EMPOWERMENT OF RESOURCE POOR WOMEN THROUGH INCOME GENERATION ACTIVITIES (IGAs): A CASE OF SLUM AREA IN DHAKA CITY CORPORATION OF BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the study was to determine the level of empowerment of women working at garments industry in Bangladesh. The factors influencing the achievement of empowerment of women were also analyzed. A total of 50 women serving in garment industry at Pallabi Thana in Dhaka were selected randomly from a total of 240 women. Data were collected by using structured questionnaire during January to February 2016. All the women opined for having moderate to higher level of empowerment in terms of freedom of mobility and participation in household decision making process. Even none of the women fell in low empowerment category. Before involved in IGAs it was difficult for them to go out even in relatives' house and were not consulted in making household decisions. After getting job, they contributed approximately 40 to 58 percent of their income to meet family expenses. The age, level of education, family income and job experience were related to their empowerment. The women identified that social superstition, existing value system are still hinder empowerment. The adult education programme and awareness building campaign by the development agencies could mitigate the existing limitations of empowerment of women.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a developing country with 160 million population whereas half of its population is women (BBS, 2015). The socio-economic condition of women in Bangladesh is very low. Here participation of men and women in development activities is not equal. Many indoor and outdoor activities of women are not treated as work. The devaluation of women labour in labour market also hinders women rights. But in market economy women of Bangladesh are always facing new challenges. Though women are working in different GO and NGOs still are not treated as equal to male. In the society of gender disparity it is difficult for women to stay parallel and enjoy the right of equal to men.It was found that mortality of women occurs due to discrimination and resulted imbalance sex ratio in the population where 106 men for 100 women (BBS, 2015). The empowerment of women in developing countries like Bangladesh has been considered as a potential working force of development. The national and international donors are also paying emphasize on inclusion of women in development activities. Although empowerment is often conceptualized as a process (Hanny, 2006; Naila, 2001; Anju and Ruth, 2005), most quantitative studies have been cross-sectional, comparing individual women with others in their communities or societies (Anju and Ruth, 2005). It is assumed that previously the women of Bangladesh have limited exposure in socio-econo-political arena, negligible freedom of mobility, influence, autonomy and power of making even household decisions.

With the passage of time the women are coming out of their house and involved in both indoor and outdoor activities for their survival. In the recent past women empowerment has been studied by making comparison between the past and present socio-economic and political status in the society. Some of the researchers argue that the measurement methods of empowerment are changing over time as well as mode of interventions to foster empowerment of women (UNDP 1995; Solava and Akter, 2007).The present study was undertaken to examine the status of empowerment of resource-poor women working in garments industry with the following specific objectives:

- To find out the level of empowerment achieved by the resource-poor women working in garments industry.
- To explore the factors influencing possession of empowerment of resource-poor women.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted with the women serving in three different garment industries in Dhaka. The garments workers living in a slum area of Mirpur, Section 11 (Baoniabad) under PallabiThanna, Dhaka form where 50 women workers were selected randomly from a total of about 240 workers. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data through interviewing during the months of January to February 2016. It was found that the sampled women workers were from different districts of Bangladesh which had the cultural diversity among the respondents.

The characteristics of women such as age, level of education, family size, family annual income, job experience, and aspiration were considered as independent variables while empowerment achieved due to involvement in IGAs was the dependent variable of the study. The age was measured in terms of years from birth to the time of interview. The year of schooling has completed by a women from formal educational institutions was considered as her level of education. The family members share their income and ate in a same pot is family size. The total income earned by the family members in a year is termed as family annual income. Job experience meant the experience which was gained by a woman from actively doing a job and it was expressed in year. The future plan of a women about her family members in terms of well-being and prosperity. Women Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make their own decisions by themselves and gaining benefit out of it. It also refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength so that they can enjoy equal-right with their male partners. They can live with self-respect, dignity access and control over resources like male members in the society. In addition, they have complete control of their life both within and outside of their home and workplace.

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According to Syed and Ruth (1993), Syed et al., (1996) and Ruth et al., (1996) the empowerment of women was measured considering their choice of mobility, economic status and decision making power in household issues. In this study empowerment was measured considering their freedom of mobility and access to decision making in household activities. Twenty two items, 11 related to mobility of women in various places and 11 related to participation of women in various aspects of decision making process were considered. A 4 point rating scale such as regularly, frequently, occasionally and not at all was used. Appropriate weights such as 3 for regularly, 2 frequently, 1 for occasionally and 0 for not at all were assigned. Adding all score together the empowerment score was calculated. However, the possible empowerment score could range from 0 to 66 where, 0 indicating no empowerment and 66 for highest level of empowerment of women. The data after were compiled, coded, tabulated and analyzed. Descriptive statistical measures such as range, mean, percentage, and standard deviation etc. and coefficient of correlation test were computed to explore the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The empowerment was the dependent variable and selected characteristics such as age, level of education, family size, family annual income, job experience, and aspiration of the women were the independent variables of the study. The description or characteristics of the respondents is presented below:

Age
The age of women ranged from 19 to 52 years with an average of 30.06 years. The standard deviation was 6.80. Based on age of the women, they were classified into 3 categories, such as young, middle aged and old aged and presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the women according to their age

Categories	Women		Mean	Standard deviation
	Number	Percent		
Young (Up to 35 years)	8	16		
Middle age (36- 50 years)	40	80	30.06	6.80
Old age (51 years and above)	2	4		
Total	50	100		

The information of Table 1 show that large majority (96 percent) of the women were young to middle aged while a negligible number were old aged. Usually the young and middle aged women are found working in garments industry. The old aged people are not capable to work there. This may be due to the reason that comparatively the young and middle aged women are more energetic, industrious, enthusiastic, motivated and capable to perform hard work in garments industry. This is how they earn money for giving financial support to their family. It is a general assumption that young and middle aged individuals have more courage to participate IGAs for curving economic problems of the family.

Level of Education:
The level of education of the women respondents ranged from 5 to 16 years of schooling. The mean value and standard deviation were found 10.12 and 2.56 respectively. According to level of education, the women were classified into 6 categories and presented in Table 2.

The information of Table 2 indicate that all the respondent women working in the garments Industry had varying extent of education and none was found illiterate. This means all the respondents were literate. Education increases knowledge and understanding, adjustment capability in any situation and improves mental horizon. Education is also a process of development of mind of an individual which increases his/her power of observation, integration, understanding, decision making and adjustment in new situations. It is therefore, assumed that the literate women might have good sense about enjoying rights and privileges from the society and possessing empowerment as well.

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Table 2. Distribution of the women according to their level of education

Categories	Women		Mean	Standard deviation
	Number	**Percent**		
Illiterate (0)	0	0		
Can sign only (0.5)	0	0		
Primary education(1 - 5)	5	10		
Secondary education (6 - 10)	26	52	10.12	2.56
Higher secondary education (11 - 12)	13	26		
Higher education (Above 12 years)	6	12		
Total	50	100		

Family Size

The family size of women ranged from 2 to 11 with a mean value of 4.88 and standard deviation being 1.70. The average family size of the respondents was found lower against the national average of 5.5 (BBS, 2012). The women were classified into 3 classes based on their family size and presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of the women according to their family size

Categories	Women		Mean	Standard deviation
	Number	**Percent**		
Small (Up to 4)	28	56		
Medium (5 – 6)	18	36	4.88	1.70
Large (7 Above)	4	8		
Total	50	100		

The data of Table 3 indicates that large majority (92 percent) of the respondents had small to medium family size while only 8 percent having large family size. This may be due to campaign against population pressure by the various GO and NGOs. However, the reasonable level of literacy of the respondents along with massive awareness activities undertaken by the development agencies the people becomes conscious about population pressure.

Family Annual Income

The family annual income of the respondents ranged from TK. 80 thousand to TK. 500 thousand. The average and standard deviation were TK. 250 and 140.19 respectively. According to family annual income the respondents were classified into 3 categories and presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of the women according to their annual family income

Categories	Women		Mean	Standard deviation
	Number	**Percent**		
Low (Up to TK. 100 thousand)	9	18		
Medium (TK.101 – TK. 300 thousand)	20	40	250.10	140.19
High (TK. 301 thousand and Above)	21	42		
Total	50	100		

The information of Table 4 depicted that large majority (82 percent) of the respondents fell in medium to high income category while 18 percent in low income category. This may be due to reason that the working women earning money and supporting their family by giving a lion share of their income. It may be mentioned here that the women are contributing 40 percent to 58 percent of their earnings in supporting their family expenses. This may be a reason for higher family annual income of the respondents. The economic contribution of women is acted as a driving force towards empowerment of women in Bangladesh (Syed and Ruth, 1993).

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Job Experience

The job experience of the respondents ranged from 1 to 16 years with the mean and standard deviation of 5.0 and 3.37 respectively. The women based on their service length classified into 3 categories and shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of the women according to their job experience

Categories	Women		Mean	Standard deviation
	Number	Percent		
Short (1 – 5 years)	40	80		
Medium (6 – 10 years)	6	12	5.0	3.37
Long (11 – 16 years)	4	8		
Total	50	100		

The information of Table 5 depicted that 4 out of 5 respondents (80%) had short service length while only 20 percent having medium to long service length. The information seems logical because large majority (96 percent) of the respondents were young to middle aged. The job experience plays a vital role in achieving empowerment in the society. Because empowerment is highly associated with income and which eventually enhance social prestige, dignity and honour of women in the society.

Aspiration of Women

The level of aspiration score about future life of the respondents ranged from 1 to 28 against the possible range of 1 to 36. The mean value and standard deviation were 16.37 and 7.81 respectively. Based on aspiration score, the women were classified into 3 categories and presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Distribution of the women according to their aspiration

Categories	Women		Mean	Standard deviation
	Number	Percent		
Low (1 - 12)	12	24		
Medium (13 - 24)	28	56	16.37	7.81
High (25 - 36)	10	20		
Total	50	100		

The information of Table 6 depicted that about three-fourths (76 percent) of the respondents had medium to high aspiration and less than one fourth having lower aspiration about future life. This means higher the level of education and family annual income higher is the aspiration of life. The moderate to higher aspiration of the women indicates that they like to see their children having higher education, better income, and better living. The existing social empowerment might play a positive role in forming a positive aspiration for their future generations.

Empowerment of Women

The empowerment score of the women ranged from 29 to 66 against the possible range of 0 to 66. The mean value and standard deviation were 51.60 and 10.16 respectively. Based on empowerment score, the women were classified in to 3 categories and presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Distribution of the women according to their level of empowerment

Categories	Women		Mean	Standard deviation
	Number	Percent		
Low (Up to 22)	0	0		
Medium (23 - 44)	13	26	51.61	10.16
High (45 - 66)	37	74		
Total	50	100		

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The information of Table 7 show that all the women respondents fell in medium to high empowerment category. None was found having low empowerment. This means the respondent women are enjoying enough privileges in respect to mobility and involvement in household decision making process. It was explored that the respondents in respect of financial support contributed 40 percent to 58 percent of their income to the family expenses. Nevertheless, all the respondents were literate along with earning through service which made them a privileged section in the community. Furthermore, functional literacy of rural people, media coverage and massive development activities of the development agencies, the mentality of people has been changing gradually towards accepting women as a power for social development. The researchers like Syed et. al., (1996) and Ruth et al. (1996) also found similar findings where women had the significant effect on different dimensions of the social program in Bangladesh.

Relationship between the variables

To explore the relationships between the variables coefficient of correlation test was employed and presented in Table 8.The information of Table 8 show that age, level of education, family annual income and job experience of the women were found significantly correlated with their empowerment. This means these characteristics of the women exerted a reasonable extent of influence in achieving empowerment by the garments workers.

Table 8. Relationship between the dependent and independent variables

Dependent variable	Personal characteristics of women	Co-efficient of correlation
Empowerment of women	Age	0.320*
	Level of education	0.599**
	Family size	0.179
	Family annual income	0.316*
	Job experience	0.338*
	Aspiration	0.183

**1% level of probability, * 5% level of probability

The women were asked to mention the problems they have been encountered in possessing empowerment. They opined that superstitions of the people especially older people, existing value system are hindering empowerment of the women. Arrangement of adult literacy programme along with awareness building campaign by the development agencies could improve the situation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Involvement of women in income generation activities (IGAs) is found to be a potential factor in enhancing empowerment of women in the male dominated society like Bangladesh. The findings of the study revealed that the existing value system of the society is being changing. This might be due to the reason that level of literacy of general mass is increasing, the role of mass media, communication exposure of people, and development activities of service providing agencies etc. influencing change process of value system. This is why the people are considering women as a potential force for development. The change process needs to be accelerated through adult education and media campaign towards development by collaborative efforts for men and women.

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