

Effect of Gender Equality on Women Empowerment: A Critical Reviews of Past Studies

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Abstract:

Despite progress made over the years, women still face many challenges and barriers to achieving equality in various aspects of life. Gender inequality persists in areas such as education, employment, politics, and access to health care. Gender equality is a crucial factor in women's empowerment. When women are treated equally and have the same opportunities as men, they are better able to take control of their lives and participate fully in all aspects of society. Gender equality and women's empowerment are closely linked, with one leading to the other. Gender equality provides the necessary conditions for women to be empowered. This research article is focusing on past studies and its finding on gender equality and women empowerment. The purpose of this paper is to provide critical review of existing researches on gender equality and synthesizing evidences for finding its effect on women empowerment. Through review of past researches, a researcher tried to find out how far gender equality can act as a crucial factor for Women empowerment.

Keywords: Gender equality, Women empowerment, Gender Inclusion, Gender discrimination, equal opportunity, critical review

Introduction

Gender equality and women's empowerment are crucial issues in the 21st century, and there has been significant progress made towards achieving these goals. However, there is still a long way to go, and many challenges remain. One of the most significant obstacles to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is discrimination and bias, which can manifest in various forms, including social, economic, and political exclusion. Gender equality leads to equal access to education, employment, political representation and health care benefits. The term gender equality in the Indian Constitution is mentioned in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of State Policy. According to Chaudhary (2020), Though the Gender Inclusion Fund and Special Education Zones introduced by the National Education Policy, 2020 and other prevalent policies (like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao) give hope towards building a gender-equal public education system, the real conundrum of the state of public education in India, as a whole, fails to provide gender parity under the proposed provisions.

The World Bank (2012) identifies gender equality as a core development objective in its own right and asserts that greater gender equality is equivalent to 'smart economics' because of its potential to enhance productivity and improve other development outcomes, including prospects for future generations

and for the quality of societal policies and institutions (Onditi & Odera, 2017). Empowerment is defined as the process of change in one's ability to exercise choice (Goulart et al., 2021). According to Etienne Lwamba (2022) This ability to exercise choice relies on three interrelated dimensions:

- (i) Resources: material, human and social resources which serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice;
- (ii) Agency: ability to define one's goals and act upon them and operationalized decision-making; and
- (iii) Achievement: ways of being and doing which can be realised by different individuals.

In development discourse, "women's empowerment" is often used in close conjunction with girls' education and gender equality, suggesting that the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women will result from the removal of gender disparity in primary and secondary education (Sahni, 2018). There is close relationship between two term Gender equality and Women Empowerment, as giving equal opportunity to women in various domains like society, education, employment, politics makes them independent in terms of making decisions related to own life and allow them to make their own life choices. This way it makes women empowered in real sense. An indication that women empowerment and gender equality issues do not only apply to women alone but rather to every person and should be regarded as a human right and a criterion for nations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals set.

There are many provisions and policies implemented by Indian government for gender equality and women empowerment. Such policy is incorporated in Indian constitution for gender equality as Article 14 to ensure right to equality for women, Article 15(1) for prohibition of gender discrimination and Article 15(3) which ensures to take affirmative steps for women betterment. Another scheme is "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)" Scheme launched on 22nd January 2015. The main purpose of this scheme is to address declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and women empowerment issues and overall upliftment of girls and women. Schemes like Women Self Help Group (SHG) Scheme, Women Entrepreneurship Fund Scheme, Sukanya Samridhi Scheme, Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme, etc. are launched by government of India for promoting women empowerment by making women financially independent. These schemes are for upliftment of women and making them financially dependent as men in the society. Through such policies and programs, government of India evolve various approaches not only to reduce the gender inequalities but also promotes women empowerment and making them self-reliant. Due to gender equality, women can achieve financial, social, political and economical autonomy. This enables women to increase their income, improve their standard of living and status in society. It acts as catalyst for bringing this action of society to the main stream (Sheikh, 2022).

Gender equality is crucial to promote women's empowerment as it challenges gender norms, stereotypes, and discrimination that limit women's progress in society. (Batool Sajid & Qaisar, 2022). Gender equality act as a preliminary step, which can empower women. Due to gender equality, women are given equal rights as men. This can break social and economic barriers in path of progress for women.

Gender perspective is considered in various aspects of policy planning, legislation, financial and corporate sector and defining role of men and women in society in order to promote gender equality. Thus, the policy related to gender equality addresses the systematic discriminations between women and men in our society without ignoring the fundamental differences between them (Ali and Koki, 2018). This process of elimination of inequality based on gender by empowerment of women can be work as entry point and help in balancing fundamental rights of men and women in the society.

Objective

The main purpose of this study is to find out how gender equality affects women empowerment. If gender in quality is addressed properly, it can result into equal opportunities in terms of education, vocation and status of women in the society and workplace. This can promote empowerment of women by allowing

them to take their life related decisions. This study is based on critical reviews and analysis of past studies conducted on women empowerment and gender equality. So it is based on secondary data.

- 1) To search and find out past studies on broad theme "Gender equality and women empowerment".
- 2) To scrutinize and select relevant research and studies specifying effect of gender equality on women empowerment through systematic critical review.
- 3) To determine how far gender equality leads to women empowerment.

Delimitations

In order to conduct systematic review researcher had delimited research articles and selected only relevant researches conducted in last 5 years (between 2018 to 2022 year). Though there are many electronic data based of literature like Scopus, Web of science, PubMed, Shodganga, Cochrane Library, Google scholar, etc. But researcher reviewed research papers from only Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) journals. The search result was sorted based on full text availability criteria and research articles which are available in English language were considered for study. Books, data, Ph.D. thesis conference papers and literature reviews were excluded from search results.

Limitations

Findings of the study is based on data, results and findings of selected articles searches by researcher for critical analysis. While searching articles from online data base, there is possibility that few relevant articles might not be seen on webpage. This might affect research inference. Apart from this, research articles before 2017 were not included in study, so, concepts, ideas and views of role of gender equality mentioned in the article before 2017 would be missing in current study findings.

Methodology

The sample for this study is research papers and conceptual papers on gender equality and women empowerment based on studies conducted earlier. In order to refer and analyse the most significant studies in this field, the systematic literature review (SLR) method has been used (Prendes-Espinosa, et. al. .2020). Google scholar, ResearchGate, and ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) journals electronic database were used to identify and collect research papers. The search terms and keywords like gender equality and women empowerment, effect of gender equality, factors affecting women empowerment were used to search and locate relevant research papers. This study result is based on secondary data collected after meta-analysis of research articles. These secondary data are findings of collected research articles.

Population and Sample

Following table represents population of this study, which includes total number of relevant as well as irrelevant research papers.

Table: 1 Electronic Database Search Result

Type of Data base	Search key words	Total No. of Papers (Published between 2018-2022)
Google Scholar	Gender equality and women empowerment	126
	Effect of gender equality	70
	Factors affecting women empowerment	26
ResearchGate	Gender equality and women empowerment	5599
	Effect of gender equality	8619
	Factors affecting women empowerment	7443
ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)	Gender equality and women empowerment	472
	Effect of gender equality	898
	Factors affecting women empowerment	15
Total Population		24,268

For all three indexing database filters like full text availability, journal articles and publication year 2017-2022 was applied to search articles from key words. Google scholar has very less filtering criteria, so it is showing thousands of research papers. In order to find most relevant articles, advanced search option was used for Google scholar and total number of appeared article in search result was included in population. In google scholar, filters like articles between year 2017-2022 and keywords only in title were applied to search and find relevant articles for the study. In case of ResearchGate, filters like years between 2017-2022, journal articles and full text availability were applied. Total number of articles appeared were included in population. In case of ERIC, filters like full text availability, year of publication between 1027-2022 and journal articles were applied to search articles. Total 1801 articles appeared with These articles are not only research articles, but it also includes, conference proceeding, Ph.D. thesis, review articles, book chapters and policy documents. Total articles found on all three data bases were 24,268, which is population for the study.

The researcher used purposive sampling technique to take out sample from population. After going through each page of results, only those articles were selected, which is having keywords like gender equality and women empowerment in the title of article. So following table is about total number of articles taken in the sample frame for this study. Articles from sampling frame were further undergoes inclusion and exclusion process.

Table: 1 Number of articles included in sample frame

Type of Data base	Keywords in the title	Total No. of Papers (Published between 2018-2022)
Google Scholar	Effect of Gender equality on women empowerment	26
ResearchGate	Effect of Gender equality on women empowerment	1166
ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)	Effect of Gender equality on women empowerment	1108
Total Sample		2300

Research Process

It was not possible to conduct critical review of all articles in the sample as many of them are not relevant and directly related to purpose of study. As some of the article does not fulfil the main objective of this review study. Articles which are most relevant and fulfilling the purpose of study was selected using Systematic literature Review (SLR) and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol guidelines and flowcharts have been utilised for this SLR (Joseph, 2023).

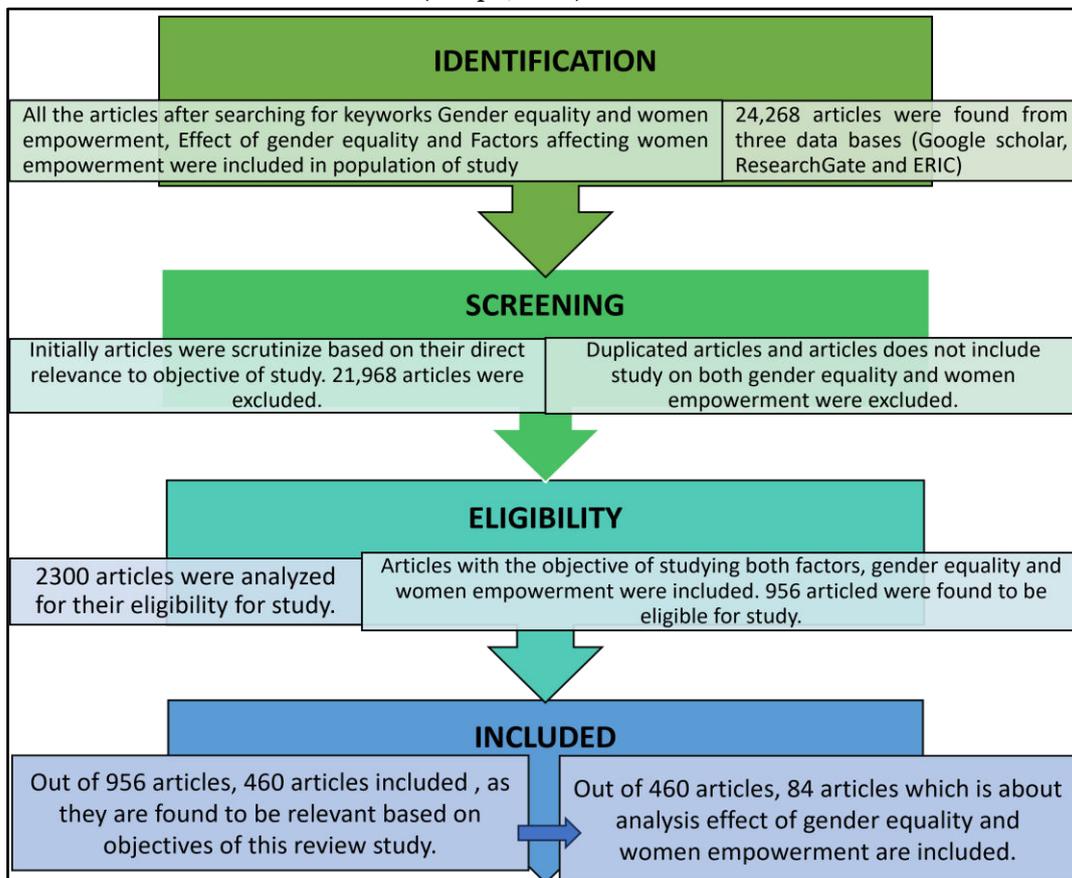


Figure: 1 Flow chart of systematic review to scrutinize research article for review.

The process of inclusion and exclusion of articles was done for initial screening of article. Following flowchart is showing process of systematic literature review process used to select articles for review. As reflecting in figure 1, sample for this study was 84 articles. These 84 articles were further undergone process of Meta analysis by researcher to synthesize evidences related to how far gender equality leads to women empowerment. Title of all 84 articles were critically reviewed and articulated showing effect of gender equality and women empowerment were listed down for further meta analysis.

Meta Analysis Process

Meta analysis is a quantitative research method where results from previously conducted empirical studies are summarized and compared. Researcher used to review old studies and their research methodology, findings and implications. Based on the review of prior literature and draws conclusion which is subjective in nature (Card, 2015). Researcher went through 84 research paper title, abstract, research methodology used, findings of study, result and conclusion. Out of these all 84 research papers, 21 articles are showing relationship between gender equality and women empowerment. Researches which were not having proper empirical evidences for ensuring effect of gender equality on women empowerment, removed from

the list of 84 articles, which further decreases final list of 26 articles. These 26 articles were analysed by researcher critically. Various components like research topic, research method, intervention and findings of papers were reviewed. Following is list of downloaded articles included for final analysis process.

Sr. No.	Author/s	Title of Article	Year of publication
1)	Etienne Lwamba, Shannon Shisler, Will Ridlehoover, Meital Kupfer, Nkululeko Tshabalala, Promise Nduku, Laurenz Langer, Sean Grant, Ada Sonnenfeld, Daniela Anda, John Eyers, Birte Snilstveit	Strengthening women's empowerment and gender equality in fragile contexts towards peaceful and inclusive societies: A systematic review and meta-analysis	2022
2)	ke Chijioke Chinwokwu & Sylvia Kaka Arop	Gender Equality and Women Empowerment towards Sustainable National Development in Nigeria	2018
3)	J. Priyadharshini and M. Selladurai	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment In India	2022
4)	Bishnuprasad Mohapatra	Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in India: A Corporate Social Responsibility Perspective.	2018
5)	Muhamad Sayuti Hassan and Rozana Abdullah	Accelerating Gender Equality and Empowering Women in Malaysia.	2022
6)	Satyajit Saha	Gender Equality And Women Empowerment To Achieve Sustainable Development Goal	2022
7)	Smart Mhembwe	The Impact of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment on Sustainable Community Development: A Case Study of Ward 5 in Shurugwi District in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe	2019
8)	Rahmawati Mohd Yusoff, Nadzrah Ahmad, Alizah Ali, Noraini Ismail, Ira Rozana Mohd Asri	An Analysis of The Factors of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Issues in The Economic Sector in Malaysia: An Analysis	2021
9)	Ziya Hasan, Ghazala Parveen	Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in India: Mapping through UN Sustainable Development Goals	2020
10)	Priyadharshini J, Jackuline & Muthusamy, Selladurai	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in India.	2022
11)	Padma, R., and PB Beulahbel Bency	Conceptual View on Gender Equality through Women Empowerment	2018
12)	Punitha, K. and Ravi	Study On Gender Equality And Women Empowerment	2020
13)	Baqutayan, S. M. S.	Women's Empowerment Is Needed to Boost Gender Equality in Malaysia	2021
14)	Kausar Ali	Economic Independence In Relation To Women Empowerment And Gender Equality	2022
15)	Dina Hadad	Women's Empowerment And Gender Equality In The Arab World:, Interpretations And	2018

		Challenges	
16)	Ani PurwantiDyahWijaningsihMuh. Afif MahfudFajar Ahmad Setiawan	Assessing Fishery Legislation for Gender Equality and Empowerment in Fishery Communities in Indonesia	2021
17)	Christopher Coley, SheshadriSrividya, Sriram Devanathan	Men's Experience of Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality: A Phenomenological Study in Kerala, India	2022
18)	Emefa TonorgbeviAwuku, Stephen Elvis Ampah	Empowering Women and Achieving Gender Equality through Capacity Building Programmes: The Role of NGOs	2022
19)	Batool S.F, Sajid U & Qaisar H	Empowering Women; basic right for beingan Individual	2022
20)	Mustapha Alhaji Ali1, Dr. Ahmad Tahir Adamu Koki2	The Dilemma of Gender Equality: Women, Education,andEmpowerment in Yobe State, Nigeria	2018
21)	Shaikh Wasim, Shaikh Shabbir	Women empowerment in India: A quest from past to present	2019
22)	Andrey Shastri	Human Rights for Women's Development in Multidimensional: A Step towards Gender Equality in Education: A Step Towards Gender Equality	2019
23)	Cynthia Changxin Wang, Eveline Mussi, RizaYosiaSunindijo	Analysing Gender Issues in the Australian Construction Industry through the Lens of Empowerment	2021
24)	Kodikara, G. A.	Women's empowerment and Gender Equality in Workspace: Identifying initiatives of the "She Works" Sri Lanka partnership by AusAID and IFS.	2021
25)	Masood ul Hassan and Anjum Naz	Education for Women Entrepreneurial Attitudes and Intentions: The Role of Perceptions on Gender Equality and Empowerment	2020
26)	Milcah Paul Machavarapu and P Radha	Gender Differences in Empowerment Status at The Household and Occupational Level-A Review	2018

Findings and Discussion

There was only 2 research paper showing direct relationship between gender equality and women empowerment. A study by Priyadharshini and Selladurai (2018) studied about gender equality and women empowerment in India. It was found that, gender equality and women's empowerment are two sides of the same coin: progress toward gender equality requires women's empowerment and women's empowerment requires increases in gender equality as shown. It can be concluded that one causes other and action taken toward gender equality can leads to women empowerment or vice a versa. A study on "She Workers" at Sri Lanka by Kodikara (2022) indicated that, various gender equality measures and policy updates initiated under the 'she works' program has increased production, employee development, and workspace unitiesince 2018. Another study (Lwamba, 2022) reviewed articles to find out evidence for effect of gender specific and gender transformative interventions and concluded that smaller effects on behavioural outcomes supports and leads to empowerment. A study by Saha (2020) agreed that women empowerment is key factor to achieve sustainability. She further concluded that sustainable development

can be possible by equitable distribution of resources and gender equality. It was findings of most of the studies that gender equality and women empowerment are two factor associated with each other and it affects economical, political and social growth of country (Abdulla and Hussain, 2022; Mohapatra, 2018; Chinwokwu and Arop, 2018).

According to Pathan, Shabir and Shaikh (2019), Women empowerment can be possible by promoting and upholding the idea of gender equality and uprooting social beliefs of giving the undue preference to male child. In countries where gender gaps in education have been reduced, women are more likely to be empowered. Educating women / girls and giving them equal opportunity in education sector can be act as an effective measure towards their empowerment. The education of women, in particular, is seen as providing the key to securing the inter-generational transfer of knowledge from one generation to another and will help in reducing gender gaps (Shastri, 2019). A study by the World Bank found that women's education is positively associated with their participation in the labor force, political participation, and decision-making power in the household. Gender equality can lead to increased economic opportunities for women. For example, a study by the McKinsey Global Institute found that advancing gender equality could add \$12 trillion to global GDP by 2025. This is because gender inequality leads to lost productivity and potential in the workforce. A study on male dominated construction industry revealed that, women's empowerment can be achieved by taking personal initiative to fully utilise the positive and supportive environment around them, while overcoming other long-standing relational and environmental barriers (Wang, Mussi and Sunindijo, 2021)

Certain studies by Punitha and Ravi (2020), Baqutayan, S. M. S. (2021), Naz and Hussain (2020), Mhembwe (2019), approved the idea of 'right to equality' in terms of gender can facilitate women empowerment and help in overcoming situations like socio economical discrimination and political inequalities. Some other researches by Padma and Bancy (2018), Saha (2020) if women are empowered enough to fulfil various roles in the society, they can inculcate idea of gender equality for all-round development of society among next generation. Gender biasness is not only found among male members but women are also possess such stereotype and bound themselves in limits and act as barrier for their own development. Overall, gender equality and women's empowerment are closely intertwined, and one cannot exist without the other. When women are empowered, they are better able to contribute to their families, communities, and society as a whole, leading to a more just and equitable world for all. Therefore, progress towards gender equality requires a holistic approach that includes both empowering women and increasing gender equality. This includes efforts to address gender-based violence, provide access to education and healthcare, promote equal pay and employment opportunities, and ensure equal representation in politics and other decision-making processes.

Conclusion

Women empowerment is considered as very significant not only for national development but also for long term sustainable national development and national security. We recognize that long term sustainable national development will only be realizable when men and women share and enjoy equal chance to rise to their natural potential. Gender equality can help to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, which can limit women's choices and opportunities. Equality for both the gender should not only be implemented through government policies in the society, but also implemented within family, work place and offices by applying small practices like creating supportive and positive environment for women, ensuring equal participation of them in every profession, focusing educating girl child of family, raise voice against domestic violence on women etc. When society recognizes the value and contribution of women, it creates a more inclusive environment, where women can thrive and reach their full potential.

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