

Women Empowerment: An Objective Analysis across Indian States

Sneh Choithani

Assistant Professor, Department of Business Economics, SVKM's Narsee Monjee College of Commerce and Economics, Mumbai – 400 056, Maharashtra, India

Abstract

India is ranked 132 out of 148 countries on Gender Inequality Index as per the 2013 Global Human Development Report. UNDP argues that where development is not 'engendered' it is 'en-dangered'. Gender equality and women's empowerment are central to UNDP's strategy for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Education and health are the two important determinants of women's socio-economic participation and thus have a powerful influence on their ability to control their environment and their lives. At the same time, education and health are also the two important areas in which persistent gender inequality exist. Creation of composite indices from gender disaggregated data is of crucial importance in analyzing the far reaching impact of disparity and also making policy strategy that can correct it. Estimation of state-wise indices can focus the attention of state governments to persistent issues of gender disparity and also find ways and means of attaining equity.

KEYWORDS: Women's Empowerment, Life Expectancy at Birth, Literacy rate, Sex Ratio, Mean Age at Effective Marriage, Labour Force Participation Rate, Infant Mortality Rate, Maternal Mortality Rate and Income Gap

Introduction:

India is ranked 132 out of 148 countries on Gender Inequality Index as per the 2013 Global Human Development Report. Women from disadvantaged groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and minorities in particular face discrimination, exploitation and limited employment opportunities. UNDP argues that where development is not 'engendered' it is 'en-dangered'. Gender equality and women's empowerment are central to UNDP's strategy for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Education and health are the two important determinants of women's socio-economic participation and thus have a powerful influence on their ability to control their environment and their lives. At the same time, education and health are also the two important areas in which persistent gender inequality exist. Equal access to public health and education services is essential for women's participation in decision making at the grass root level. Availability of gender disaggregated data is useful to understand the disparity in factors influencing quality of life. However, creation of composite indices from such data is of crucial importance in analyzing the far reaching impact of disparity and also making policy strategy that can correct it. This study is aimed at constructing an index of women's empowerment. Estimation of state-wise indices can focus the attention of state governments to persistent issues of gender disparity and also find ways and means of attaining equity.

Data and Methodology Used:

The latest available secondary data from government/official publications are collected for the identified indicators in selected states. A simple average is then taken for the normalized scores yielding values between 0 and 1 for each indicator. The formula used to compute the normalized score for each indicator depends on whether women's empowerment increases for higher values for that indicator or it decreases. As such, for Life Expectancy at Birth, Literacy rate, Sex Ratio, Mean Age at Effective Marriage and Labour Force Participation Rate;

Normalised score = (Observed Value – Minimum Value)

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(Maximum Value – Minimum Value)

Whereas, for Infant Mortality Rate, Maternal Mortality Rate and Income Gap;

Normalised score = (Maximum Value – Observed Value)

÷

(Maximum Value – Minimum Value)

After normalizing the data for all the indicators, a simple average is computed as an index of women's empowerment in the selected states. The values taken by the index also oscillate between 0 and 1. A higher score for a state indicates that the women are more empowered here than other states with a lower score.

Scope of the Study:

15 major states of India are included in the study. They are Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

The dimensions of Women's Empowerment are categorized as follows:

1. **Health Index:** Female Infant Mortality Rate, Maternal Mortality Rate and Female Life Expectancy at Birth (Years) are the indicators chosen to estimate health index.
2. **Education Index:** which is estimated based on Female Literacy Rate
3. **Social Index:** Sex Ratio (Females per 1000 Males) and Mean Age (Years) at Effective Marriage for Females are the indicators included in this index.
4. **Economic Index:** which is estimated using data on Female Labour Force Participation Rate and Estimated Income Gap between Males and Females
5. **Political Index:** Proportion of Women MPs and MLAs to Total MPs/MLAs (%) is taken as an indicator of political empowerment.

Data for all the dimensions and their indicators are collected from official publications of the government and the indices are estimated as mentioned above.

Major Findings of the Study:

1. Health Status:

1.1 Kerala is significantly ahead of other states in terms of IMR, MMR and Life Expectancy at Birth.

1.2 Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh show IMR higher than national average.

- 1.3 Rajasthan (318) and Uttar Pradesh (359) account for very high MMR
- 1.4 Women in all states have higher Life Expectancy at Birth than men due to their 'natural advantage'

2. Women's Education:

- 2.1 Kerala is the only state with female literacy rate over 90%, followed by Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu at 75% and 74% respectively.
- 2.2 Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan have female literacy rates of less than 60%

3. Social Empowerment:

- 3.1 Kerala (1084) is the only Indian state where the sex ratio is above the equality ratio.
- 3.2 Punjab (893) and Haryana (877) register worst sex ratio in India.
- 3.3 Indian states have a narrow range of difference in Mean Age of Effective Marriage with Kerala (22.6 Years) at the top and Rajasthan (20.1 years) at the lowest rung.

4. Economic Empowerment:

- 4.1 Despite very high ranks attained by Kerala in all other categories, the state is at a lowly 11th among 15 states in the study in terms of Women's Labour Force Participation Rate (18.23%) and Income Gap between Male & Female workers.(Rs. 235)
- 4.2 Punjab ranks the highest in terms of Income Gap (Rs. 98 only) but lowest in LFPR for female workers (13.91%)!

5. Political Empowerment:

- 5.1 As per the data from Election Commission of India, out of the total 4896 MPs/MLAs across the country, only 418 or 9% are women.
- 5.2 Among MPs, Lok Sabha has 59 (11% of 543) and Rajya Sabha has 23 (10% of 233) women MPs.
- 5.3 Among State Assemblies, West Bengal (34 out of 294 MLAs), Bihar (34 out of 243 MLAs) and Andhra Pradesh (34 out of 294 MLAs) have the maximum number of women MLAs followed by Uttar Pradesh (32 women out of 403 MLAs) and Rajasthan (28 women out of 200 MLAs)
- 5.4 In terms of percentage, among State Assemblies, the highest percentage of Women MLAs is from Bihar with 14% followed by Rajasthan with 14% and West Bengal with 12%.

Table 1: State-wise data on the selected indicators in 2011

| States | Infant Mortality Rate (Females) 2011 | Life Expectancy at Birth (Females) 2011 | Female Literacy Rate 2011 | Sex Ratio 2011 | Mean Age at Effective Marriage(Females) 2010 | Maternal Mortality Rate 2011 | Labour Force Participation Rate (Females) 2011 | Estimated Income Gap 2011-12 |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|----------------|--|------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Andhra Pradesh | 46 | 71 | 60 | 992 | 20.6 | 134 | 36.16 | 209 |
| Bihar | 45 | 69 | 53 | 916 | 20.6 | 261 | 19.07 | 310 |
| Chhattisgarh | 50 | 66 | 61 | 991 | 21.5 | 269 | 39.7 | 203 |
| Gujarat | 42 | 72 | 71 | 918 | 21 | 148 | 23.38 | 150 |
| Haryana | 48 | 71 | 67 | 877 | 20.7 | 153 | 17.79 | 214 |
| Karnataka | 35 | 72 | 68 | 968 | 21.1 | 178 | 31.87 | 211 |
| Kerala | 13 | 77 | 92 | 1084 | 22.6 | 81 | 18.23 | 235 |
| Maharashtra | 25 | 72 | 75 | 922 | 20.6 | 104 | 31.06 | 208 |
| MadhyaPradesh | 62 | 65 | 60 | 930 | 20.6 | 269 | 32.64 | 303 |
| Odisha | 58 | 67 | 64 | 978 | 21.1 | 258 | 27.16 | 193 |
| Punjab | 33 | 73 | 71 | 893 | 22.1 | 172 | 13.91 | 98 |
| Rajasthan | 53 | 70 | 53 | 926 | 20.1 | 318 | 35.12 | 156 |
| Tamil Nadu | 23 | 72 | 74 | 995 | 22.3 | 97 | 31.8 | 214 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 59 | 67 | 59 | 908 | 21 | 359 | 16.75 | 243 |
| West Bengal | 34 | 72 | 71 | 947 | 20.3 | 145 | 18.08 | 308 |
| All India | 46 | 69 | 65 | 940 | 21 | 212 | 25.51 | 224 |

Table 2: Estimated Indices of the Five Dimensions of Women's Empowerment

| States | Health Index | Education Index | Social Index | Economic Index | Political Index | Overall Empowerment |
|----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Andhra Pradesh | 0.545 | 0.175 | 0.378 | 0.669 | 0.846 | 0.523 |
| Bihar | 0.344 | 0 | 0.172 | 0.101 | 1 | 0.323 |
| Chhattisgarh | 0.217 | 0.205 | 0.211 | 0.753 | 0.846 | 0.446 |
| Gujarat | 0.584 | 0.462 | 0.523 | 0.561 | 0.615 | 0.549 |
| Haryana | 0.509 | 0.359 | 0.434 | 0.302 | 0.692 | 0.459 |
| Karnataka | 0.595 | 0.385 | 0.49 | 0.582 | 0 | 0.41 |
| Kerala | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0.261 | 0.308 | 0.714 |
| Maharashtra | 0.752 | 0.564 | 0.658 | 0.573 | 0.231 | 0.556 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 0.108 | 0.175 | 0.142 | 0.379 | 0.769 | 0.315 |
| Odisha | 0.204 | 0.282 | 0.243 | 0.533 | 0.308 | 0.314 |
| Punjab | 0.644 | 0.462 | 0.553 | 0.5 | 0.846 | 0.601 |
| Rajasthan | 0.249 | 0 | 0.125 | 0.774 | 1 | 0.429 |
| Tamil Nadu | 0.774 | 0.538 | 0.656 | 0.574 | 0.462 | 0.601 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 0.076 | 0.154 | 0.115 | 0.213 | 0.538 | 0.219 |
| West Bengal | 0.641 | 0.462 | 0.552 | 0.86 | 0.846 | 0.672 |
| All India | 0.396 | 0.308 | 0.352 | 0.427 | 0.615 | 0.419 |

Chart 1: Women's Empowerment Index

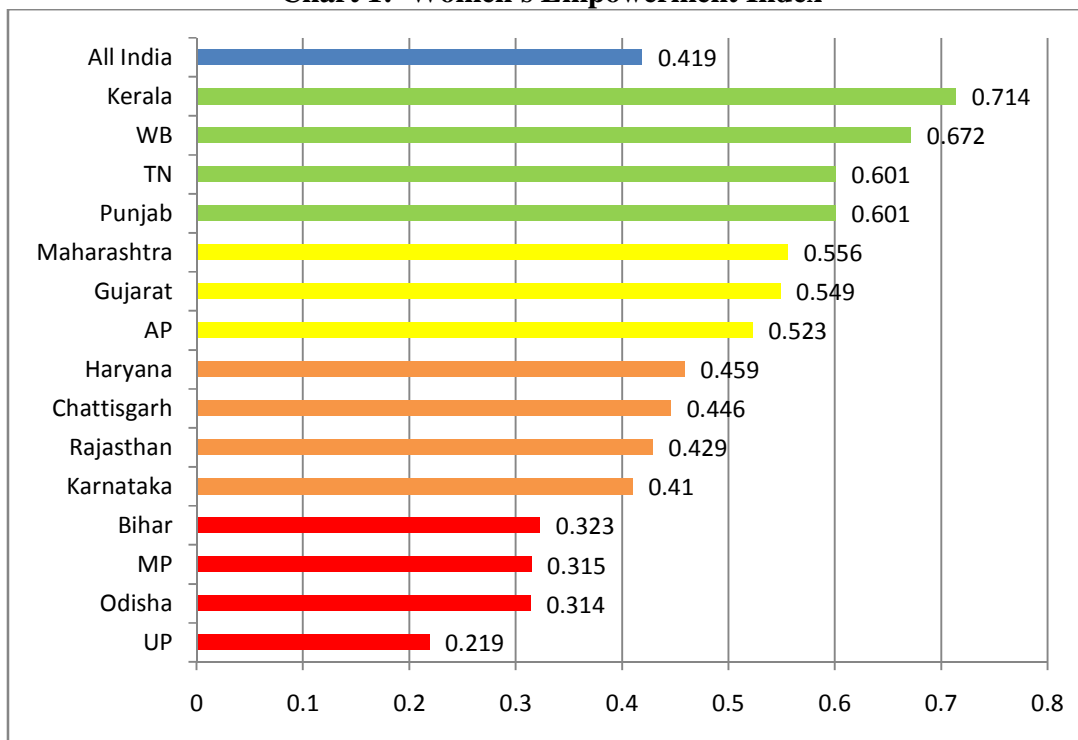


Table 3: Categorising States on the basis of Estimated Women's Empowerment Index

| | |
|---|--|
| Category I 0.601 and above | Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Punjab |
| Category II Between 0.501 and 0.600 | Maharashtra, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh |
| Category III Between 0.401 and 0.500 | Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Karnataka |
| Category IV Below 0.400 | Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha & Uttar Pradesh |

Observations:

1. Kerala is the only state attaining Women's Empowerment Score over 0.700
2. The next best score is attained by West Bengal (0.672)
3. Tamil Nadu and Punjab are on the borderline of Category I and Category II(exactly 0.601)
4. Karnataka, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha & Uttar Pradesh are the states attaining an empowerment score below the All-India level.

Conclusion:

Perhaps the role of communist governments in Kerala and West Bengal is responsible for higher levels in 'inclusiveness' of women in the development process.

In order to empower the women, policies aiming at enhancing their mobility and social interactions are necessary. Changing the labour patterns among women from traditional, primary and unskilled activities to tertiary activities can empower the women further. No doubt the role of attainment of higher education and skills along with better health standards is extremely important. Entrepreneurship among women needs to be strongly supported by providing easy access to bank loans. Women's participation in decision making in intra-family as well as in socio-economic and political spheres can improve their quality of life significantly. The role of Self-Help Groups in financial inclusion of women cannot be emphasized more in this regard. Early marriage and motherhood is seen as factors that slow down the social, economic and political participation of women. Skewed sex ratio brings a host of demographic and social issues that often lead to crimes against women. Hence, policies to enhance these factors are necessary.

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