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RESEARCH ARTICLE

AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION OF RURAL FEMALES IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT ACTIVITIES -A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Background: Women contribute a lot towards society development. Gender equality is essential for society to ensure sustainable development of the country. Better is the status of women more developed are the societies. Status of women can be increased with their empowerment. **Objectives of the study:** To study awareness and participation of women in women empowerment activities in rural areas of Haryana. **Method:** Type of Study: Cross-sectional descriptive. **Study Settings:** Block Lakhna Majra. Study population: Women 18 years and above. Sample and sampling Technique: Stratified sampling technique for selection of study population to represent the all strata of population in equal proportion. Systematic random sampling for interviewing the study subjects. **Results:** Among 1000 study participants 47.8% were house wives. Mobility of females in rural areas is restricted and they are not permitted to move out of house independently. Among the participants 4.7 % women owned land, 6.3% women having their own productive assets like cattle, sewing machines and 11% women having their own cash savings. 16.8% participants were aware toward political involvement of women in political activities and 83.2% were not aware and involved in political activities and they were not allowed to participate in political activities. It has been observed that 9.4% participants exercised voting by their own understanding and 51.2% voted according to desire of male members of the family. **Conclusion:** It is concluded that awareness among females of rural areas regarding women empowerment is very low. Overall awareness regarding political activities and voting rights is also low and these females are not empowered.

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INTRODUCTION

Women constitute nearly half of the world's population yet they are not treated equal to men in many parts of the world¹. Women in developing countries have poor health and literacy status. There is lack of gender balance in decision-making positions in government and other organizations. Women continue to be under represented in national parliaments and on average only 17 percent of seats are occupied by women. The situation is not better at the level of local government. Females are treated as a weaker sex due to lack of empowerment and often suffer from violence. Empowerment of women is necessary for development of society. There are limited studies available regarding the status and awareness of women empowerment in the Indian rural settings. Keeping in view the present study was undertaken with the objective to study awareness regarding women empowerment and their participation in activities related to women empowerment.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study was conducted in block Lakhna Majra, a rural field practice area attached to Department of Community Medicine, Pt. B D Sharma PGIMS, Rohtak. It was a cross sectional descriptive study. The stratified random sampling technique was used for representing the equal proportion of population from all strata of society spread over in thirteen villages. A total of 1000 female above the age of 18 years were included as study subjects and interviewed on a pre-designed pre-tested performa. Females who did not consent, not present during study period were excluded from study. Data thus collected was analyzed by using appropriate statistical tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Among the study subjects, 40.9% were in the age group of above 40 years, 99.2% were Hindus, 86.5% married, 3.6% unmarried and 0.8% separated. Education wise 43.3% were

illiterate, 27.2% educated up to primary standard, 23.1% having high school education, 3.4% were graduates, and 2.4% were Post-graduates. Only 0.6% women possessed professional qualification.

Table 1. Age wise distribution of Study participants

Age (in years)	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	142	14.2
25-30	205	20.5
30-35	120	12.0
35-40	124	12.4
Above 40	409	40.9
Total	1000	100

Table 2. Status regarding asset ownership and involvement in activities

Type	Yes	No	Total
Land/ house in Name of Female	47(4.7)	953(95.3)	1000
Economic Security and contribution	266(26.6)	734 (73.4)	1000
Working Outside Home	212(21.2)	788(78.8)	1000
Knowledge of Voting Rights	343(34.3)	657(65.7)	1000
Awareness regarding political Activity	168 (16.8)	832(83.8)	1000
Visit to Market	67(6.7)	933(93.3)	1000
Go to Cinema	51(5.1)	949(94.9)	1000

Table 4. Participation of women in public protests

Participating in any public protest	Frequency	Percentage
Generally	03	0.3
Occasionally	83	8.3
Never	914	91.4
Total	1000	100.0

Table 5. Distributions according to participation towards election campaign

Participation in election campaigning	Frequency	Percentage
Local Body Elections	75	7.5
Assembly Elections	5	0.5
Parliament Elections	8	0.8
Never Participated	912	91.2
Total	1000	100.0

Table 6. Reasons for Low Awareness and low political Participation

Reason	Frequency	Percentages
Lack of Education	470	47.0
Patriarchal Society	35	3.5
Economic dependence on Males	177	17.7
Other factors	318	31.8
Total	1000	100

Occupation-wise 47.8% women were house wives, 19% were labourers and only 13.1% were doing jobs either in Govt. or private sector. 12.9% were doing agriculture work, 5.8% involved in business related activities. Only 1.4% study subjects were doing independent work at their home. **Figure-3** depicts that only 18.9% women participated in social activities and a large number of women (81.1%) were not socially active to participate in any social activity. Only small numbers of participants (4.9%) were having membership of social organizations like self-help group (SHG). Rural females (7.4%) were allowed to move outside the village with some accompaniment while other 92.6% were not allowed to visit the village at their own will. Only 18.9% participants were visiting hospital with some accompaniment. None of the

participants were allowed to visit the hospital independently. No woman was allowed to go to village market *alone*. Only 5.1% participants were going for cinema/entertainment while majority of participants were not allowed to watch cinema.

Only 10.4% participants were living independently and free from family dominations. Large number (89.6%) of participants were bound to follow the family dominations. This indicates that rural women are not independent and lack of empowerment is present regarding their movements. 45.2 % participants were deprived of money, 36.4% of jewelry, and 2.7% of land that indicates that rural women lack economic independence. Participation in public protest was very poor as 91.4% women have never participated in public protests. Table II depicts that 34.3% respondents were aware of their voting rights and rest of them (65.7%) did not know about their voting rights. Only 10.4% participants were not deprived of the followings where as 45.2% were deprived from money, 36.4% were from jewelry, and 5.3% deprived from live stocks and land and 2.7% deprived from the land. 21.2% study participants were allowed to move from house to work and earn the money while 78.8% were not allowed to go out the home for working, only 16.4% study participants were visiting their parental home by own wish while 83.6% were not visiting without permission of the family members. Only 26.6% study participants were having economic security and 73.4% were economically not secure.

Among the participants only 4.7 % women owned land, homestead land, or house in their own name and only 6.3% women having their own productive assets like cattle, sewing machines and 11% women having their own cash savings. Table –II shows that 16.8% participants were aware toward political involvement of women in political activities and 83.2% were not aware and involved in political activities and they were not allowed to participate in political activities. It has been observed that 9.4% participants exercised voting by their own understanding and 51.2% voted according to desire of male members of the family, 31.7% participants stated that on the basis of caste, very few of them (0.4%) on the basis of political party and 7.3% exercise of their voting on the basis of candidate. Above facts show that awareness regarding political activities and voting rights is very low among the female participants and these females are not having land and houses and other assets in their names hence they are devoid of economic empowerment. Above table indicates that 91.4% participants never participated in any public protest, 8.3% participated occasionally and while few of them (0.3%) generally participates in any public protest. This shows that 91.2% participants never participated towards election campaign, 7.5% subjects participated in local, 0.5% participated in assembly and only 0.8% participates in parliamentary election campaigns. The main reason about low awareness and low political participation by women was due to lack of education (47%), patriarchal system of the society (3.5%), economic dependency of women on male members (17.7%) and 31.8% due to other factors.

Conclusion

On the basis of results and discussion, it is concluded that awareness among females of rural areas regarding women empowerment is very low. Participation of rural women in social activities like election campaigns is lacking as 91.4% never participated in such activities. Among the study participants 65.3% were not aware regarding their voting rights

and voting is exercised as per desire of male partners or on advice of elderly family members. Only 10.40% females are living independent of their family dominations. Low awareness and less involvement in empowerment activities by rural women can be attributed to their low literacy status and patriarchal society, economic dependence on males and some gender bias. Awareness level of women, particularly women PRI members need to be improved through repeated trainings and IEC activities at block level by Department of women and child development and department of rural development. Mahillamandals and women groups can play important role in making women aware and empowering them by improving their economic generation activities. There is need to enroll all girls in schools and these girls may be encouraged to complete their education up to matriculation level.

Conflicts of interest: There are no conflicts of interest.

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