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Dr. Komal Patel
Ph.D. Student, SM Patel College
of Home Science, Gujarat, India

Dr. Nidhi Gupta
Nidhi Gupta, Associate
Professor, SM Patel College of
Home Science, Gujarat, India

MGNREGs: A weapon socio-economic empowerment of rural women

Dr. Komal Patel and Dr. Nidhi Gupta

Abstract

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) presently known as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGS) is crucial for women empowerment in our country. The act plays a significant role to meet the practical as well as strategic needs of women's participation. The main objective of the present study is an in-depth analysis of the potentials of MGNREGs in bringing socio-economic empowerment of rural women in Anand District. Out of 8 blocks in Anand District, 3 blocks were selected namely Sojitra, Tarapur and Umreth. The primary data for the study was collected from 284 women MGNREGS beneficiaries selected from 9 villages of 3 blocks from Anand district. The study was based on structured questionnaires, with personal interviews of MGNREGs beneficiaries. The results revealed that Approximately two-fifth of the women respondents belongs to 35-50 years group and studied up to Primary level or were illiterate (39%). That three-fifth (59%) of the respondents were found in the income categories of (Rs.1000-2500) while residing in Medium size family system (64.4%) respondent's. It was noted that half of the women beneficiaries (50%) have 2-5 years' experience in working with MGNREGs. Moreover, the study also revealed that Overall impact analysis of MGNREGs women beneficiaries with respect to their socio-economic empowerment revealed more economical and social empowerment in comparison to their personal empowerment.

Keywords: Women empowerment, self-help group, socio-economic empowerment, mgnregs and rural women

1. Introduction

"Women are less likely to secure favorable outcomes for them in household decision making process. Socio-economic development is not possible without participation and empowerment of rural downtrodden women"

Women empowerment refers to the power of having decision making of their own. The dictionary meaning of the term 'empower' is to invest legally or formally with power, to make powerful. Role and involvement in decision making in family affairs, freedom in spending, help received in discharging responsibilities in household and deviation from traditional customs etc are some indicators of women empowerment. It is a holistic concept, multidimensional in approach and involves a basic realization and awareness of one's own powers and potentials, capabilities and competencies and of one's rights and opportunities for development in all spheres of life- social, political, economical and cultural to lead a reasonable and rational life with dignity. Among all the facets of empowerment, economic empowerment occupies utmost significance and employment opportunity is considered to contribute to economic empowerment.

1.1 MGNREGs and Women Empowerment

There is a large literature on issues connected to rural women's empowerment through the largest public works scheme of India. The National Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, first started in 200 districts since 2 February 2006 and renamed after the Father of the Nation as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act (MGNREGS). It is widely believed that MGNREGS helps rural women in two ways: first, by providing as a continuous source of income generation and second, by upgrading the social status of rural women—a path to economic independence and hence, empowerment of women. MGNREGs is one of the most distinguishing features of this scheme and its approach towards empowering citizen including

Correspondence

Dr. Komal Patel
Ph.D. Student, SM Patel College
of Home Science, Gujarat, India

women citizen to play an active role in the implementation of the scheme, through Gram Sabha, social audits, participatory planning and other activities. As seen earlier, women's empowerment essentially refers to changing power relations between men and women in favor of women. The unequal power relations are reflected in different spheres of life such as, labour and employment, health and nutrition, education and skills, asset ownership, political and social participation etc. unequal power relations denote that women enjoy limited power of decision making in multiple spheres of life as compared to men. MGNREGS has facilitated increase of women's participation in the labour force. In this context, the researcher has raised two pertinent questions: Whether women have become empowered or not? And secondly Does MGNREG scheme has helped women to become empowered? In this context, it is proposed to undertake a study on socio-economic women empowerment through MGNREG scheme in Anand District. MGNREGS has emerged as a key programming strategy for most of the women development activities.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample Selection: The present study was carried out in Anand District of Gujarat state. The study has attempted to describe the social, economic and personal empowerment by the respondents by participating in MGNREGs activities. The population of the present study consisted of all the women who actively participated in MGNREGs, out of which 2% women were selected as the part of the sample population for the present research. Out of 8 blocks 3 blocks were selected namely Sojitra, Tarapur and Umreth. These blocks (Sojitra, Tarapur & Umreth) were selected on the basis of highly concentrated women participation in MGNREGs activities as revealed from the five years data of MGNREGs procured from the District Rural Development office (DRDO). Out of 3 blocks, 9 villages were selected as District Rural Development office claimed that during our field survey, these villages will have MGNREGs activities going on in full swing. The selection of MGNREGs beneficiaries were made by preparing a list of all the women working at these selected worksites and 35 women were chosen randomly from each village (Batva, Limbali, Trmbovad, Umreth, Jhakhala, Fatepur, Tol, Malpur & Ishanpur) for being the part of the sample population. So the total sample for the present study came out to be 315 MGNREGs beneficiaries selected from 9 villages of 3 blocks from Anand district but some forms were rejected due to incomplete or incorrect data so the actual sample size came out to be 284.

2.2 Selection of Tool: A standardized scale was developed to measure the Extent of Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women Working under MGNREGs. (EOSEE)

2.3 Item Collection: A Likert type three point rating scale was prepared and used to obtain the data to assess extent of empowerment among the women respondents selected for the study. The present scale was developed by the researcher on three sub scales namely Social Empowerment, Economic Empowerment and Personal Empowerment after joining this scheme. This scale was prepared based on the accurate information collected through various review of literature, research Journals, books related to the topic. The EOSEE scale thus formed had 41 statements which were broadly classified into three categories like,

1. **Social Empowerment:** Comprised of 17 statements.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** Comprised of 14 items/statements.
3. **Personal Empowerment:** Consist of 10 statements.

The scale was subjected to content validity before it was used for data collection. For establishing the content validity of rating scale a list of 41 statements were given to a panel of 10 judges. Only those statements were included in the scale, which had agreement of 80% judges or more. These were included in the scale after they were approved by the judges. Total 29 statements were retained in the final scale of assessing Extent of Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women Working under MGNREGs (EOSEE).

2.4 Scoring of the scale: A three-point rating scale was developed for the EOSEE scale for MGNREGs beneficiaries. Respondents were supposed to express their socio-economic empowerment in terms of "High", "Moderate" and "Low". The response of "High" was given three points and responses of "Moderate" and "Low" were assigned the scores of two and one points respectively for the SEE scale.

2.5 Reliability coefficient of the scale: A test score is called reliable when it has reasons for believing the score to be stable and trustworthy. Stability and trustworthiness depend upon the degree to which the score is indexes of 'true ability' i.e. free of chance error. Cronbach's Alpha (α) method was used for measuring the reliability of present scale. The Reliability of the scale came out to be 0.835.

3. Results & discussions

The participation of women in MGNREGS in the whole state, Anand District is far ahead the average participation of women under MGNREGS. The concept of women's empowerment got wider popularity and acceptance in Anand District with the launching of decentralized planning in the state. The main reason for the high participation of women in MGNREGS is mainly due to the higher wage rate when compared to the existing wage rates for unskilled labour for women in the State. It is also seen that MGNREGS has the potential to empower the beneficiaries economically and socially.

Table 1: Socio economic profile of women respondents in MGNREGS

socio economic profile of women respondent	% of women respondents
Age	
18 to 25	21.8
25 to 35	34.9
35 to 50	38.4
Above 50	4.9
Education Level	
Illiterate	39
Primary level	42
Middle School	16
Secondary level	1
Higher Secondary level	2
Personal Income (Rs.)	
Less than 1000	11
1000-2500	59
More than 2500	30
Family Size	
1 to 5 members	30.2
5to 10 members	64.4
10 to 15 members	4.2
Above 15 members	1
Members of SHG	
Yes	32
No	67.9
Work Experience in MGNREGS	
Less than 2 years	26
2-5 years	50
More than 5 years	24

Socio economic profile of women respondents in MNREGA: The data of socio economic status of women respondents in MNREGA presented in table 1 revealed that two-third of the respondents (66 percent) belong to age group of 35 to 50 years. The education status revealed that 42 percent of the beneficiaries were having primary level education and 59 percent of the respondents had income group of between Rs.1000-2500/pm. Two-third women respondents were having 5 to 10 members in a family while two-third of the women were not involved with any self-help group. Moreover, that half of the women beneficiaries (50%) have 5 years’ experience in working with MGNREGs while one-fourth of the respondents have been working with MGNREGs since 2 years.

Social Empowerment: This section (fig. 1) was used to measure the respondent’s level of “Women Social Empowerment” after joining MGNREGs. The below figure displayed that overall mean score of the women social empowerment after joining MGNREGs was 2.34 out of 3 which shows moderate social empowerment. The analysis revealed that social aspects like, Capacity of raising voice against injustice, family support for doing outside job, liberty to work in comfortable hours and wear clothes as per their choice shows moderately high mean score while other social aspects like support from family members for child care activities and moral support from co-workers showed low mean scores with respect to social empowerment. Thus, the women who participated in this scheme in Anand District generally revealed moderate social empowerment score after joining MGNREGS.

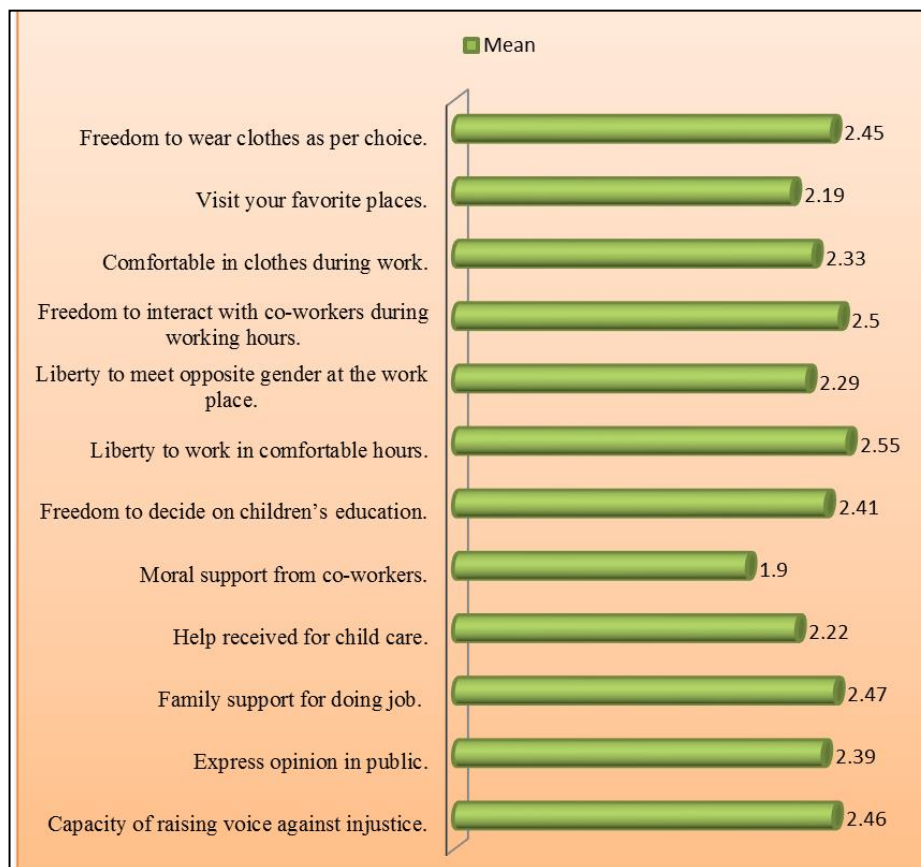


Fig 1: Social Empowerment (N=284, overall mean=2.34)

Economic Empowerment: The main idea behind this section “Women Economic Empowerment” was to measure the level

of the respondents benefited economically from their active participation while working with MGNREGs.

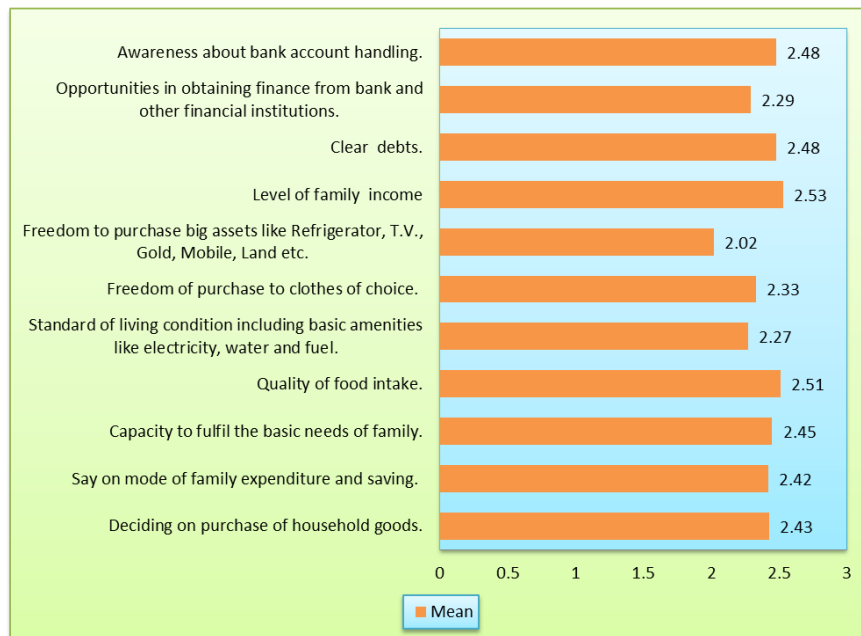


Fig 2: Economic Empowerment (N=284, overall mean=2.38)

Women have the potential to change their own economic status, as well as that of the families, communities, states and countries in which they live. The analysis displayed that the overall mean score of women economic empowerment after joining this scheme was 2.38 out of three which indicates moderate economic empowerment of the respondents after joining this scheme. The results revealed that moderately high economic empowerment on the aspects like good quality of foods, increased family income, taking decision on purchase of household goods, say on mode of family expenditure & saving and fulfil the basic needs of the family members.

Personal Empowerment: “Women personal empowerment”

The five statements measured the MGNREGs beneficiaries level of personal empowerment and the results depicts that the personal empowerment of the women was measured on aspects like spending money on personal health and liberty to spend their own money as she likes in which they scored high while aspects of personal empowerment like free time for leisure activities, confidence to solve any financial problem and managing bank accounts were scored moderate. The overall mean item score on personal empowerment came out to be 2.39 out of three which depicts moderate personal empowerment after joining MGNREGs.

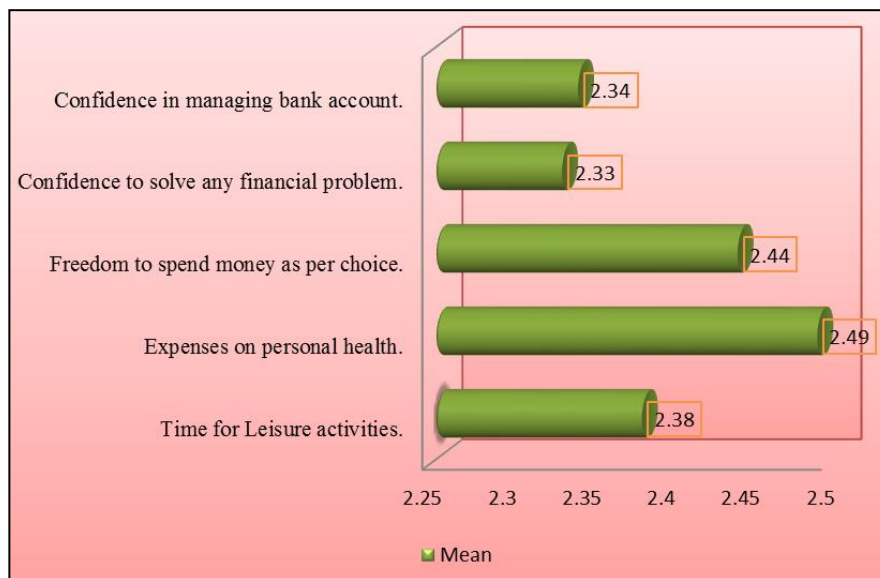


Fig 3: Personal Empowerment (N=284, Overall Mean Score=2.39)

4. Conclusion

The results of the present study can be concluded that Empowerment of women has certainly happened due to MGNREGS. Enhancement of economic security, promotion of gender equity and equitable opportunities to disadvantaged groups and increasing bargaining power of the poor are envisaged in the policy. Factually, majority of women collect their own wages, broadened their choices and capabilities.

The raised incomes were invested on higher education of children, health and nutrition of family, particularly women. Access to bargaining and increased purchasing power resulted in self-confidence and sustainable development of the women working in MGNREGS. The present study has very clearly indicated that both tangible and intangible benefits have occurred due to MGNREGA.

MGNREGS was observed capable of enhancing income level, food security and livelihood security of rural households on a sustainable manner and showed its positive impact on the socio-economic conditions of the beneficiaries. The scheme also enhanced the purchasing power of beneficiaries, as their asset possession, annual per capita food and non-food expenditure, per capita expenditure on education and health increased considerably after they started working under the scheme. The present research for the beneficiaries on the basis of selected socio-economic indicators showed that MGNREGS altered the socioeconomic set-up of rural masses towards betterment. Therefore, the scheme seems worth continuing in future. The potential of MGNREGS for women empowerment can further be increased by proper implementation and monitoring of the scheme.

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