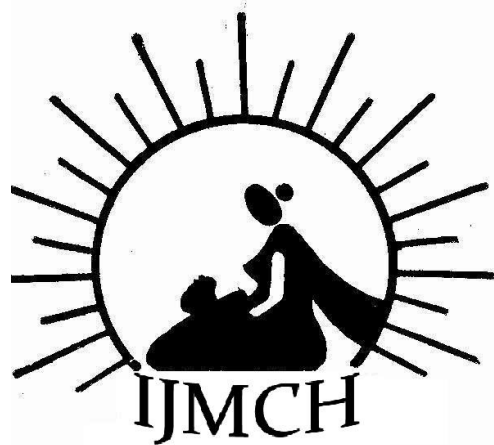


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INDIAN JOURNAL OF MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

What is the women empowerment status and what are its relevant determinants among women in a slum area of Kolkata?

How empowered are the women? : A cross-sectional study in a slum area of Kolkata

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Abstract

Research question: What is the women empowerment status and what are its relevant determinants among women in a slum area of Kolkata?

Methodology: A cross-sectional, community based, epidemiological study was conducted among the women of reproductive age group (15-49 years) in Chetla slum of Kolkata City. 150 women of reproductive age group were selected from service area of Urban Health Centre, Chetla by multi-stage sampling and interviewed by using a predesigned and pretested questionnaire. In case of non-responsiveness from any women, information was taken from next person.

Results:

Empowerment of the women of reproductive age group in Chetla was not found to be much satisfactory (Mean WEI=0.58). Age, age at marriage, spousal age difference, social class, type of family, religion, employment, education of women and their husband were found to be relevant determinants of women empowerment in Chetla.

Key words: *Women Empowerment, Reproductive Age Group, Slum of Kolkata, Women Empowerment Index*

Introduction

Women's empowerment is — "a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination" ¹. According to ICPD there are five components of women's empowerment: 1) women's sense of self worth 2) their right to determine choices 3) their right to have access to opportunities and resources 4) their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home and 5) their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.² Women's empowerment is a matter of basic human rights. Interest in women's empowerment among demographers and population policy makers was heightened during the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, at which the empowerment of women was legitimated as a social goal and enshrined as a necessary condition for population stabilization.²

Many studies showed that when women do well, the economy does well and recommended that countries should make participation and involvement of women in all spheres of life. The World Bank has identified empowerment as one of the key constituent elements of poverty reduction, and as a primary development assistance goal.^{3,4,5}

At the 2005 world summit, governments of all nations agreed that — “progress for women is progress for all”. The inclusion of a Millennium Development Goal oriented towards the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women demonstrates that gender equality is placed high on the development agenda (UN 2002). The Millennium Declaration also states that the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women in addition to being a goal in itself also is a means to further other development goals such as the elimination of poverty, hunger and diseases.

It is recognized that women work more hours than men particularly in low-income households, more as unpaid family laborers than as managers. Even if they do most of the work, men mostly control the decision-making power and ownership of household resources. Garcia and Oliveira, 2001² found that women are highly dependent and have little or no power of decision, or are limited to some badly appreciated domestic duties.

The World Bank study in Bangladesh highlighted that women have a limited role in household decision-making, limited access and control over household resources (physical and financial assets), low level of individual assets, heavy domestic workloads, restricted mobility and inadequate knowledge and skills that lead to women's vulnerability⁶.

In developing countries age related variables like age, age at marriage, age difference between spouses etc. affect women's empowerment. Recently, a number of empirical studies have explored the effects of socio-economic characteristics of individuals such as age and education on empowerment of women.^{7, 8}

Though with the above background information it is very clear that empowerment of women is a most important necessity for a country to develop, there is scarcity of studies in this aspect especially in a developing country like India. With this backdrop the present study was conducted in an urban slum of Kolkata to assess the status of women empowerment and to determine its covariates.

Materials and Methods

The Community based cross sectional study was carried out in Chetla urban slum of Kolkata involving women of reproductive age group (15-49 years) from 15th February-14th May 2012. The sample size required was 142 considering the prevalence of women employment in slum area of Kolkata=31.1% (NFHS-3)⁹ with allowable absolute error being 10%, design effect being 1.5 and assuming non-responsiveness being 10%. 3 Units were working in the service area under UHC, CHETLA. Under every unit 2 sectors were there. First 1 unit had been selected randomly from 3 units. Under that unit from each of the 2 working sectors samples had been selected according to population proportion to size. Thus total 150 samples were collected. After taking informed verbal consent, women were interviewed by predesigned, pre tested semi-structured schedule adapted from N.F.H.S women's questionnaire. In case of non response from any women; information was taken from next

willing woman. Data were analyzed using SPSS software. Frequency, percentage, chi square test, Pearson's correlation, multiple linear regression were applied for statistical analysis.

Construction of Index

Women's empowerment is multidimensional and is very difficult to measure. It comprises the entire complex of interactions, roles, rights and statuses that surround being male versus being female in a given society or culture^{10,11,12}. However, in our study we have tried to measure women's empowerment in the domestic sphere by making a woman empowerment index using the dimensions in accordance with Mason and Smith, 2003¹³. The particular aspects or dimensions of domestic empowerment we take are:

1. Women's economic decision-making power.
2. Their household decision-making power.
3. Their physical freedom of movement.

The detailed description of these three dimensions with their relevant indicators is given in Table below. Then the index of each dimension was constructed where minimum and maximum values were chosen for each underlying indicator. Performance in each indicator is expressed as the minimum and maximum value between 0 and 1 in accordance with the construction method of the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2005)¹⁴ as follows:

Dimension index= (Actual value- minimum value)/(Maximum value-minimum value)

The Women Empowerment Index (WEI) is then computed in a simple average of these three indices according to the formula below:

$WEI = 1/3(\text{economic decision making index}) + 1/3 (\text{household decision making index}) + 1/3 (\text{freedom of movement index}).$

As per the United Nations Development programme (UNDP, HDI, 2005) of framing Human development indices, the value of index 0 is deprived of development and value 1 is showing the full development, value between 0 to 0.5 having minimum level of development, 0.6 to 0.7 is medium level of development & 0.8 and more have high development.

NO.	COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION	CODING	MEASUREMENT SCALE
1.	Economic Decision Making index	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decision making regarding how their husband's money will be spent 2. Decision making regarding major household purchases 3. Decision making regarding daily household needs 4. Decision about buying gift for social function 	MAINLY YOU=1 JOINTLY=2 MAINLY HUSBAND=3 SOMEONE ELSE=4	1,2=1 3,4=0
2.	Household decision making index	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decision about their own health care 2. decision about family planning 3. Decision about child health care 4. Decision about food to be cooked each day 5. Decision about supporting natal home 	MAINLY YOU=1 JOINTLY=2 MAINLY HUSBAND=3 SOMEONE ELSE=4	1,2=1 3,4=0
3.	Social empowerment index	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. decision about visit to their family/relatives 2. access to market 	MAINLY YOU=1 JOINTLY=2	1,2=1 3,4=0

		3.access to health facility 4.access to outside community	MAINLY HUSBAND=3 SOMEONE ELSE=4	
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Results and Discussion

A total of 150 women of reproductive age group between 15-49 years were surveyed. Majority of them were in the age group of 20-29(50%), currently married (94.7%), Hindu (68.7%) belonging to joint family (61.3%) & socio-economic class III & IV (74.6%). Age at first marriage for most of them (57.7%) was below 18 years. Majority (49.3%) of ever married women had spousal age difference of > 5 years. 14.7% of women were illiterate whereas 25.3% & 28.7% women had completed primary & middle education respectively. Only 36% women were employed. Among them majority were Maid servant(18.5%) & Tailors(18.5%). Others engaged in jobs like Cooking(16.6%), Papad making(11.1%), Private tuition (11.1%), Nursing(5.55%), Beauty-parlor (5.55%), Dress selling(1.85%), Sweeper(1.85%), Ironing of cloths(1.85%), Aya (1.85%), Artisan (1.85%), Making of paper bag(1.85%). Majority (58.3%) of women were not allowed by their family to work for money. Majority of employed women (83.3%) mentioned that they earn money for betterment of future of their family or children, not for self dependence or self amusement. Among the working ladies 33.3% were working away from home. Majority (44.4%) was earning money around Rs 1000-2000, whereas among married women majority (80.44%) was earning less than their husband. It is to be noted that 73.9% of married women had a say on expenditure of the money earned by them. According to NFHS-3, in slum area of KOLKATA, 44.1% women (15-49yrs) were married before 18yrs of age, 31.1% of women were employed, and 14.8% of women were employed for self-dependence. 34% of ever married women (15-49yrs) were illiterate. Median age at first marriage of women (15-49yrs) in India was 16.8, which was similar to this study i.e. 17 years. Proportion of ever married women with spousal age difference ≥ 10 yrs in West Bengal was 27.3, whereas in this study it was found to be lesser i.e. 10%. Proportion of women who decides alone or jointly how the

Table I: Socio-economic & demographic profile of respondents

Age group(in completed years) (N=150)	Frequency	Percent (%)
15-19	14	9.3
20-29	75	50.0
30-39	38	25.3
40-49	23	15.3
Marital status (N=150)		
Currently married	142	94.7
Widowed	1	.7
Separated/Divorced	1	.7
Unmarried/Never married	6	4.0
Age at first marriage(n=144; mean=17.72; median=17; mode=17; minimum=13; maximum=30;SD=2.783)		
<15	6	4.2
15-17	77	53.5
18-20	44	30.6
>20	17	11.8
Spousal age difference(in completed years) (n=144)		
0-5	73	50.7
6-10	61	42.4
>10	10	6.9
Religion(N=150)		
Hindu	103	68.7
Muslim	47	31.3
Type of family (N=150)		
Nuclear	58	38.7
Joint	92	61.3
Social class (Modified Prasad Scale:2012) (N=150)		
V. Lower(PCI<585)	5	3.3
IV. Upper lower (PCI=585-1169)	62	41.3
III. Lower middle (PCI=1170-1949)	50	33.3
II. Upper middle(PCI=1950-3899)	30	20
I. Upper (PCI>=3900)	3	2
Education (N=150)		
Illiterate	22	14.7
Below primary	7	4.7
Primary	38	25.3
Middle	43	28.7
Secondary	21	14.0
H.s	15	10.0
Graduate	4	2.7
Occupational status (N=150)		

Not employed/hw	96	64
Employed	54	36
Cause of unemployment(n=96)		
Not allowed	56	58.3
Herself not interested	15	15.6
Busy with children/hw	25	26.1
For whom employed? (n=54)		
For family/children	45	83.33
Self employed	9	16.67
Place of work (n=54)		
At home	18	33.33
Away from home	36	66.67
Compare to husband how much do you earn? (n=46)*		
>your husband	3	6.52
<your husband	37	80.44
=your husband	6	13.04
Who decides about spending of your money (n=46)*		
Mainly you	8	17.39
Mainly your husband	10	21.73
Jointly	26	56.52
Someone else**	2	4.34
Amount Of money (n=54,minimum=400,maximum=5000, Mean=1734.26,sd=1067.788)		
<500	2	3.7
>=500-1000	19	35.18
>1000-2000	24	44.44
>2000-3000	4	7.4
>3000	5	9.25

*Excluding unmarried, separated and widow

**Someone else= mother-in-law/father-in-law

money they earn can be spent was 81% in India according to NFHS-3, which was found to be 73.91% in this study. [Table I]

Majority i.e. 76.7% & 72% of women had no access respectively to newspaper/magazine and Radio at all, whereas most of them (86.7%) used to watch TV almost every day and 43.3 % of women had watched movie in a hall in last 6 months. Majority (68%) of them had no bank account at all.

According to NFHS-3, proportion of women having more than or at least weekly exposure to TV, Radio & Newspaper/Magazine was 55, 29 & 23% in India respectively, which were found to be 90.7,24.44 &20.3% in this study. Proportion of women having a bank account in slum area of Kolkata was 21.9 according to NFHS-3, whereas it was found to be 32% in this study. [Table II]

Proportion of ever married women who have a say on how their husband's earning will be spent, large household purchases, purchases for daily needs were found to be 36.36, 28.47 & 59.72% respectively, whereas in NFHS-3 they were found to be 68% (in India), 51.8% &

53.9% (in slum of Kolkata) respectively. Mean of economic empowerment index in this study was found to be of lower grade (0.45).

Table II: Distribution of study population according to access to media and bank account

Read paper/ Magazine (N=150)	Frequency	Percent
1*	11	7.3
2*	20	13.3
3*	4	2.7
4*	115	76.7
Listen to radio		
1*	20	13.33
2*	12	11.11
3*	10	6.67
4*	108	72
Watch TV		
1*	130	86.7
2*	6	4
4*	14	9.3
Has gone to Cinema hall (last 6 months)		
Yes	65	43.3
No,(not allowed/not taken to cinema hall)	8	5.3
No,(herself not interested)	9	6
No(busy with HW/children)	25	16.7
No(no need ,as TV is there)	36	24.0
No(financial problem)	7	4.7
Bank account		
Single account	18	12
Joint account	30	20
Not at all	102	68

*1= almost every day, 2= at least once a week, 3= less than once a week, 4= not at all

In this study 79.85, 59.72, 61.1, 42.36% of ever married women had a say on decision about own health care, family planning, child health care and decision on supporting natal home respectively. According to NFHS-3, 62.7% women in slum of Kolkata had a say on decision of own health care. Household empowerment index in this study was found to be of medium grade (0.6).

In this study, 78.46% ever married women had a say on visits to her family and relatives, whereas according to NFHS-3 it was 58.5% in slum of Kolkata. 88.7, 46.7 & 51.3% of women were allowed to go alone to market, health care facility & outside the community respectively, whereas in NFHS-3, the above proportions were 51.5, 47.7 & 37.7% respectively in India. Social empowerment index was found to be of medium category in this study (mean-0.68).

The women empowerment index was also in medium level (0.58). A study by Varghese T (2011) in Oman found the WEI of 0.725 ¹⁵. Towfiqua et al.¹⁶ in Bangladesh found the WEI in medium range as well (0.7056). [Table III]

Table III: Distribution of ever married women according to economic, household, social empowerment

Economic empowerment of women		
Who decides how their husband's money will be spent(n=143)*	Frequency	Percent
Mainly you	2	1.39
Mainly your husband	74	51.75
Jointly	50	34.97
Someone else	17	11.89
Decision about major household purchases (n=144)		
Mainly your husband	60	41.67
Jointly	41	28.47
Someone else	43	29.86
Decision about daily household needs(n=144)		
Mainly you	70	48.61
Jointly	16	11.11
Someone else* *	58	40.28
Decision about buying gift for social function (n=144)		
Mainly you	23	15.97
Mainly your husband	16	11.11
Jointly	59	40.97
Someone else	46	31.94
Economic empowerment index of ever married women : mean= 0.454861(range=0-1,SD=0.369),median=0.5 (IQR=0.0-0.75)		
Household empowerment		
Decision about your health care(n=144)	Frequency	Percent
Mainly you	3	2.08
Mainly your husband	25	17.36
Jointly	112	77.77
Someone else	4	2.77
Decision about how many children to have(n=144)		
Mainly you	1	0.69
Mainly husband	55	38.19
Jointly	85	59.03
Someone else	3	2.08
Decision about child health care(n=144)		
Mainly you	14	9.72
Mainly husband	40	27.77

Jointly	74	51.38
Someone else	13	9.03
Decision about food to be cooked each day(n=144)		
Mainly you	83	57.63
Jointly	3	2.08
Someone else	58	40.27
Decision about supporting natal home(n=144)		
Mainly you	15	10.42
Mainly husband	71	49.3
Jointly	46	31.94
Someone else	12	8.33
Household empowerment index Mean= 0.6(range=0-1,sd=0.3),median=0.6(iqr=0.4-0.8)		
Social empowerment		
Decision about visit to your family/relatives (n=144)		
Mainly you	4	2.77
Mainly husband	11	7.64
Jointly	109	75.69
Someone else	26	18.05
Access to market(n=150)		
Alone	133	88.7
Only with someone else	16	10.7
Not at all	1	.7
Access to health facility(n=150)		
Alone	70	46.7
Only with someone else	80	53.3
Access to outside community (n=150)		
Alone	77	51.3
Only with someone else	73	48.7
Social empowerment index Mean =0.68(range=0-1,sd=0.3),median=0.75(iqr=0.5-1)		
W0men empowerment index Wei=(economic empowerment index + household empowerment index+ social empowerment index)/3=(0.454861+0.6114+0.678882)/3=0.581 Low wei=(0-<0.5), medium wei=(0.5-0.799),high wei=(>=0.8) Mean= 0.58(range=0-1,sd=0.28) Median=0.6 (0.37-0.77)		

*unmarried=6, unemployed husband=1

** Someone else: mainly they are mother-in-laws of women belonging to joint families

In this study 23.3,36.6,24.6,13.3,14,46 & 51.3% of women agreed that wife beating is justified by the husband ,if she goes out without telling, neglects house/children, argues with husband in some or other matter, doesn't cook properly, disrespects her in-laws & if suspected to be unfaithful by the husband, whereas according to NFHS-3,in India the percentages were 29,35,30,14,20,41 & 25.According to NFHS-3,80.2% of women in slum of Kolkata agreed on wife beating in any of the above reasons, which was found to be much lesser in this study(58.6%). A significant proportion (20.14%) of ever married women had

told that their husband were not at all used to accept their opinion during sexual intercourse [Table IV]

We observed, on an average that the women who were under 30 years of age were much less empowered than the women who were above 30 which could be seen in upward trend in the mean score of the women empowerment index($r=0.529$). We also observed that the women who married earlier (<18 years) and with spousal age difference >10 years were also less empowered than those who married at older ages (after 20 years) and with little spousal age difference. We found women of higher social class were more empowered than lower social class. Women belonging to religion Hindu and nuclear family were more empowered than those belonging to religion Muslim and joint family. Women empowerment was also found to be increased with increase in their academic qualification level and also of their husband. Women who were contributing financially to the family income were more empowered than the home makers. A study by Towfiqua et al. ¹⁶ in Bangladesh had found women empowerment was increasing as the age, age at marriage, education of women and their husband, social class going up and spousal age difference was going down. [Table V]

Table IV: Distribution of women according to perception regarding wife scolding & beating and acceptance of wife's opinion during sexual intercourse by husband

Subject	Scolding is justified by husband N=150		Beating is justified by husband N=150	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
If she goes out without telling	94	62.7	35	23.3
If she neglects house/children	143	95.3	55	36.6
If she argues	79	52.7	37	24.6
If she refuses sex	22	14.7	20	13.3
If she doesn't cook properly	44	29.3	21	14
If she disrespects her in-laws	147	98.0	69	46
If she is suspected to be unfaithful	134	89.3	57	51.3
For any of the above the reasons	147	98.0	88	58.6
During sexual intercourse, acceptance of wife's opinion(n=144)	Frequency	Percent		
	Always accepts	88	61.1	
	Sometimes accepts	27	18.75	
	Never accepts	29	20.14	

Table V: Mean score of WEI by selected demographic variables, N=144

Variables	Number of cases	Percentage	Mean score of wei
Age			
15-19	13	9	0.28
20-29	71	49.3	0.504
30-39	37	25.69	0.733
40-49	23	15.97	0.7763
<i>Correlation between age & WEI, correlation co-efficient(r)=0.529,p=0.000, R square=0.28,ANOVA(sig)=0.000</i>			
Age at first marriage			
<15	6	4.166	0.5358
15-17	77	53.47	0.51
18-20	44	30.55	0.6
>20	17	11.8	0.8
<i>Correlation between age at marriage & WEI</i>			
<i>Correlation co-efficient(r)=0.303,p=0.000, R square=0.092, ANOVA (sig)=0.000</i>			
Spousal age difference (in years)			
0-5	73	50.69	0.7266
6-10	61	42.36	0.455
>10	10	6.94	0.2746
<i>Correlation between spousal age difference & WEI</i>			
<i>Correlation co-efficient(r)=(-0.552),p=0.000, R square=0.305, ANOVA(sig)=0.000</i>			
Social class			
Lower	5	3.47	0.4126
Upper lower	60	41.66	0.48
Lower middle	48	33.33	0.588
Upper middle	28	19.44	0.7977

Upper	3	2.08	0.8
Correlation between PCI & WEI <i>Correlation co-efficient(r)=(0.415),p=0.000, R square=0.172, ANOVA(sig)=0.000</i>			
Variables	Wei<0.6	Wei>=0.6	Mean score of wei
Religion			
Hindu	36(37.1)	61(62.9%)	0.67
Muslim	34(72.3%)	13(27.7%)	0.41
Chi-square=15.727,p=0.000 ,df=1			
Type of family			
Nuclear	14(26.4%)	39(73.6%)	0.75
Joint	56(61.5%)	35(38.5%)	0.48
Chi-square=16.54,p=0.000 ,df=1			
Educational status			
Up to primary(including illiterate)	46(68.7%)	21(31.3%)	0.395
Middle & above	24(31.2%)	53(68.8%)	0.765
Chi-square=20.155,p=0.000 ,df=1			
Educational status of husband			
Up to primary(including illiterate)	36(63.2%)	21(36.8%)	0.47
Middle & above	34(39.1%)	53(60.9%)	0.696
Chi-square=7.992,p=0.005 ,df=1			
Occupational status			
Not employed(home maker only)	58(60.4%)	38(39.6%)	0.497
Employed(giving financial contribution to family)	12(25%)	36(75%)	0.836

Chi-square=16.068,p=0.000 ,df=1

Table VI showed regression analysis, taking WEI as the dependent variable and some important socio-economic and demographic factors as independent variables. Data was in normal distribution. Multicollinearity of independent variables & VIF factor was checked & found to be satisfactory to go for the linear regression analysis. The model gave R square of 0.676 i.e. 67.6% of variation of women empowerment can be explained by the 9 independent variables (age, age at marriage, spousal age difference, PCI, type of family, religion, women employment, education of women & their husband. Influence of age, spousal age difference, type of family, religion, employment and education of women were found to be statistically significant in changing women empowerment. A study by Varghese T.(2011) in Oman found that income of family, education, employment and acquisition of assets were statistically significant factors influencing women empowerment in Oman ¹⁵.

Table VI: Regression analysis

Variables	Coefficient			
	B	Sig	95% ci	
			Lower bound	Upper bound
Age	0.467	0.000	0.014	0.020
Spousal age difference	-0.251	0.000	-0.034	-0.014
Age at marriage	0.055	0.26	-0.004	0.015
Pci	0.185	0.000	0.000	0.000
Education of women	0.111	0.036	-0.004	-0.003
Education of husband	0.048	0.349	-0.030	0.086
Type of family	0.244	0.000	0.094	0.191
Religion	.127	0.005	0.024	0.129
Employment	0.167	0.000	0.049	0.152

***R SQUARE=0.676**

Conclusion

Empowerment of women is a process. It has several dimensions and several factors simultaneously act on it. Based on results and discussion, the overall conclusion of this study is that the level of women's empowerment in the study area (slum of Chetla) is not so satisfactory (Mean WEI=0.58, medium level). Older women have more independence and empowerment than younger women because they have more experience with life, a better understanding of how to get what they want or need, a closer relationship with the husband, or because they have fulfilled certain social obligations to the husband and his family (for example, bearing children or sons) and thus are more trusted than are young

wives, over whom tighter controls are maintained. Like much of the developing world, in this slum also adolescent and child marriage continues to be a social problem, particularly for girls. Early female marriage is associated with a number of poor social and physical outcomes for young women. On average, girls who marry as adolescents attain lower schooling levels, which cause lower self confidence, bargaining power, freedom of choices etc. As a result they have less reproductive control and suffer higher rates of maternal mortality and domestic violence and thereafter less empowerment. It is also seen that women with smaller age difference with their husbands are more empowered. It may be due to the fact that if the age difference is little there will have better understanding between husbands and wives and eventually, women's participation in decision-making will increase. Since the empowerment of women is an essential precondition for the elimination of world poverty and the upholding of human rights, the government should enforce the existing law of minimum age at marriage (18 years). They should take pragmatic steps to increase level of education for both males and females. Also awareness about women's right i.e. fundamental needs should be increased through the mass media, IEC etc. Though the present study area is under the purview of an renowned public health institution of India with well trained, efficient and dedicated manpower, the status of women empowerment in this area was not found to be so much satisfactory. If this is the picture women empowerment status in a area which is under good supervision of a public health institution, it is quite clear that the status is far more inferior in other under privileged and underserved areas. So the work is yet to be done with comprehensive efforts from all aspects of the society from the Government to the beneficiaries.

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