Women Empowerment in Relation to Feminist Identity and Employment Status

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Abstract

The present study is descriptive one and it has been conducted in Punjab (India). It highlights women empowerment in relation to feminist identity and employment status. Women empowerment is defined as the process of learning by which women identify their own potential and accordingly they change to perform better in society. The study was conducted on 900 women selected randomly from three administrative divisions of Punjab. The data was analyzed using two way ANOVA. The results showed that women with high Feminist Identity are more empowered as compared to those who have low Feminist Identity. Also, working women performed significantly better on women empowerment scale as compared to non-working women. There is significant interaction between feminist identity and employment status on the variable of women empowerment.

KEYWORDS: Women empowerment, feminist identity, employment status, administrative divisions.

Women, over a long period of time, have been considering themselves as powerless. Or, one can say that men have had this kind of attitude towards women and women accepted it and developed a sense of weakness. It seems that this wrong view prevailed for about 2500 years- that a wife is the property of her husband and, therefore, he can do anything with her as he thinks fit. So, in many countries, more than one quarter of women were, over the millennia, physically abused, and a very large number of them subjected to emotional and psychological abuse. There have also been increasing number of cases of ill-treatment, bride-burning and violence against women due to issues related to dowry and other causes.

It is ironical that a country which has recently acclaimed the status of the first Asian country to accomplish its Mars mission in the maiden attempt is positioned at the 29th rank among 146 countries across the globe on the basis of Gender Inequality Index. No doubt there is improvement in the status of women vis-à-vis past but their true empowerment is still awaited.

In order to ameliorate this situation, a large number of women organizations have come up all over the world during the last 50 years or so. These organizations have been taking up the issues related to the welfare of women and have got many such laws enacted by the governments, so that abuse and violence against women is prevented. In many countries, women commissions have been set up for helping women and taking up their causes in many ways. Women organizations have done a lot of work to provide awareness to women about their legal and social rights. The real goal will be achieved if all efforts go in the direction of making women empowered.

Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing an individual to think, behave, take action and centralize work in an autonomous way. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of one's life.

The term 'empowerment' is the range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilization that challenge basic power relation. It is a process aimed at changing the nature and directions of systematic forces, which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections in a given society. It can be viewed as a means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for social transformation.

Moser (2007) argues that empowerment can only occur through a bottom up mobilization. Success of programmes to empower women depends on participation by women. NGOs can make gender planning successful because they can reach the grass root levels where real people are.

Kabeer (2001), whose definition is the most widely accepted, defines empowerment as "the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them".

He further states that empowerment cannot be given it must be self-generated. All that a gender transformation can hope to do is to provide women with the enabling resources which will allow them to take greater control of their own lives.

The sources of women's empowerment can be traced to the interaction between feminism and the concept of popular education. Gender subordination and the social construction of gender were a priority in feminist analysis and popular education. With a strategically non-violent, comprehensive, patient, yet persistent collective feminist interventions, women—along with men's support—can become the primary agent of democratization, pluralism, and peace with justice in the world.

Feminism refers to a belief in gender equality and an awareness of contemporary gender discrimination at interpersonal and social levels (Jackson, Fleury and Lewandowski 1996). Paradoxically many women who endorse gender equality do not identify as feminists. Identifying as a feminist may have its benefits however because feminism may empower to challenge sexism in their lives and the larger society. It is the pursuit of equality in regard to women's rights. It has manifested across centuries and continents through various movements, currents and ideologies.

Identity is a personal process as it shows the set of characteristics through which a person is known to others. It is a combined whole of values, beliefs and roles which are the attributes of an individual. In other words, identity may be defined as the distinctive characteristics belonging to any given individual or shared by all members of a particular social category or group.

Feminist identity is a woman's collective or social identity that involves adopting feminist attitudes and identifying as a feminist (Eiseleand Stake, 2008).

Feminist identity, attitudes, and other such traits have been linked to a wide range of variables, suggesting the important role that feminism plays in women's rejection of harmful sexist socio-cultural messages and the attendant effect that rejection of these messages can have on well-being. These include more positive attitudes about sexual stimuli (Bay-Cheng and Zucker, 2007) and effects on issues related to disordered eating.

Emergence of the Problem

Equal access to participation and decision-making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation is still a question mark. Men have too much influence on politics in comparison to women. Indian women often do not take full advantage of their constitutional and voting rights because they are not properly aware of them.

Moreover the need of the hour is to work against all forms of violence; physical and mental, against women or girl child whether at domestic or societal level, strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

Also, the major justification of the study is that it presents the need of awareness as feminist among women in the patriarchal system of society where a woman is treated like a second class citizen.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the significant difference between women empowerment of women with high and low level of feminist identity.
2. To study the significant difference between women empowerment of women with different employment status.
3. To study the significant interaction between feminist identity and employment status on the variable of women empowerment.

Hypotheses of the Study

H1 There exists no significant difference between women empowerment of women with high and low level of feminist identity.

H2 There exists no significant difference between women empowerment of women with different employment status.

H3 There exists no significant interaction between feminist identity and employment status on the variable of women empowerment.

Sample

In the present study a sample of 900 women was drawn randomly from three administrative divisions of Punjab. From the total sample 450 women were working and the other 450 were non-working. Also, among the working women equal weightage was given to teachers, entrepreneurs and women with office job.

Tool Used

1. Women Empowerment Scale developed by the investigator.
2. Feminist Identity Development Scale by Bargad and Hyde (1991) revalidated by the investigator.

Statistical Techniques Used

2x2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for the analysis interaction of Feminist Identity and Employment Status on the variable of Women Empowerment. For further analysis F-test was followed by t-test.

Results

Table1 **Summary of 2 X 3 Analysis of Variance on Scores of Women Empowerment in Relation to Feminist Identity and Employment Status**

Source of Variation	SS	d_f	MSS	F-Value
Main Effects **A: Feminist Identity** **B: Employment Status**	141951.49 5558.63	1 1	141951.49 2779.32	46.16* 5.20**
First Order Interaction **A X B** **(Feminist Identity x Employment Status)**	3075.05	1	3075.05	5.75**
Within Group (Error)	258664.81	484	534.03	
Total		487		

Main Effect A:

Main effect of Feminist Identity on the variable of Women Empowerment

Table 1 reveals that the F-ratio for the difference between mean scores on women empowerment of groups having high and low feminist identity came out to be 46.86 which is significant at the 0.01 level of confidence. It means that both the groups were significantly different on the scores of women empowerment. Hence, the null hypothesis H1 stating that there exists no significant difference between women empowerment of women with high and low level of feminist identity is rejected. An examination of means of two groups suggests that the group having low level of feminist identity has lower mean (Mean = 171.19) on the variable of women empowerment as compared to group having high level of feminist identity (Mean = 205.29). It reveals that the group with low level of feminist identity has less women empowerment as compared to group having high level of feminist identity.

The results support the findings of various studies which include findings of Cichoka, et. al. (2013) who observed that there is some degree of connection between feminist traits and women's personal empowerment and Yakushko (2007) who on the basis of his online survey about feminist attitudes and their impact on their lives concluded that feminist attitudes promote an active sense of agency in women that encourages growth and psychological well-being which leads to empowered life.

Main Effect B:

Main effect ofEmployment Status on the variable of Women Empowerment

Table 1 reveals that the F-ratio for the difference between mean scores on women empowerment of groups having different employment status came out to be 5.20 which is significant at the 0.05 level of confidence. It means that both the groups were significantly different on the scores of women empowerment. Hence, the null hypothesis H2 stating that there exists no significant difference between women empowerment of women with different employment status is rejected. An examination of means of two groups suggests that the group of working women has higher mean score (Mean = 186.14) on the variable of women empowerment as compared to the group of non-

working women (Mean = 182.93). It reveals that working women have high women empowerment as compared to non-working women.

It may be due to the reason that working women have more exposure to the outside world, more opportunities for decision making, more freedom and upper hand because of their being earning hand as compare to non-working women who are mostly confined to a fixed area and fixed environment and who don't have much opportunities for communication outside their families and have limited access to the resources and little freedom for decision making. Sultana A.M. et al (2013) also reached the same results when she concluded in her study that working women had greater autonomy in decision making in various matters and enjoyed greater power and freedom as compare to non-working women.

Interactional Effect A X B:

First order interactional effect of Feminist Identity and Employment Status on the variable of Women Empowerment

Table 1 reveals that the F-ratio for the difference between mean scores on women empowerment due to interaction between feminist identity and employment status came out to be 5.75 which is significant at the 0.05 level of confidence. The results show that different groups scored different mean scores on women empowerment for two levels of feminist identity (high and low) and two types of employment status (working and non-working). It means that mean scores due to interaction of feminist identity yielded different mean scores for working and non-working women. Hence, the null hypothesis H3 stating that there will be no significant interaction between feminist identity and employment status on the variable of women empowerment is rejected.

To investigate further F–ratio was followed by t–test. The t–ratios for the difference in means of different combination of pairs were computed and have been recorded in table 2.

Table 2 t-ratios for difference between Mean Scores on women empowerment of Different Combination Pairs of Two levels of feminist identity and two types of employment status

	Low Feminist Identity		High Feminist Identity	
	Working	Non-Working	Working	Non-Working
	Mean =177.07 SD = 23.96 N =122	Mean = 165.30 SD = 23.74 N =122	Mean =206.16 SD = 19.54 N =122	Mean = 204.43 SD = 24.85 N =122
LFI/WW	-	3.85*	10.39*	8.75*
LFI/NWW	-	-	14.68*	12.56*
HFI/WW	-	-	-	0.60NS

HFI/NWW	-	-	-	-

*Significant at 0.01 level of significance, NS- Not significant at 0.05 level of significance.

With Low Feminist Identity

The t-ratio for the difference in mean scores on women empowerment of working and non-working women with low feminist identity came out to be 3.85 which is significant at 0.01 level of confidence. It leads to the conclusion that working and non-working women with low feminist identity did not have equal mean scores on women empowerment. An examination of the two means suggests that LFI/WW group achieved higher mean score (Mean = 177.07) as compared to LFI/NWW group (Mean = 165.30).

With High Feminist Identity

The t-ratio for the difference in mean scores on women empowerment of working and non-working women with high feminist identity came out to be 0.60 which is insignificant at 0.05 level of confidence. It leads the investigator to conclude that working and non-working women with high feminist identity have equal mean scores on women empowerment.

With Working Women

The t-ratio for the difference in mean scores on women empowerment of working women with low and high feminist identity came out to be 10.39 which is significant at 0.01 level of confidence. It leads to the conclusion that working women with low and high feminist identity did not have equal mean scores on women empowerment. An examination of the two means suggests that LFI/WW group have lower mean score (Mean = 177.07) as compared to HFI/WW group (Mean = 206.16).

With Non-Working Women

The t-ratio for the difference in mean scores on women empowerment of non-working women with low and high feminist identity came out to be 12.56 which is significant at 0.01 level of confidence. It leads to conclude that the non-working women with low and high feminist identity did not have equal mean scores on women empowerment. An examination of the two means suggests that LFI/NWW group have lower mean score (Mean = 165.30) as compared to HFI/WW group (Mean = 204.43).

For LFI/WW and HFI/NWW

The t-ratio for the difference in mean scores on women empowerment of working women with low feminist identity and non-working women with high feminist identity came out to be 8.75 which is significant at 0.01 level of confidence. It leads to the conclusion that working women with low feminist identity and non-working women with high feminist identity did not have equal mean scores on women empowerment. An examination of the two means suggests that LFI/WW group have lower mean score (Mean = 177.07) as compared to HFI/NWW group (Mean = 204.43).

For LFI/NWW and HFI/WW

The t-ratio for the difference in mean scores on women empowerment of non-working women with low feminist identity and working women with high feminist identity came out to be 14.68 which is significant at 0.01 level of confidence. It leads to the conclusion that non-working women with low feminist identity and working women with high feminist identity did not have equal mean scores on women empowerment. An examination of the two means suggests that LFI/NWW group have lower mean score (Mean = 165.30) as compared to HFI/WW group (Mean = 206.16).

Conclusion

The present study is an attempt to explore the relation between feminist identity and employment status on the variable of women empowerment. The findings show that women with high feminist identity have higher women empowerment as compared to their counterparts. Also working women have higher women empowerment than non-working women. It takes to the conclusion that work culture promotes women empowerment. There exists significant interaction between feminist identity and employment status on the variable of women empowerment. Working women with high level of feminist identity have higher women empowerment as compared to other groups in the study. Also, there exists no significant difference between women empowerment of working and non-working women with high feminist identity.

The results seem to be in line with the study by Yakushko (2007) whose findings suggest that feminist attitudes promote an active sense of agency in women that encourages growth and psychological well-being hence leads to empowered life. Eisele and Stake (2008) also reached the conclusion that feminist attitudes and identity contribute to positive traits for women that may be indicative of personal empowerment. Moreover, feminists also have an awareness of social injustice and believe that the current gender system can be detrimental to women and thus requires change. They have a greater commitment to eradicating oppression towards women. Feminist identity may act as a buffer against the stresses of gender discrimination thus leading to empowerment.

Educational Implications

The development of feminist consciousness (i.e., a personal awareness of sexism and its effects on women) is thought to be an effective means by which to reduce these detrimental effects by providing a way to understand sexist discrimination and place it in a larger framework of women's oppression. The study will help in exploration of issues affecting equality of the sexes. The study is going to help in spreading awareness about gender discrimination and importance of women in development. It will help in chalking out plans for raising the level of education of women which are the backbone of a country. It will draw attention to the issues related to women security which are a major hindrance in the exploration of their talents. It will promote further research in the field of women empowerment taking into consideration various unexplored aspects related to it.

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