	-0.001	0.001	-1.217	0.224
Education (illiterate as reference)				
Literate	0.014	0.005	2.688	0.007
Religion (Non-Muslim as reference category)				
Muslim	0.026	0.007	3.454	0.001
Household head (Female headed family as reference category)				
Male	-0.208	0.008	-27.226	0.000

Respondents currently working (Not working as reference)				
Yes	0.025	0.005	5.158	0.000
Place of residence (Rural as reference category)				
Urban	0.037	0.006	6.788	0.000
Exposure to mass media (no as reference)				
Yes	0.026	0.005	5.033	0.000
Involvement with NGO (no as reference)				
Yes	0.020	0.005	4.489	0.000
Social status (poor as reference)				
Not-poor	-0.002	0.005	-0.448	0.654
Constant	0.647	0.020	33.091	0.000

It is important to note that education have no significant effect on EDMI but have significant effect on HDMI. Educated women have greater power to take household decision than illiterate women. Exposed to media and involvement with NGO also increase the power of household decision making.

V. CONCLUSION

For the quantification of women empowerment, it is measured in two dimensions and the measurements are taking in an index form such as economic decision making index (EDMI) and household decision making index (HDMI). The mean value of EDMI is larger than that of HDMI. So it may be concluded that women are less empowered in household decision making purpose. It is further noticeable that rural women are comparatively less empowered than that of their counterpart for both dimensions. According to current age, lower aged (<25 years) women are relatively less empowered than others.

To see the factors affecting women empowerment multiple linear regression analysis is used for both dimensions. Considering economic decision making dimension, the continuous variables respondent's age and the discrete variables respondent's religion, household head, respondent's currently working status, involvement with NGO, exposed to media and type of place of residence have significant effect on the value of economic decision making index. From the results it is conclude that respondent's age has positive significant effect on the value of women's economic decision making index whereas household head has negative and significant effect on the value of women's economic decision making index. Further the results also show that the women's economic decision making power is more for Muslim, urban and currently working women than that of non-Muslims, currently not working and rural women respectively but economic decision making power is less for the women with male headed household than that of female headed household (Table 3).

In case of household decision making dimension, the continuous variable respondent age and the discrete variables respondent's religion, currently working status, education level, NGO involvement and place of residence have positive significant effect on the value of household decision making index whereas the variable household head has negative significant effect on HDMI. In addition, the results also elucidate that the women's household decision making power is more urban, currently working and Muslim women than that rural, currently not working and non-Muslim women respectively. Between the two dimensions of empowerment, obviously urban women are relatively more empowered than that of rural women. In both dimensions the women who are engaged in earning activities are more empowered.

Policy:

In this study the women who are engaged in earning activities are more empowered. So it needs to take proper initiatives so that every woman should be participated in income generating activities even those are merely engaged as housewife should be considered as earning person in the family and then they will be approached into the way to make them empowerment properly.

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