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Impact of Migration on Women Empowerment: A Situational Analysis of North-Bihar

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted during 2018-2019 to explore the impact of male migration in north-Bihar in empowering women in different domain of household decisions. Five domains namely agricultural production, asset creation, health care, educational decision of children and leadership were considered and women empowerment indices were computed for each domain. The result revealed that migration of male member adequately empowered only 29.44 per cent of women. Larger proportion of women respondents (43.89%) were found under moderately empowered category and 29.67 per cent were observed still under low empowerment group. Women were adequately empowered in studied area to take decisions related to health care, education and agricultural production. The decision to purchase and sale of assets still was under the jurisdiction of male counterpart as the patriarchal system still dominated. The role of women in decision making in all the farm activities, from selection of crops to the sale of farm produce, showed comparatively more moderate empowerment indices. The paper concludes that the women are empowered to varying extent in situation of male migration from their native places.

INTRODUCTION

Migration has significant economic impact at both, the native and the destination places (Borjas et al., 1994; Dustmann et al., 2016) and it is imperative to assess the impact of migration and remittances on households 'left behind' at native places (Antman, 2013). Generally, the male member of the family migrates for better job opportunity. In the absence the male member(s), the onus of managing the household affairs lies with the female members. In the male migrated families, females have to participate in all socio-agro-politico-economic activities at native places. Therefore, women contribution in various spheres of social upliftment including their own being needs to be assessed, discussed and reorganized. Emphasizing the contribution of women in the development of society, Amartya Sen (1999) opined that 'Nothing, arguably, is as

important today in the political economy of development as an adequate recognition of political, economic, and social participation and leadership of women'. Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) by World Economic Forum assess the gender parity on four premises *i.e.* health, education, economic participation and political empowerment. In GGGI, India ranked 140th among 156 nations (WEF Gender Gap Report, 2021). According to 2020-21 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Index of NITI Aayog, that measures the progress of Indian states based on 115 indicators including gender parity, wage equality among men and women and domestic violence against women, Bihar was adjudged the worst performer state (SDG India Index & Dashboard, 2020-21). Many researchers have studied women's empowerment using indicators like education (Haddad, 2000; Smith & Haddad, 2000; Berti et al., 2004), control over income (Berti et al., 2004; Leroy et al., 2008; Arimond et al., 2011)

and women decision making power and gender parity in society (Smith, 2003). Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices, particularly in contexts where this ability had been denied to them.

Migration of labourers from Bihar is well known on account of poor economic condition and underdeveloped infrastructure. In rural Bihar, migration of male members reduces the multi-faceted dimension women personality into single gender identities like 'left-behind women'. Migration of male member makes women of the household more mobile in both private and public sectors and they don't remain under direct and constant control of their male counterparts. It has been observed that women who became de-facto head of household have to take their own decision in their day-to-day activities spanning from education of children to health care to looking after in-laws through other household activities. Such condition of male migration seems to leverage women to break the age-old patriarchal system, empower them in various household businesses and enhances their stake in advancement of society. These positive impact of migration on left-behind women needs to be answered quantitatively and at the same time it has to be keenly evaluated whether this has any negative impact on them as well. Because, males are conventionally thought to better manage the agricultural activities, finances and various buying-procurement activities (Hughes, 2011; Singh et al., 2012; Kumar et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2015) and once, the male counterpart migrates, the roles and responsibilities of left behind women get intensified. In this context, the present study was carried out to assess the impact of migration on women left-behind and the extent of their empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on primary data collected from 180 migrant households selected randomly from twelve villages of Samastipur, Darbhanga and Madhubani districts of Bihar. The selection of districts was purposive as these districts recorded large scale migration according to 64th round NSSO report and Census of India, 2011. The survey was conducted with the help of pre-structured schedule in the year 2019 and detailed information on various socio-economic aspects were collected.

The Women Empowerment index was calculated on the basis of the model suggested by Alkire et al., (2013). Five Domains of Empowerment (agricultural production, asset creation, education,

and health related decisions and leadership quality) were taken to estimate WEI. The individual data on women was used to access the WEI from the respondent's household of migrant labourers. To evaluate the degree of empowerment at the individual level, various indicators under each domain were identified and quantified to assess the level of women empowerment across the domains. Each domain was assigned equal weights and further indicators were given weights as per their observed importance such that sum of all the weights of the indicators under all five domains was equal to one. Indicators were binary, with 1 indicating empowerment and a 0 indicating lack of empowerment. Accordingly, the aggregate empowerment score lied between 0 and 1. The score of WEI was set at 0.75 as a benchmark for achieving adequate empowerment.

$$\text{Individual Empowerment Index} = \sum_{ij} I_{ij} W_{ij}$$

Where,

I_{ij} = j^{th} indicators of i^{th} domain, W_{ij} = j^{th} weights for i^{th} domain

After calculating individual empowerment scores, indicator wise domain empowerment was estimated by the using formula:

$$\text{Average} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n W_i I_i}{\sum W_i}$$

On the basis of indicator wise empowerment scores, group empowerment was computed using following equation:

$$\text{Women Empowerment Index} = W_e + W_n (D_a)$$

Where, W_e = Percentage of women with adequate empowerment, $W_n = (1 - W_e)$ = Percentage of women without adequate empowerment, D_a = Percentage of domains in which disempowered women have adequate empowerment

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For assessing women empowerment five important domains related to involvement of the left behind women in decision making for financial and social status upliftment of family were considered in the analysis. The indicators under each domain was carefully selected that were appropriate to reflect the decision making ability of women in day-to-day activities of household in absence of male member and quantifiable to assess individual empowerment index. The weight assigned to individual indicator, based on their importance, is presented in Table 1. The sum of weight of all the indicators is equal to unity. The empowerment and lack of empowerment of women were represented by binary value of 1

Table 1. Weights assigned to various domains and indicators of WEI

Domain (I_i)	Indicators (I_{ij})	Weights (W_{ij})
Agricultural Production (I_1)	Crop selection related decision (I_{11})	0.08
	Purchase of input decision (I_{12})	0.07
	Sale of output decision (I_{13})	0.05
Assets creation (I_2)	Ownership of assets (I_{21})	0.10
	Purchase, sale, or transfer of assets (I_{22})	0.10
Education (I_3)	Decision related to children education (I_{31})	0.10
	Expenditure on education (I_{32})	0.10
Health care (I_4)	Dietary decision for family (I_{41})	0.10
	Consultation with doctors in case of illness (I_{42})	0.05
	Sanitary measure of household (I_{43})	0.05
Leadership (I_5)	Member of social Group (I_{51})	0.10
	Speaking in public (I_{52})	0.10

Table 2. Frequency distribution of women under different ranges of Individual Empowerment Index (IEI)

Range	Percentage
Low (0.10-0.50)	26.67
Moderate (0.50-0.75)	43.89
Adequate (≥ 0.75)	29.44
Total	100

and 0, respectively. Thus the individual empowerment score would lie between 0 and 1 (Table 2).

The score for Individual Empowerment Index (IEI) was calculated and categorized in three groups on the basis of IEI *i.e.* (0.10-0.50) indicates low empowerment, (0.50-0.75) indicates moderate empowerment and equal and greater than 0.75 indicates adequate empowerment. The frequency of women under each range of IEI has been given in Table 3.

A perusal of the Table 2 showed that only 29.44 per cent of women were assessed to be adequately empowered. Larger proportion of women respondents (43.89%) were found under moderate empowered category, and this result is also supported by the findings of other researchers which revealed that majority of rural women had medium participation in decision making agricultural activities (Yadav et al., 2021) and 26.67 per cent were observed still under low empowerment group. The reason that could be attributed is the type of family the left-behind women has. In the nuclear family the left behind women are more empowered while the left behind women in joint/extended family are less empowered as most of the decisions are taken by elderly family members particularly in-laws. Extent of women empowerment was low in joint family however, such families are still much existent in Bihar due to its associated benefits like support in health problems and other household burden sharing (Antonucci et al., 2007). Women who live with in-laws have to take decisions in consultation with their in-laws. Dual decision-making authorities appear which often lead to a deterioration of relationship. Kulczycka (2015) described this type of arrangement as patriarchal control. Adequate empowerment may be because the left-behind women who live in nuclear family were not under control of other family members as in extended family and have autonomy to take their own decisions and are free to bear additional responsibilities in absence of their male counterparts. Similar findings have been reported by Desai and Banerji (2008) that women not living in extended families have

faced higher levels of responsibilities and greater autonomy, while women who live in extended households do not experience these demands or benefits.

Decision making of women in household plays an important role in the overall welfare of the family. A woman's empowerment in household decision making increases the likelihood that her children's schooling, proper medical care during illness and provision of nutritionally secure foods. Women have played important role in agriculture in most of the agrarian economies for their active participation in production, processing and marketing (Singh et al., 2020a; Singh et al., 2020b; Kumari et al., 2020). With migration of the male members of the family, there has been a role reversal and women were more actively involved in farm decision making in migrant families. Decision making powers of women in selection of crop, purchase of inputs and sale of output are studied in the area under investigation under the domain of agricultural production.

Domain-wise women empowerment indices (Table 3) revealed that the health care domain shows comparatively high empowerment indices and for all its three indicators followed by education and agricultural production domain. Low empowerment indices were observed in asset creation and leadership domain. The result indicated that women were adequately empowered to take decisions related to health care, education and agricultural production. Their autonomy in decision-making in these domains have contributed to overcome many constraints that hamper their empowerment (Shinogi et al., 2021).

The decision of purchase and sale of assets still comes under the jurisdiction of male counterpart as the patriarchal system still dominates in the study area. The health care has emerged as most important domain having adequate empowerment score in the area under investigation. The probable reason may be added responsibilities on women in absence of their spouse who are also the caretaker of the family. They have to take care of health related problems of children and elder family member. Similar findings was also reported by Roy and Nangia (2005); Datta & Mishra (2011). Apart from additional household responsibilities on part of women in male migrated families in search of job opportunities, information and communication technology (ICT) tools are also playing role in women empowerment (Sabharwal et al., 2020).

The educational empowerment may be due to the state government's envisioned girls' education policy which has invested heavily in state sponsored girls' education programs such as *Mukhya*

Table 3. Domain wise women empowerment indices

S.No.	Domain (I_i)	Indicators (I_{ij})	Weighted average index	Percentage of women
1.	Agricultural Production (I_1)	Crop selection related decision (I_{11})	0.83	10.1
		Purchase of input decision (I_{12})	0.79	9.62
		Sale of output decision (I_{13})	0.74	9.01
2.	Assets creation (I_2)	Ownership of assets (I_{21})	0.38	4.62
		Purchase, sale, or transfer of assets (I_{22})	0.36	4.38
3.	Education (I_3)	Decision related to children education (I_{31})	0.88	10.71
		Expenditure on education (I_{32})	0.75	9.13
4.	Health care (I_4)	Dietary decision for family (I_{41})	0.86	10.47
		Consultation with doctors in case of illness (I_{42})	0.78	9.50
		Sanitary measure in their household (I_{43})	0.91	11.08
5.	Leadership (I_5)	Member of social Group (I_{51})	0.48	5.84
		Speaking in public (I_{52})	0.45	5.48

Mantri Balika Cycle Yojana, Mukhya Mantri Akshar Aanchal Yojana and the *Mukhya Mantri Kanya Utthan Yojana* as a pathway for women's educational empowerment.

Study indicated that the role of women in decision making in all the farm activities like selection of crops to be grown, purchase of inputs and managing labour and selling of farm produce yielded comparatively more moderate empowerment indices (Table 3).

The empowerment indices were 0.83, 0.79 and 0.74 for the indicators; crop selection related decision, purchase of inputs and sale of produce related decisions. This is probably due to increased involvement of women of migrant households in various farming activities. Findings revealed that crop selection indicator in agriculture domain have showed the highest empowerment index which infers that women of the migrant households have highest autonomy in taking decision related to selection of crop. This finding is also supported by study of other researcher in which women have chosen cash crop to become socially, politically and economically more empowered (Rabha et al., 2021). Similar results were reported in another study which stated that due to male out-migration, the women left behind in the villages assume a major role in various farm activities resulting in the so-called 'feminisation of agriculture' (Singh et al., 2011); Singh et al., (2013); Jha & Varghese (2021) also observed similar results in their studies. Singh et al., (2017) advocated women committee in the form of cooperatives, strengthening the livestock extension service by recruiting sufficient number of women dairy extension personnel and liberal arrangement of credit facilities for empowerment whereas Slathia et al., (2015) advocated self-help groups for rural congregation on large scale for empowerment of women. National Skill Development Mission is being implemented to prepare young women to enter the work place and to increase women's work participation in Bihar. The government has made reservation of 35 per cent for women in government jobs and in local body elections it is hoped that women and girls in Bihar would be able to achieve their potential and fulfill their aspirations.

CONCLUSION

From the ongoing discussion it is evident that male migration has greatly impacted the role of women in household business. Male migration has bearing on upscaling the responsibility of women and making them self-reliant. Decision making by women in households plays an important role on the overall welfare of the family. Various governmental interventions like, National Skill Development Mission, *Mukhya Mantri Balika Cycle Yojana, Mukhya Mantri Akshar Aanchal Yojana* and the *Mukhya Mantri Kanya Utthan Yojana* have also been helpful in empowering women in domains like; health care, education & agricultural production. However the women empowerment in domains like, asset creation & leadership are still low, the reason for which, in part, are rooted in prevalence of patriarchal hegemony of rural society and therefore, more awareness and governmental initiatives are required in these sectors.

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