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Employment and empowerment of rural poor women in Mymensingh District of Bangladesh

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Abstract

The study was undertaken to identify the factors influencing women empowerment, calculate empowerment index considering the trend of employment. In doing so, the study utilized the data collected by the field survey from Mymensingh districts of Bangladesh. A total number of 60 women respondents were selected using random sampling technique and were categorized into two groups, employed and non-employed, each group comprised equal number of respondents, i.e., 30 women. Data were analyzed using simple statistical techniques as well as OLS regression analysis. An analysis of the socioeconomic status of the women showed that average monthly income difference between employed and non-employed women was BDT 3916 such high difference in average monthly income enabled 70% of the employed women to be empowered whereas with negligible earnings, only 33% of the non-employed women were empowered. The result of the OLS method suggests that the number of children, age gap between husband and wife and income gap between husband and wife significantly affect women empowerment. The five domains of empowerment index indicated that in case of employed group the highest disempowered women (69.44%) in case of leadership domain followed by Production (35.56%), resource (32.41%), income (32.41%) and time domain (23.15%) and in case of non-employed group the highest disempowered women (35.19%) in case of resource domain followed by production (34.57%), leadership (32.10%), income (30.86%) and time domain (4.94%). Results showed that the employed women are more empowered than non-employed women. Therefore, this study strongly suggests that women should be given all the facilities to get involved with income generating activities.

Key words: Women empowerment, employment, disempowerment index

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Introduction

Women's empowerment has been one of the top priorities of development agencies and governments around the globe, including Bangladesh. The Gender Gap Report (2014) stressed that women's increased control of household resources can improve outcomes for the next generation, and that empowering women as economic, social, and political actors can lead to productivity gains and sustainable development for any nation. In Bangladesh, the continual singularity since the beginning has been the standing of women, particularly the rural poor women as the poorest and most culturally stigmatized sector of the population and

the prime reason might be its complex socio-cultural settings which restrict women from being employed (Gopalan, 2001). The most common trendy in rural Bangladesh is that women are under the control of male members in all stages of life (Mabud and Akhter, 2003). In addition, major family decision making power in rural Bangladesh is mostly vested on the male head of the family: father, husband or son (Sen, 2000). The extreme case of disempowerment of rural women in Bangladesh is that even in case of sickness, the decision to visit a doctor or to attend a hospital also rests with the male members of the household (Lloyd, 2005). There are many other factors that stand as barrier to the effective empowerment of rural women in Bangladesh (Mahatab and Prabha, 1999).Yet, the true fact is without the active participation of women in all spheres of the economy, the goal of achieving sustainable development seems unimaginable in Bangladesh. On the other hand, international organizations like the World Bank and United Nations have also focused on women's issues especially the empowerment of poor women in rural Bangladesh and consequently, the importance of involving women in economic activities is increasing in Bangladesh (McNamara, 2003).Keeping all these in mind, the Government of Bangladesh has reached a remarkable height in involving women – especially the rural - into various income generating activities through the implementation of numerous policies and initiatives in remote areas of Bangladesh. The greater employment of women in the economy might have brought some substantial advances in their livelihood by the attainment of higher empowerment base. So, it is of immense importance to assess the level of empowerment of rural women specially the poor one's considering the new trend of women employment in Bangladesh.

Women empowerment is a burning issue all over the world. Thus, research that addresses the empowerment of women is considered to be of enormous reputation and seen as essential. Therefore, in view of the importance of this matter, an attempt has been made in this study to investigate the rural poor women's empowerment status in relation to the contemporary women employment situation in Mymensingh district of Bangladesh. In addition, the study attempts to find out the differences of empowerment status between rural employed and non-employed women group. The results of this study are expected to provide programs and policy recommendations that will help to ensure improvement of women's status especially in decision making power, both at the individual and community levels. Based on the mentioned background, the objectives of this study are to identify the socio-economic status of rural poor women, the factors influencing women empowerment and calculate empowerment index considering the trend of employment.

Materials and Methods

This study purposively selected some villages named Morakhola, Mashudabari, Boira, Kewatkhali, Charnilakshia, Kalibari under Mymensingh Sadar Upazila of Mymensingh District where very poor employed and non-employed rural women were available. To measure the extent of women empowerment considering the new trend of employment, two categories of rural women–employed and non-employed group were selected purposively. Those who fell under the employed group were involved with numerous income generating activities and those who fell under the non- employed group were not engaged in any kind of income generating activities. Simple random sampling technique was used for the selection of sample and both the employed and non- employed group included equal numbers of respondents i.e., 30 women. Primary data were collected during the period of January to February, 2015. By using the prepared interview schedule, primary information was collected regarding the respondent's household, employment, land and agriculture, income and expenditure, consumption habit, etc. In order to measure the role and extent of women's involvement in agriculture sector, this study

selected 5 areas of query i.e., decision about agricultural production, access to and decision making power over productive resources, control over use of earnings, leadership in the community and time use. As an analytical tool under this study, Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) was used to measure women's empowerment by using five domains, i.e., production, resource, income, leadership and time. In order to precisely calculate the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index, interviewed questions were arranged in a logical sequence and required data were collected through direct interviews by making personal visits to the workplace of the respondents. The data and information collected from field survey, interviews, discussions and communications were scrutinized, classified, edited and coded accordingly. Different computer software packages like Excel and EViews programming were used for analyzing the data. The final results of the analyses were summarized and presented in tabular forms with their meaningful interpretations. The specification of the employed OLS regression model by this study is as follows;

$$\mathbf{Y= \alpha+ \beta_0 X_1+ \beta_1 X_2+ \beta_2 X_3+ \varepsilon}$$

Where, Y= Empowered Index

X_1= No. of children

X_2=Age gap between husband and wife

X3=Income gap between husband and wife

α= Intercept

β_0, β_1& β_2= Coefficients of respective independent variables and ε= Error term

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic status of rural poor women

Socio-economic status covered information regarding demographic, dwelling, consumption and earning status of rural poor women under job group and non-job group. Demographic information includes education, occupation, age distribution, type of marriage and family size. Dwelling information includes house ownership, water source, cooking fuel and electricity. Consumption habit information includes mainly feeding pattern and earning information includes monthly household income and expenditure.

It was found by the study that average age gap between respondents and their husbands are 10 years and 8 years in employed and non-employed group, respectively. Table 1 indicates that in employed group, the educational achievement of most (53.59%) women reaches to the sign only criterion and 41.57% for the husbands; while 42.26% respondents and 51.31% of the husbands have experienced to go to primary school; and 4.15% respondents and 7.12% of the husbands have experienced to go to secondary school. On the other hand, in non-employed group, 41.18% of respondents and 22.43% of their husbands can sign only, 54.63% of respondents and 71.28% of their husbands have experience to go to primary school and 4.19% of respondents and 6.29% of their husbands have experienced to go to secondary school.

Table 1 shows that the respondents were working as aya, cleaner and cook and their husbands were engaged as shopkeeper, rickshaw puller, guard, day laborer and other low income services under employed group. On the other hand, under Non-employed group, 27%, 13%, 29%, 24% and 7% of the respondent's husbands worked as shopkeeper, rickshaw puller, guard, day laborer and other low income services under non-job group. The study also found that under employed group, 80% marriages are of monogamy type and 20% of polygamy type whereas under non- employed group, 90% marriages are of monogamy type and 10% of polygamy type. Table 1 shows that in employed and non-employed group families, total family members on an average are 5 (children: 2 and adult: 1) and 6 (children: 3 and adult: 1). In employed group, 46.67% is sole and 53.33% is joint family. In non- employed group, 33.33% is sole and 66.67% is joint family. Results indicate that in both groups, total family members differ in the number of children. The children number is higher (3) in Non- employed group than employed group (2) because of the difference in family

planning consciousness. Sole family is higher (20%) for employed group than the non-employed group. Joint family in employed group is 20% higher than non-employed group. Higher number children are easily reared up in joint family.

It was found by the study that under the both group, the respondents have more own house than rented house but their husbands have more own and rented house than their wives. The water source status of respondents under both groups includes the sources like tube-well, supply and others. Results show that employed group uses more tube-well water (16.67% owned and 70% not owned) than supply (10%) and others (3.33%). Non- employed group uses more tube-well water (66.67% owned) than supply (10%) and others (3.33%) but here own tube-well is lower than employed group and supply water is higher than the Employed Group. In both groups, people use more tube-well water than other sources. The cooking fuel status of respondents under both groups includes the sources like fuel gas cooker, firewood/charcoal /sawdust and Electronic Stove. Results show that both of the groups people use mostly the firewood as cooking fuel. For both groups, people mostly use the electricity facility but the employed group has much access to electricity (96.67%) than Non- Employed Group (86.67%). Result also shows that in both groups, mostly people use to eat more than three times. But the percentage is higher for the employed group which implies that the employed group respondents are in a better condition regarding feeding pattern than the Non-Job Group.

The monthly household income source of respondents includes income from respondents and her husband and other household members like son, daughter, grandparents etc. Results show that under the employed group, respondents and their husbands have monthly income, on an average, BDT 4,166 and BDT 6,013.33, respectively and their total monthly income, on an average, is BDT 11445.99.

On the other hand, in Non-Employed Group, the respondents and their husbands have monthly income, on an average, BDT 250 and BDT 7,233.33 respectively and their total monthly income, on an average, is BDT 9086.66.Result also indicates that the husbands of non-employed Group earn more than the husbands under the employed group. The respondents' husbands are mostly engaged in small agriculture land. On the other hand, the employed group respondents earn more than non-employed group respondents. So, wives under the Employed group are in a better condition than the non- employed Group. Though the non-employed group respondents are mainly housewives, but a very few of them earn money from poultry or cattle rearing, tailoring, etc. So there is a big gap between the income of employed and non-employed group respondents, BDT 4,166 and BDT 250 respectively. The reason behind such huge gap might be the fact that women of employed group are able enough get permission to earn money. So the employed group respondents are more empowered in terms of earning money. The monthly household expenditure pattern of respondents under both groups includes different expenditure like food, clothing, education, family health, social activities and others. Results show that, both employed and non-employed group spend their largest share of income on food purpose, 39.25% and 44.56% respectively. The employed group people are more conscious about child education and spend more income than non-employed group. Both the groups' respondents spend least on family health purpose and spend the major portion of expenditure in daily food intake. As respondents under employed group earn more than non-employed group; they spend more money for education purpose.

Factors influencing women empowerment

In order to examine the correlation between women empowerment and other characteristics like age gap between husband and wife, income gap between husband and wife, the number of their children,

Table 1. Socioeconomic characteristics of women respondents

Variables	**Classification**	**Employed Group**		**Non-employed Group**	
		Respondent	**Husband**	**Respondent**	**Husband**
Age (Years)	-	35	45	31	39
Education level (%)	Sign only	53.59	41.57	41.18	22.43
	School pass	42.26	51.31	54.63	71.28
	Bellow SSC	4.15	7.12	4.19	6.29
	Total	100	100	100	100
Family type (%)	Sole	46.67		66.67	
	Joint	53.33		33.33	
	Total	100		100	
Average family size (No.)	No. of children	2		3	
	Adult members	1		1	
	Total	5		6	
Family member's occupation (%)	Aya	37	-	-	-
	Cook	29	-	-	-
	Cleaner	34	-	-	-
	Day laborer		51	-	13
	Rickshaw puller		13	-	24
	Guard		7	-	29
	Shopkeeper		8	-	27
	Other lower job		21	-	7
	Total		100	-	100
House ownership status (%)	Own	23.33	30	13.33	40
	Rented	13.33	33.33	3.33	43.33
	Total	100	100	100	100
Average Monthly Household Income (BDT)	-	4166	6013.33	250	7233.33
	Other sources	1266.66		1603.33	
	Total	11445.99		9086.66	
Monthly Household Expenditure pattern (%)	Food	39.25		44.56	
	Clothing	10.56		11.40	
	Child Education	13.90		11.66	
	Family Health	7.74		7.16	
	Social Activities	8.34		7.60	
	Others	20.21		17.62	
	Total	100		100	
Types of marriage (%)	Monogamy	80		90	
	Polygamy	20		10	

Table 1. Socioeconomic characteristics of women respondents (-Contd.-)

Variables	Classification	Employed Group		Non-employed Group	
		Respondent	Husband	Respondent	Husband
Source of Cooking fuel (%)	Gas Cooker	13.33		16.67	
	Firewood/Charcoal /Sawdust	83.33		76.67	
	Electric Stove	3.33		6.67	
	Total	100		100	
Electricity use status (%)	Yes	96.67		86.67	
	No	3.33		13.33	
Feeding pattern (%)	Three Times a Day	6.67		26.67	
	More Than Three Times	93.33		73.33	
Source of water use (%)	Own Tube-well	16.67		6.67	
	Not-owned Tube-well	70		66.67	
	Supply	10		23.33	
	Others	3.33		3.33	

Source: Author's calculation based on field survey, 2015.

statistical analysis using the OLS regression has been conducted in this study. The result of OLS method has been summarized in Table 2 and the interpretations has been explained accordingly. Equation 1 shows the relationship between women empowerment and other characteristics like age gap between husband and wife, income gap, the number of their children. The specification with calculation of the equation is as follows;

Women empowerment = 7.93 + 1.75 children - 0.45 age gap - 0.0006 income gap……. (1)

(3.41) (2.96) (-2.61) (-2.08)

Equation 1 shows the relation between empowered women and age gap between husband and wife. Women empowerment decreases significantly by 0.45 with per year age gap increase between husband and wife. The main reason behind such high age gap between husband and wife may be to sustain the dominant position of men within the household because the lesser is the age gap between husband and wife, the less dominancy a husband can sustain over his wife. Such high age gap in case of both groups might result in the disempowerment of the wives. But when rural women earn money then "age gap with her husband" is not a factor for disempowering women whereas when women earn nothing, her husband never give importance to her for any purpose. Equation 1 also shows the relation between women empowerment and income gap between husband and wife. Women empowerment decreases significantly when the income gap increases between husband and wife.

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis of the factors influencing women empowerment

Variables	Coefficients	t-value	R^2
Intercept	7.93	3.41	0.65
Children (X_1)	1.75	2.96	
Age gap (X_2)	-0.45	-2.61**	
Income gap (X_3)	-0.0006	-2.08**	

Source: Authors' Calculation based on field survey, 2015; ** accepted at 5% level of significant

Here H_o is there is no relationship between dependent and independent variables.

Intercept: The calculated value of t with 8 d.f. is seen to be greater than the tabulated value of t at 5% level of significant i.e. t_{tab}=1.960 < tc_{al}=3.41. Hence, the calculated value is significant and the null hypothesis may be rejected.

Children (X_1): Women Empowerment increases significantly by 1.75 numbers per increase in their number of children. The calculated value of t with 8 d.f. is seen to be greater than the tabulated value of t at 5% level of significant i.e. t_{tab}=1.960 < tc_{al}=2.96. Hence, the calculated value is significant and the null hypothesis may be rejected.

Age gap (X_2): The calculated value of t with 8 d.f. is seen to be smaller than the tabulated value of t at 5% level of significant i.e. t_{tab}=1.960 > tc_{al}=- 2.61. Hence, the calculated value is significant and the null hypothesis may be accepted.

Income gap (X_3): The calculated value of t with 8 d.f. is seen to be smaller than the tabulated value of t at 5% level of significant i.e. t_{tab}=1.960 > tc_{al}=- 2.08. Hence, the calculated value is significant and the null hypothesis may be accepted**.**

Table 3 shows the result of WEAI (0.95) under employed group. The five domains of empowerments show that 70% of women are empowered and the rest (30%) of the women who are not yet empowered have, on an average, inadequate achievements in 24% of domains. Thus women's disempowerment index (Mo) is 0.072 and women's five domains of Empowerment index is 0.93. On the other hand, the results in the study areas shows that 3% of men are not yet empowered and the average inadequacy score among these men is 0.6%. So, men's disempowerment index (Mo) is 0.018 and men's five domains of Empowerment index is 0.98. Furthermore, the table 3 also shows the result of WEAI (0.72) under non-employed group. The five domains of Empowerment show that 33% of women are empowered and the rest (67%) of the women who are not yet empowered have, on an average, inadequate achievement in 81% of domains. Thus women's disempowerment index (Mo) is 0.54 and women's five domains of Empowerment index is 0.59. On the other hand, the results in the study areas show that 10% of men are not yet empowered and the average inadequacy score among these men is 3%. So, men's disempowerment index (Mo) is 0.13 and men's five domains of Empowerment index is 0.87.

Table 4 shows the results of decomposition of the disempowerment measure for both men and women under both the groups. The domains (5DE) in the Bangladesh sample areas that contribute most to women's disempowerment are follows: Production, Leadership, Resources, Income and Time. The results of Table 4 in case of employed group indicate the highest disempowered women (69.44%) in case of leadership domain followed by Production (35.56%), Resource (32.41%), Income (32.41%) and Time domain (23.15%).About 69.44% of women are not yet empowered and lack leadership criterion. The lack of leadership is higher for disempowered women (69.44%) than disempowered men (27.78%). Disempowered women of 23.15% and 46.30% have lack of decision making power as group member and speaker in public respectively. On the other hand, 9.26% and 18.52% disempowered men have no decision making power as group member and speaker in public respectively. About 35.56% of women are not yet empowered and lack access to make decision about production. Disempowered women of 9.26% and 26.30% have no decision making power over the input in productive decision and autonomy in production respectively. About 32.41% of women are not yet empowered and lack access to make decision about resources. Disempowered women of 9.26% and 23.15% have weak decision making power over the purchase, sale or transfer of assets and ownership respectively. About 32.41% of women are not yet empowered and lack access to make decision about income. Disempowered women of 13.89% and 18.52% have no decision making power over the permission of

Table 3. Estimated values of Women Empowerment Agricultural Index (WEAI) for both men and women under both employed and nonemployed group

Indexes	**Employed Group**		**Non-Employed Group**	
	Women	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**
Disempowered Headcount (H)	30%	3%	67%	10%
Average Inadequacy Score (A)	24%	0.6%	81%	3%
Disempowerment Index (Mo)	0.072	0.018	0.54	0.13
5DE Index (1-Mo)	0.93	0.98	0.59	0.87
Percentage of Women with No Gender Parity (HGPI)	73%		63%	
Average empowerment (IGPI)	27%		37%	
Gender Parity Index	0.02		0.13	
WEAI	**0.95**		**0 .72**	

Source: Author's Calculation

Table 4. Five Domains of Empowerment Index, decomposed by dimension for both men and women under both employed and non-employed group (in %)

Five Domains of Empowerment Index	**Employed Group**		**Non-Employed Group**	
	Women	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**
Production	**35.56**		**34.57**	
1. Input in Productive Decisions	9.26		16.67	
2. Autonomy in Production	26.30		17.90	
Resources	**32.41**		**35.19**	
1. Ownership	23.15		17.28	
2. Purchase, Sale or Transfer of Assets	9.26		17.90	
Income	**32.41**		**30.86**	
1. Permission of Earning	13.89		15.43	
2. Control over Income	18.52		15.43	
Leadership	**69.44**	**27.78**	**32.10**	**13.58**
1. Group Member	23.15	9.26	14.81	9.88
2. Speaking in Public	46.30	18.52	17.28	3.70
Time	**23.15**		**4.94**	
1. Workload	9.26		2.47	
2. Leisure	13.89		2.47	

Source: Authors' calculation based on field survey, 2015.

earning and control over income respectively. Men are fully empowered in making decision about income. About 23.15% of women are not yet empowered and easy access to make decision about time. Only 9.26% and 13.89% of disempowered women have decision making power regarding workload and leisure.

The results of Table 3 indicates that in case of non-employed group, women face the highest disempowered in case of resource domain (35.19%) followed by production, leadership, income and time domain . Disempowered women of 17.90% and 17.28% have weak decision making power over the purchase, sale or transfer of assets and ownership respectively. About 34.57% of women are not yet empowered and lack access to make decision about production. Disempowered women of 17.90% and 16.67% have no decision making power over the input in productive decision and autonomy in production respectively. The lack of leadership is higher for disempowered women (32.10%) than disempowered men (13.58). Disempowered women of 17.90% and 17.28% have decision making power as group member and speaker in public respectively. Only 9.88% and 3.70% disempowered men have no decision making power as group member and speaker in public respectively. About 30.86% of women are not yet empowered and lack access to make decision about income. Disempowered women of 15.43% have no decision making power over the permission of earning and control over income. Men are fully empowered in making decision about income. About 4.94% of women are not yet empowered and easy access to make decision about time. Only 2.47% disempowered women have decision making power regarding workload and leisure. On the other hand, men are fully empowered in making decision about production, time, resources but they lack the empowerment in making decision about leadership.

Contribution of employed and non-employed group at Mymensingh

Though 50% (30 respondents) of non-employed group and 50% (30 respondents) of employed group, the contribution of non-job group to disempowerment index ($Mo_{Mymensingh}$) is 83.33% suggests bear a disproportionate share of poverty whereas contribution of employed group to ($Mo_{Mymensingh}$) is 16.67%. So, to increase empowerment, women need to increase their earnings on a consistent basis. In family, financial support from women can able women to participate in decision making process, for both resource and production.

Opinion of rural women under employed and non-employed group at Mymensingh

To increase women empowerment, under both group, rural women opined firstly the education followed by social status, financial support, age gap with her husband and family planning. In job group, 100%, 97%, 97%, 20% and 17 % rural women gave opinion on education, financial support, social status, family planning and age gap. Under non job group, 97%, 97%, 70%, 33% and 17% rural women gave opinion on education, financial support, social status, age gap and family planning.

Table 5. Opinion regarding women empowerment under both group at Mymensingh (%)

Opinion	Employed Group	Non-employed Group
Family planning	20	16.67
Financial support	96.67	96.67
Education	100	96.67
Age gap	16.67	33.33
Social status	96.67	70

Source: Author's Calculation based on field survey, 2015

Conclusion and Recommendations

According to MDG, it is an important goal to achieve women empowerment. Results of the study showed that by increasing earning capacity of rural women through lower-salary job (cook, cleaner, etc.) can increase women empowerment from 33% to 70%. About 67% disempowered women need to reduce their inadequacy score from 81% of domain under non employed group and about 30% disempowered women need to reduce their inadequacy score from 24% of domain under employed group. The age and income gap between husband and wife and the number of their children are important factors to influence women empowerment. Therefore, decision making power for five domains; resource, production, income, leadership and time

should be emphasized to reduce age and income gap between husband and wife and consequently, to increase women empowerment status. The following recommendations may be suggested based on the above analysis to increase women empowerment status.

The employed women have stronger position in their families. They can take more decisions, they can enjoy more freedom and they can meet their basic needs with their earned money. Result showed that, the earning women are more empowered than non-earning women. So, the women should get engaged in income generating activities at every level of social status. So rural poor women should be given all the facilities to get involved with income generating activities. Both the groups have given the same opinion that lack of education, age gap, social status, financial problem etc. are the common factors responsible for their state of disempowerment. Though they have said the same reasons, they had mainly emphasized on education. The process of income generation through women's employment will help to improve the empowerment condition of poor rural women by rising education level. Furthermore, more education facilities will enhance the overall process of ensuring women empowerment by increasing income generation.

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