

Factors Contributing to Women Empowerment: An Investigative Study on Khulna District of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Background: In Bangladesh, half of the total population is women, yet they are struggling for security, dignity, and equal rights. Women empowerment is viewed as an essential and effective means to achieve respectable status within both household and community levels. The principal objective of the study was to explore the factors that contributing to women empowerment in Khulna district of Bangladesh.

Methods and Materials: Survey method was used to conduct the study A structured interview schedule was used for data collection, respectively. In this study simple random sampling technique was followed, and the sample size was 188. For measuring empowerment, women empowerment index (WEI) was used.

Results: Findings from the bivariate analysis showed significant relation between religious status, income, education status, education status of spouse, family type and family size. However, the There was no significant women empowerment and religious status of the respondents while a strong association was found among women empowerment and family size, family type of the respondent, religious status of the respondent, Income of respondent, education status of the respondent, education status of respondent's husband.

Conclusion: The level of women empowerment in household decision making and control over income, expenditure and savings is satisfactory but the empowerment in socio-political participation and mobility is exceptionally low in Bangladesh. Gender equality and women empowerment may remain a farfetched dream in Bangladesh unless customary laws are aligned to the formal laws and constitutional rights.

Key Word: Economic Freedom, Empowerment, Household Decision Making, Social and Political Participation, Social Networking.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is considered as one of the strongest instruments to reach positive development outcomes as well as wellbeing of life (Tripathi, 2011:175). Though women have a great contribution in the development process, they possess low status compared to men, especially in the developing world (Khan *et al.*, 2010:09). Women in Bangladesh are struggling for modernity, tradition, men-women equality, social dignity, security and for multilateral pressure though they constitute half of the population (Nessa, 2012: 118). They are not recommended to engage in economic activities and enjoy exceptionally low social status. Studies conducted by the World Bank demonstrate that rural women in Bangladesh have limited access to household decision making, physical and financial assets. While having an exceptionally low level of individual assets, they are heavily loaded with work, and are restricted in terms of mobility. They possess inadequate levels of skills and knowledge, thus being very vulnerable to male dominance in any social sphere (Sebstad and Cohen, 2000, p. 44).

Women's literacy, participation in income earning activities and engagement in politics has increased in the last three decades in Bangladesh while fertility has decline (White, 2011:36). Some of the highest positions of power in Bangladesh belong to women, for example, the Prime Minister, the leader of the opposition, and the speaker are all women. However, that these positions are filled by women does not indicate that women actively participate in every aspect of life in Bangladesh. The life of women in Bangladesh is dominated by a patriarchal social system. The traditional socio-economic and cultural factors restrict women's financial autonomy, and the spatial and occupational flexibility in many developing countries (Mahtab, 2007). Their positions at the lowest levels of both the gender and class structures provide them with few opportunities to break out of their traditional roles. It is not possible for women in developing countries to control their own lives because of social and cultural rules and values, as well as institutional arrangements and legal structures. Therefore, they are not active participants in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, sustainable development cannot be achieved if half of the world's population is not allowed to engage in productive

activities. As a result, proponents of women empowerment are of the opinion that increases in women's control over resources, employment, and income will improve their status relative to men.

The status of women in Bangladesh has been ranked the lowest in the world based on twenty indicators related to health, marriage, children, education, employment, and social equality. 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.

In Bangladesh women empowerment is highly challenged by patriarchal power relations. This multi-dimensional process is influenced by different factors. The ever-increasing contribution of women is clearly evident in every spheres of the society. Their increasing active participation in all sectors ranging from agriculture to politics has made great impact to the national development.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

For a comparative understanding of the factors of women empowerment in Bangladesh, two separate geographical areas, one each from urban and rural area were selected purposively considering the convenience of the researcher. The areas were Ward # 1 of Khulna City Corporation (KCC) and in rural area Ward # 1 of Arong Ghata Union under Digholia *Upazilla* of Khulna District.

For this study, some specifications were made to identify the participants of the study. Data were collected from (i) married women (ii) belonged to the age limit between 25 to 55 years (iii) residing with their husbands during data collection and (iv) living in the study areas.

Study Design: Survey method was used to conduct the study.

Study Location: Two separate geographical areas, one each from urban and rural area were selected purposively considering the convenience of the researcher. The areas were Ward # 1 of Khulna City Corporation (KCC) and in rural area Ward # 1 of Arong Ghata Union under Digholia *Upazilla* of Khulna District.

Study Duration: The study was conducted over a period of one year starting from January 2019 and ending in December 2019. The primary data were collected from during the month of July of 2019.

Sample Size: 188 women were selected as the sample of the study.

Sample Size Calculation: For the fulfillment of the research objectives data were collected from the field by using simple random sampling technique. The sample were determined according to the following formula-

$$SS = \frac{Z^2 \times p(1-p)}{C^2}$$

Where:

Z = Z value (e.g., 1.96 for 95% confidence level)

p = Percent picking a choice, expressed as decimal (.5 used for sample size needed)

C = confidence interval, expressed as decimal (e.g., .04 = ±4)

(Source: Social Survey, 2018)

Using this formula, the number of the sample was 188 (using social survey calculator, allowing an error tolerance of 0.05 at 95 percent level of confidence with a confidence interval of 7 for the population of 3595).

Inclusion Criteria:

1. married women
2. belonged to the age limit between 25 to 55 years.
3. residing with their husbands during data collection and
4. living in the study areas.

Procedure Methodology: For this study, a semi-structured interview schedule containing both open and closed ended questions will be developed after reviewing relevant literatures. After initial development of the tool, the interview schedule will be pre-tested on twenty women in the study areas (and they will not be picked for the final data collection) to test the validity and reliability of the data collected by this tool. During the field work, firstly the participants were informed about the purpose of the study. If she agreed to provide information, then the data were collected from her. For this study secondary data were collected from published books, journals, newspapers and reports, unpublished research reports and other thesis papers. For quantitative analysis processed data were analyzed and interpreted by using descriptive as well as inferential statistical techniques. SPSS – 22.0 was used for analyzing and interpretation of data. For the measurement of women empowerment, the women empowerment index was used.

Measurement of Women Empowerment: Five measures of empowerment were selected for this study. These are: woman's decision-making ability, economic freedom of the woman, social and political participation, social networking, and perception regarding legal rights. Several items will be arranged under each of these five

separate domains and the women taking part in the survey the respondents will be asked to indicate their perceived extent of empowerment along a 4-point continuum. The responses will be analyzed by four-point scale where “1” stands for ‘no participation’, “2” stands for ‘low participation’, “3” stands for ‘medium participation’ and “4” stands for ‘high participation’. The overall empowerment score of a respondent will be determined by adding the total scores from all five components. To make a comparison among the five measures of empowerment, a unit score will be computed for each using the following formula:

$$\bullet \text{ Unit Empowerment Score} = \frac{\text{Mean score of a particular dimension}}{\text{Maximum possible score of the dimension}}$$

The constructed index for each domain, the scores for different sub-questions will be added up and divided into three categories such as High, Medium, and Low. Observing all the scores of different domains, the sum of the total responses will finally be used to construct the Women Empowerment Index (WEI).

III. RESULT

United Nations identified that women’s empowerment depends on their full and equal participation in all economic and social aspects including participation in the process of decision making. It is necessary to study women’s empowerment from the perspective of women’s socioeconomic characteristics, as women are divided by heterogeneous categories based on class, life cycle, or ethnicity. The following table explains the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents of this study.

Table 1: Socio-economic background analysis of the participants

Variables	% (N)	M (SD)
Religion		
Islam	33.0 (62)	
Hinduism	67.0 (126)	
Age of the Respondents		
≤35 Years	38.3 (72)	38.5 (8.85)
36-45 Years	34.0 (64)	
≥46 Years	27.7 (52)	
Age of the Respondents’ Husbands		
≤35 Years	26.6 (50)	45.10 (10.22)
36-45 Years	27.1 (51)	
≥46 Years	46.3 (87)	
Education Level of the Respondents		
Primary	22.9 (43)	
Under SSC	23.4 (44)	
SSC	18.6 (35)	
HSC	19.1 (36)	
Graduation and above	16.0 (30)	
Education Level of the Respondents’ Husbands		
Primary	22.9 (43)	
Under SSC	21.8 (41)	
SSC	7.4 (14)	
HSC	18.6 (35)	
Graduation and above	29.2 (55)	
Occupation of the Respondents		
Housewife	59.0 (111)	
Teacher	10.6 (20)	
Day Laborer	14.4 (27)	
Govt. Service	13.8 (26)	
Private Service	2.1 (4)	
Occupation of the Respondents’ Husbands		
Rickshaw/Van/ Auto rickshaw Puller	17.0 (32)	
Business	22.9 (43)	
Day Laborer	13.8 (26)	
Govt. Service	16.5 (31)	
Private Service	18.6 (35)	
Others	11.2 (21)	
Income of the Respondents		
Low Income (≤8000 BDT/Month)	35.1 (27)	
Middle Income (8001-20000 BDT/Month)	59.7 (46)	
High Income (≥20001 BDT/Month)	5.2 (4)	
Types of Family		
Nuclear	80.9 (152)	
Extended	19.1 (36)	
Family Size		5.32 (2.30)

	Small Family (≤ 3 members)	10.6 (20)	
	Medium Family (4-6 members)	70.2 (132)	
	Big Family (≥ 7 members)	19.1(36)	
Head of the Family			
	Husband	81.9 (154)	
	Father-in-law	10.1 (19)	
	Others	8.0 (15)	

It was found that 33 percent of the respondents were the believers of Hinduism and the rest 67 percent were the believers of Islam religion. About 38 percent of the respondents were 35 years and below age, 34 percent of them in the age group of 36-45 years and the rest of the 28 percent of the respondents were in the 46 years and above age group. While near about 27 percent of the respondents' husbands were in the 35 years and below age group and about 46 percent of the respondents' husbands were in the were 46 years and above age group.

From the above table it was evident that almost 23 percent of the respondents had primary education and 16 percent of them had graduation and above education. On the other hand, almost 29 percent of the respondents' husbands had graduation and above education and 22 percent of them SSC level education. Exactly 59 percent of the respondents were housewife, around 11 percent of them were teachers, 14 percent were day laborer, another 14 percent were govt. service holder and only around 3 percent of them were doing private service. For the respondents' husbands' occupation, 17 percent were rickshaw/van/ auto rickshaw puller, 22 percent of them were involved in business, almost 14 percent of them were day laborer and 18 percent were doing private service. It was obvious that the males were more comfortable in doing private service than the females as our culture does not favor the females to do private jobs rather the culture compels them to reside in the house ideally keeping apart from the economic activity.

Among 188 respondents only 77 respondents were involved in jobs and income earning activities. Near about 35 percent of the respondents had low income (≤ 8000 BDT/Month), around 60 percent were in the Middle Income (8001-20000 BDT/Month) group and only 5 percent of the respondents were earning High Income (≥ 20001 BDT/Month). While analyzing the types of the family of the respondents it was found that almost 81 percent were living in a nuclear family and the rest were in an extended family. Near about 11 percent of the respondents belonged to Small Family (≤ 3 members), around 70 percent of the respondents had a Medium Family consisting 4-6 members and the rest 19 percent of the respondents were living with a big family consisting 7 and above members. About 82 percent of the respondents' head of the family was their husbands and another 11 percent claimed that the head of their families were their father in laws.

Measurement of Empowerment

Women Empowerment Index (WEI) was consisted of five indices. After a careful study of the available literature on women empowerment, five indicators were selected to measure the empowerment of the women. Those were Participation of women in Household Decision Making, Participation of Women in Social and Political Activities, Control over Income, Expenditure and Savings, Perception regarding Women's Rights and Violence against Women, Mobility of the Respondent. Every single domain had different sub-questions where two indices had nine possible responses, one index with five possible responses, one with three possible responses and another one with six possible responses. The responses were analyzed by four-point scale where "1" stands for 'no participation', "2" stands for 'low participation', "3" stands for 'medium participation' and "4" stands for 'high participation'. The constructed index for each domain, the scores for different sub-questions was added up and divided into three categories such as High, Medium and Low. Observing all the scores of different domains, the sum of the total responses was finally used to construct the Women Empowerment Index (WEI).

Participation in Household Decision Making of the Respondent

Women participation in household decision-making in this study is regarded their extent of participation in (a) Purchase, Sell or Mortgage of land, (b) Selection and Buying Cattle, (c) Spending Money for any Income Generating Activities, (d) Selection of Daily Food Menu, (e) Child Education, (f) Child Health, (g) Buying the Cloth for Children, (h) Buying the Cloth for Own or Husband.

The responses were computed by four-point scale where "1" stands for 'no participation', "2" stands for 'decision based on discussion with husband and other family members', "3" stands for 'main role in join decision' and "4" stands for 'entirely own decision'. The constructed index for each domain, the scores for different sub-questions was added up and divided into three categories such as High, Medium, and Low.

Here,

Possible Highest score = Total score \times Highest individual score = $9 \times 4 = 36$

Possible Lowest score = Total score \times Lowest individual score = $9 \times 1 = 9$

Class interval = (Highest score - Lowest score) $\div 3 = (36-9) \div 3 = 27 \div 3 = 9$

Participation in Social and Political Activities of the Respondent

Women's political empowerment can take place within and outside the formal politics. Women participation in social and political activities at this study is regarded their extent of participation in (a) Participation in Social Events, Such as, Wedding, Birthday, *Chehlum* etc., (b) Helping Neighbor in Emergency, Such as, Delivery, Death etc., (c) Participation in Village Meeting/*Salish*, (d) Cultural Program (Drama, Folk Song etc.), (e) Work with People to Provide Voluntary Help while Tornado, Fire, Flood etc., (f) Arbitration in Family Quarrel of Neighbor and Relatives, (g) Casting Vote, (h) Participation in Public Meeting, (i) Discuss Present National Situation with Other.

Nine items were analyzed and a four-point scale was used to measure women's Participation in Social and Political Activities– “1” stands for ‘not at all’, “2” stands for ‘seldom’, “3” stands for ‘occasionally’ and “4” stands for ‘frequently’. The constructed index for each domain, the scores for different sub-questions was added up and divided into three categories such as High, Medium, and Low.

Here,

Possible Highest score = Total score \times Highest individual score = $9 \times 4 = 36$

Possible Lowest score = Total score \times Lowest individual score = $9 \times 1 = 9$

Class interval = (Highest score – Lowest score) $\div 3 = (36-9) \div 3 = 27 \div 3 = 9$

Economic Freedom of the Respondent

The main aspect of women empowerment is the equal rights of women in the working field. Women empowerment through economic freedom refers to the women's ability to share or to control over the decision processes regarding domestic financial matters with husband or other male family members. Indeed, the measurement of women empowerment in economic sector is based on five indicators such as (a) Spending Money for Different Purpose by herself, (b) Household Income, (c) Own Income, (d) Selection of Family Expenditure, (e) Control over Savings.

Five items were analyzed and a four-point scale was used to measure control over income, expenditure, and savings of respondents– “1” stands for ‘not at all’, “2” stands for ‘low’, “3” stands for ‘medium’ and “4” stands for ‘high’. The constructed index for each domain, the scores for different sub-questions was added up and divided into three categories such as High, Medium, and Low.

Here,

Possible Highest score = Total score \times Highest individual score = $5 \times 4 = 20$

Possible Lowest score = Total score \times Lowest individual score = $5 \times 1 = 5$

Class interval = (Highest score – Lowest score) $\div 3 = (20-5) \div 3 = 15 \div 3 = 5$

Perception Regarding Legal Rights of the Respondent

Perception regarding legal rights involves all forms of rights of women. All forms of violence against women, physical and mental, at domestic or societal levels, including those arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices shall be dealt with effectively with a view to eliminate its incidence. The measurement of women empowerment in perception regarding legal rights sector is based on three indicators such as (a) dowry at marriage, (b) religious support to woman exploitation, (c) religious permission on ownership of land.

Three items were analyzed and a two-point scale was used to measure women's Participation in Social and Political Activities– “1” stands for ‘yes’ and “2” stands for ‘no’. The constructed index for each domain, the scores for different sub-questions was added up and divided into three categories such as High, Medium, and Low.

Here,

Possible Highest score = Total score \times Highest individual score = $4 \times 2 = 8$

Possible Lowest score = Total score \times Lowest individual score = $4 \times 1 = 4$

Class interval = (Highest score – Lowest score) $\div 3 = (8-4) \div 3 = 4 \div 3 \approx 1$

Social Networking

Social networking refers to the freedom of women to move to their necessary places without being escorted. Several studies have revealed that promotion of women's freedom of movement is necessary to make them capable of making their own choices, to change their attitudes, to improve their social networks and to reduce their level of poverty.

Indeed, the measurement of women empowerment in social networking is based on five indicators such as mobility to (a) market, (b) relatives/parents' house, (c) hospital or clinic, (d) upozilla/ zillasadar, (e) working outside. Five items were analyzed and a five-point scale was used to measure women's mobility– “1” stands for ‘not at all’, “2” stands for ‘per year’, “3” stands for ‘per six months’ and “4” stands for ‘per month’ and “5” stands for ‘per week’. The constructed index for each domain, the scores for different sub-questions was added up and divided into three categories such as High, Medium, and Low.

Here,

Possible Highest score = Total score × Highest individual score = 5 × 5 = 25

Possible Lowest score = Total score × Lowest individual score = 5 × 1 = 5

Class interval = (Highest score – Lowest score) ÷ 3 = (25-5) ÷ 3 = 20 ÷ 3 ≈ 7

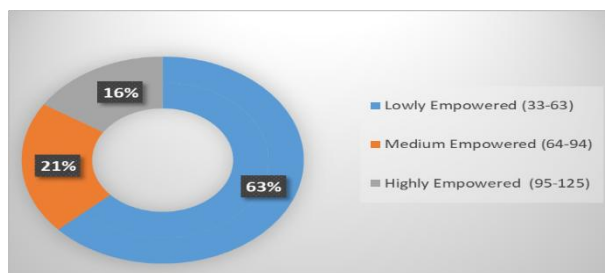


Table-2: Women Empowerment Index

Variables	% (N)	M (SD)
Participation in Household Decision Making of the Respondent		21.50 (3.45)
Low Participation (10-18)	32.4 (61)	
Medium Participation (19-27)	56.4 (106)	
High Participation (28-36)	11.2 (21)	
Participation in Social and Political Activities of the Respondent		16.64 (2.84)
Low Participation (10-18)	63.8 (120)	
Medium Participation (19-27)	17.6 (33)	
High Participation (28-36)	18.6 (35)	
Economic Freedom of the Respondent		9.39 (3.43)
Low Control over Economy (6-10)	73.4 (138)	
Medium Control over Economy (11-15)	11.2 (21)	
High Control over Economy (16-20)	15.4 (29)	
Perception Regarding Legal Rights of the Respondent		5.07 (1.12)
Low Perception (5)	43.6 (82)	
Medium Perception (6)	37.8 (71)	
High Perception (7-8)	18.6 (35)	
Social Networking		11.80 (2.79)
Low Mobility (6-12)	44.1 (83)	
Medium Mobility (13-19)	36.2 (68)	
High Mobility (20-25)	19.7 (37)	

It was found that 33 percent of the respondents’ low participation in the household decision making while only 11 percent of the respondents claimed that they had high participation family decision making. Calculation on Participation in Social and Political Activities of the Respondent found that around 64 percent of the respondents had low participation while 18 percent of the respondents had high participation in social and political activities. Around 73.4 percent of the respondents estimated that they had a low control over the economy and 44 percent of the respondents claimed that they had low perception regarding legal rights. However, assessing the social networking of the respondents it was found that only 19 percent of the respondents had high social mobility.

Empowerment of the Respondent

The empowerment score of a respondent in a particular index of empowerment was computed by adding the scores obtained in all items in that class. A summary of the measuring system of all five measurement indices is presented below.

The overall empowerment score of a respondent was determined by adding the total scores from all five components. To make a comparison among the five measures of empowerment, a unit score will be computed for each using the following formula:

$$\text{Unit Empowerment Score} = \frac{\text{Mean score of a particular dimension}}{\text{Maximum possible score of the dimension}}$$

Here,

Total Highest individual scores = (36+ 36+20+8+25) =125

Total Lowest individual score = (9+9+5+4+5) = 32

Class interval = (Highest score –Lowest score) ÷3= (125-32) ÷ 3 =93÷3 = 31

It was found that only 16 percent of the respondents were highly empowered while 63 percent of the respondents were lowly empowered. This situation represents the whole Bangladesh.

Factors of Contributing the Women Empowerment

Table-3: Association of women empowerment and socio-economic profile of the respondents

Variables	Empowerment			χ ² (df) [p value]
	Low (33-63)	Medium (64-94)	High (95-125)	
Religion				
Islam	38	38	24	5.945 (2) [.051]
Hinduism	31	3	6	

Types of Family				
Nuclear	101	38	13	35.448 (2) [.000]
Extended	18	1	17	
Family Size				
Small Family (≤ 3 members)	1	17	2	89.182 (4) [.000]
Medium Family (4-6 members)	100	21	11	
Big Family (≥ 7 members)	18	1	17	
Head of the Family				
Husband	101	39	14	93.505 (4) [.000]
Father-in-law	18	0	0	
Others	0	0	15	
Education Level of the Respondents				
Primary	43	0	0	141.892 (8) [.000]
Under SSC	42	2	0	
SSC	25	10	0	
HSC	4	20	12	
Graduation and above	5	7	18	
Education Level of the Respondents' Husbands				
Primary	43	0	0	122.164 (8) [.000]
Under SSC	40	1	0	
SSC	3	11	0	
HSC	21	7	7	
Graduation and above	12	20	23	
Income Level of the Respondents				
Low Income (≤ 8000 BDT/Month)	27	0	0	81.464 (4) [.000]
Middle Income (8001-20000 BDT/Month)	0	20	26	
High Income (≥ 20001 BDT/Month)	0	0	4	

From above table it was evident that women empowerment was highly associated with Family type of the respondent, Family Size, Head of the family, education status of the respondent, education status of respondent's husband, Income of respondent as the calculated values were higher than the table value in the specific degrees of freedom. There was a poor association between the women empowerment and religious status of the respondent.

Table-4: Regression of Contributing factors of women empowerment

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.970 ^a	.941	.936	3.26592	.941	186.546	6	70	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Family Size, Family type of the respondent, religious status of the respondent, Income of respondent, education status of the respondent, education status of respondent's husband									
b. Dependent Variable: Empowerment of Women									
ANOVA									
Model	Sum of Squares		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.			
1	Regression	11938.454	6	1989.742	186.546	.000 ^b			
	Residual	746.637	70	10.666					
	Total	12685.091	76						
Coefficients									
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.			
	B	Std. Error	Beta						
1	(Constant)	37.871	8.957		4.228	.000			
	religion of the respondent	3.300	1.033	.096	3.195	.002			
	family type of the respondent	-1.064	16.034	-.035	-.066	.947			
	education level of respondent's husband	-.604	.714	-.086	-.846	.400			
	Income of the respondent	4.831	2.743	.211	1.761	.083			
	education level of the respondent	5.978	1.149	.768	5.203	.000			
	Family Size	1.226	3.220	.204	.381	.705			

To understand the contributing factors of women empowerment a regression was conducted. In the dependent variable list the women empowerment index was set and the predictors were Family Size, Family type of the respondent, religious status of the respondent, Income of respondent, education status of the

respondent, education status of respondent's husband were provided. The value of R Square was found .941 that means the 94 percent of the model can be explained in the degrees of freedom of 6, 70 and the F value was .000 which explained that the model was highly significant.

IV. DISCUSSION

Some interesting outcomes were found during this study. From the socio-economic information of the study. Women education is penetratingly associated with the formation of women's identity, decision making capability, mobility, and contribution to the socioeconomic development of household, community, and nation. For decades, in developing-patriarchal countries like Bangladesh men's preference advocated for women's modest education. There is a growing consensus now that education irrespective of who receives it, contributes to development. It raises income, promotes health, and increases productivity. There is also a consensus that when women are the recipients, the benefits are even more apparent. Increasing education of women and girls contribute to their greater empowerment. It was found that 23 percent of the respondents had primary education and 16 percent of them had graduation and above education. On the other hand, almost 29 percent of the respondents' husbands had graduation and above education and 22 percent of them SSC level education.

Most rural women in Bangladesh actively contribute to the household activities. However, a great deal of women's activities does not generate direct income. Women's participation in income is usually a function of their poverty. Income may enhance a woman's position in the family and may increase her autonomy in decision making. Once she earns status and autonomy in family decisions, she will have control over her desired fertility⁸. There is a need for women's participation in income generating activities in Bangladesh to meet basic needs and improve quality of life in terms of education, health, and social improvement beyond simple survival. Exactly 59 percent of the respondents were housewife, around 11 percent of them were teachers, 14 percent were day laborer, another 14 percent were govt. service holder and only around 3 percent of them were doing private service. For the respondents' husbands' occupation, 17 percent were rickshaw/van/ auto rickshaw puller, 22 percent of them were involved in business, almost 14 percent of them were day laborer and 18 percent were doing private service. It was obvious that the males were more comfortable in doing private service than the females as our culture does not favor the females to do private jobs rather the culture compels them to reside in the house ideally keeping apart from the economic activity.

The debate about the relationship between paid work and women's position within the family and society is a long standing one. Some argue that women's integration into the market is the key to their empowerment while others offer more skeptical, often pessimistic, accounts of this relationship. These contradictory viewpoints reflect a variety of factors: variations in how empowerment itself is understood, variations in the cultural meanings and social acceptability of paid work for women across different contexts and the nature of the available work opportunities within contexts. Bangladesh is a country in which the denial of economic opportunities to women, and their resulting dependence on male providers, has long been the structural underpinning of their subordinate status. This has started to change in recent years with a gradual expansion in opportunities for paid work for women. Among 188 respondents only 77 respondents were involved in jobs and income earning activities. Near about 35 percent of the respondents had low income (≤ 8000 BDT/Month), around 60 percent were in the Middle Income (8001-20000 BDT/Month) group and only 5 percent of the respondents were earning High Income (≥ 20001 BDT/Month). When a woman can spend her cash income according to her sole decision that completely captures that the woman is economically empowered. The religious affiliation finds that women from Islamic faith have lower probabilities of being empowered. This result was further strengthened from the study of Anderson and Eswaran (2007) who focused on the relative contributions of earned versus unearned income (measured by ownership of assets inherited or given as marriage payments) in enhancing women's empowerment and the role of employment outside of their husband's farm. Their estimations confirmed that earned income rather than asset ownership is more important in empowering women. Results also revealed that it is not employment per se but employment outside their husbands' farms that contributes to women's empowerment.

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. While analyzing the types of the family of the respondents it was found that almost 81 percent were living in a nuclear family and the rest were in an extended family. Near about 11 percent of the respondents belonged to Small Family (≤ 3 members), around 70 percent of the respondents had a Medium Family consisting 4-6 members and the rest 19 percent of the respondents were living with a big family consisting 7 and above members. About 82 percent of the respondents' head of the family was their husbands and another 11 percent claimed that the head of their families were their father in laws.

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.

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.

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.

It was found that 33 percent of the respondents' low participation in the household decision making while only 11 percent of the respondents claimed that they had high participation family decision making. Calculation on Participation in Social and Political Activities of the Respondent found that around 64 percent of the respondents had low participation while 18 percent of the respondents had high participation in social and political activities. Around 73.4 percent of the respondents estimated that they had a low control over the economy and 44 percent of the respondents claimed that they had low perception regarding legal rights. However, assessing the social networking of the respondents it was found that only 19 percent of the respondents had high social mobility.

After developing the women empowerment index, it was found that only 16 percent of the respondents were highly empowered while 63 percent of the respondents were lowly empowered. This situation represents the whole Bangladesh.

While analyzing the contributing factors of women empowerment a regression was conducted. Considering women empowerment index as the dependent variable and keeping Family Size, Family type of the respondent, religious status of the respondent, Income of respondent, education status of the respondent, education status of respondent's husband as the predictors the regression model was formulated. The value of R Square was found .941 that means the 94 percent of the model can be explained in the degrees of freedom of 6, 70 and the F value was .000 which explained that the model was highly significant.

Finally, it was evident that women empowerment was highly associated with Family type of the respondent, Family Size, Head of the family, education status of the respondent, education status of respondent's husband, Income of respondent as the calculated values were higher than the table value in the specific degrees of freedom. There was an extremely poor association between the women empowerment and religious status of the respondent.

V. CONCLUSION

The complexity of empowerment is evident when comparing the relationships between covariates and indicators. From the regression results we find that the various dimensions of empowerment (participation in decision-making, freedom of mobility, self-esteem, and resource control) are not necessarily related to the determinants (covariates) in a consistent fashion. For example, the women in the wealthiest households have lower scores on decision-making even though they are more likely to have greater access to cash. The score on decision-making role is lower for younger and older women and highest for women in their mid-thirties. A plausible explanation of this is that younger married women are probably living in an extended household, so they have not yet become central to the household management and older women become dependent on adult sons and live in the married son's household, and become less involved in household management and decision-making. Formal education is only associated with freedom of mobility and one self-esteem indicator.

The aggregate freedom of mobility score was surprisingly low given that Bangladeshi women have over the past several decades become increasingly visible in the public sphere (i.e., outside the home and compound). In rural Bangladesh, the practice of purdah confines women within the homestead and compound and they generally must seek permission either from the husband or older in-laws, or at least inform them when going outside.

The results confirm that the empowerment process does not necessarily occur simultaneously across the different dimensions. Thus, it is quite possible for there to be an increase in a woman's value to herself and the household (self-worth and role in decision-making) without a commensurate increase in her personal autonomy and independence vis-a-vis men (freedom of mobility and access to cash). In a society undergoing rapid economic change this reflects the emerging "patriarchal bargain".

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