



RESEARCH ARTICLE

STATUS OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND FERTILITY BEHAVIOUR OF THE MUSLIMS IN RURAL WEST BENGAL

Dr. Soleman Khan*¹ and Prof. Nuruzzaman Kasemi²

¹ICSSR Post-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Geography, Raiganj University, Uttar Dinajpur

²Professor, Department of Geography, Raiganj University, Uttar Dinajpur

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 14th December, 2023

Received in revised form

20th January, 2024

Accepted 24th February, 2024

Published online 30th March, 2024

Key words:

Fertility, Women Empowerment,
Education, Domestic Violence, Female
Worker.

*Corresponding author:

Dr. Soleman Khan

ABSTRACT

This paper tries to examine the nexus between the level of women empowerment and the fertility behaviour of Muslims in rural West Bengal. The study is conducted in six selected CD blocks of Murshidabad district of West Bengal. The present study has been done based on primary data supplemented by data from secondary sources. The target group of the sample population is Muslim married women in the reproductive age group 15-49 years. Data has been analysed using statistical software (SPSS). Similarly, GIS software (ArcGIS 10.3) is used for mapping. The result of the study shows a negative association between women empowerment and fertility behaviour for Muslims in the study area. The empowerment status of Muslim Women is found to be quite poor in the study area; it has a positive relation with the fertility behaviour of the Muslims in West Bengal.

Copyright©2024, Soleman Khan et al. 2024. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Citation: Dr. Soleman Khan and Prof. Nuruzzaman Kasemi. 2024. "Status of Women's Empowerment and Fertility Behaviour of the Muslims in Rural West Bengal". International Journal of Current Research, 16, (03), 27459-27463.

INTRODUCTION

In a very simple word, the term 'women's empowerment' means empowering women in various decision-making processes, improving their ability to live freely and equal access to resources and opportunities to maintain and manage a healthy society (Saber, Ehsanpour, Mahaki, & Kohan, 2018; Jain, 2018). Empowerment of women encompasses many dimensions, like - economic, social and cultural, political, legal, reproductive, familial, and interpersonal; this leads to a wide variation in conceptualization (Upadhyay & Karasek, 2012). The level of women empowerment especially for Muslims is a much-debated issue in India. In some previous studies, it is already evident that in India, women, Muslim women in particular, are in a significantly low status, almost everywhere in the country; but controversy prevails on the extent of its influence on various demographic and socio-cultural aspects (Jain, 2018; Saeed, 2005). In a society like that of India where the patriarchal mood is dominant, men are placed in an advantageous position to grab all the socio-economic and decision-making facilities than women (Rawat, 2014). Even the nature of child bearing and caring practices also reflects male supremacy (Malhotra, Vaneman, & Sunita, 1995).

The trend of neglecting women in various decision-making processes among Muslims is detected to be quite high in India; this may be associated with their high fertility rate (Ohlan, 2020). Studies reported that the status of women within the family and largely in the community, represented by 'women's empowerment' plays a vital role in controlling the fertility rate (Atake & Ali, 2019). Fertility is considered to be one of the most inexplicable factors among various demographic variables despite various efforts and attention to exploring it (Graff, 1979). However, the effect of women's empowerment status on fertility behaviour is not crystal clear, especially in developing countries like India (Alonge & Ajala, 2013). Although various studies have reported that in India the status of empowerment of Muslim Women is low and their level of fertility is quite high the interrelation is not well conspicuous. There is confusion regarding the definition and measurement ways of women empowerment and its effects on the fertility behaviour of Muslims in West Bengal. Therefore, it seems to be quite important to detect the influence of the status of women's empowerment of Muslims on their fertility behaviour in the state.

Objectives: The objectives of the present study are listed below

- To find out the overall status of empowerment of Muslim women in the study area,
- To explore the relation between women empowerment and the fertility level of Muslims.

Study Area: West Bengal is one of the major states of the Eastern Indian region extending from 85° 50'E- 89°50'E and 21°38'N - 27°10'N respectively. According to Census of India (2011) data there are 19 districts in West Bengal among which the highest concentration of Muslim population is found in the district of Murshidabad (66.27 percent) which is in other hand also considered as one of the socio-economically backward districts in West Bengal as well as in India (Das & Das, 2020; Sk, 2023; Basu, 2019). Census of India, 2011 data also reveal that the TFR of the Muslims of the district Murshidabad (2.41) is also quite high than the state average (1.68). Therefore, in the present study, the district Murshidabad is selected as for study area.

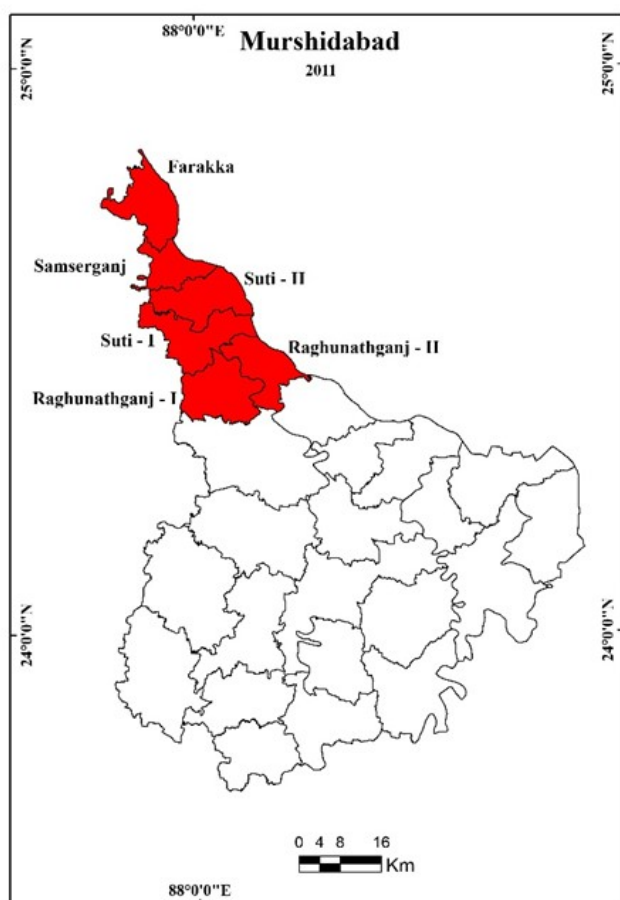


Fig. 1

METHODOLOGY

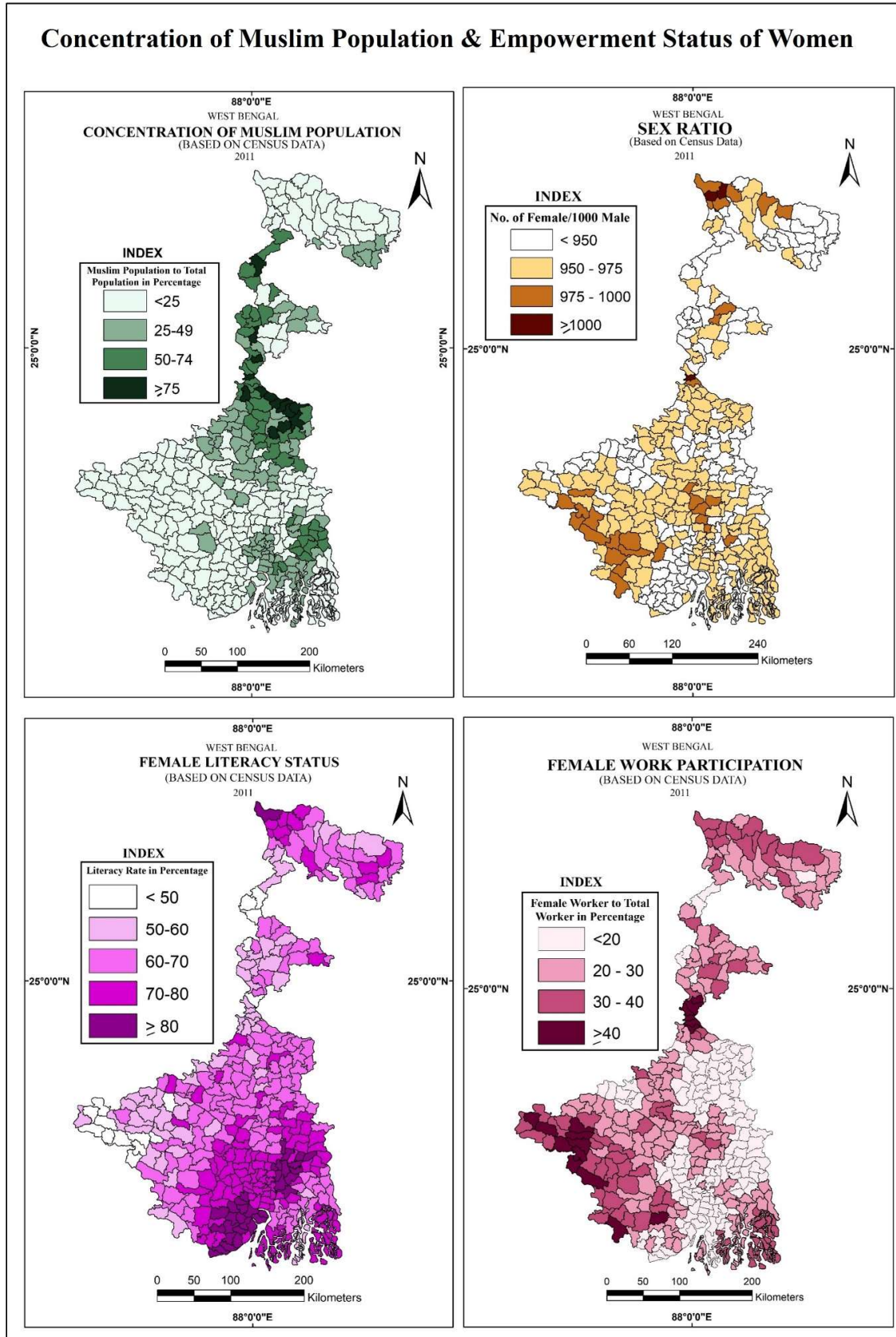
In the present study, six CD-blocks of Murshidabad districts are selected for field survey. The names of the CD blocks are Farakka, Samserganj, Raghunathganj – I, Raghunathganj – II, Suti – I, and Suti – II (Fig. 1). Sampling is conducted by a multi-stage purposive convenience sampling method. The sample CD blocks for the primary survey are selected based on two things i.e., Muslim dominance by numerical strength (≥ 50 percent of Muslim population) and High growth rate of Muslim population (≥ 30 % growth rate of Muslim population) between the census years 2001-2011).

The sample size is 600 and the survey was conducted between August 2023 and February 2024. The respondents are 600 married Muslim women of the reproductive age group (15-49 years). The present study is based on primary data, supplemented by secondary data. The principal source of secondary data is the Census of India and Health & Family Welfare. To achieve the enlisted objectives, statistical tools and techniques have also been applied. The statistical tests Multiple regression analysis in 95% confidence level have been conducted to understand the impact of women's empowerment status on their TFR (Total Fertility Rate) in detail. The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software (version 26) is used to conduct the statistical analysis. MS Excel is also used for analyzing the data. Necessary mapping has been done using ArcGIS 10.3 software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Census of India 2011 data shows that the percentage of Muslim people in West Bengal is 27.01. Nevertheless, the spatial concentration of Muslims is quite interesting. It shows that the concentration of Muslims is quite high in the areas of Murshidabad, Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, Birbhum, and some parts of two Parganas (North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas); while the rest of the parts of the state have low concentration of Muslims (Fig. 2). The measurements of sex ratio, female literacy status and female work participation status are regarded to be influencing factors of women empowerment (Mahata, Kumar, & Rai, 2017). Fig. 2 exhibits that the areas numerically dominated by Muslim people are far backward in terms of women's empowerment. The lowest sex ratio, female literacy, and female work participation rate are witnessed in the CD blocks Maldah (old) of Maldah district (884.9), Goalpokhar – I of Uttar Dinajpur district (35.08), and Tehatta – II of Nadia district (5.80) respectively. In all these three CD blocks, the concentration of Muslim people is notably high. Besides, the CD blocks where sex ratio, female literacy, and female work participation rate are found to be highest are Jorebunglow Sukiapokhri of Darjeeling district (1018.71), Rajarhat of North 24 Parganas (87.37) and Samserganj of Murshidabad district (47.55) respectively. Among these three CD blocks of Jorebunglow Sukiapokhri, Rajarhat, and Samserganj, the concentration of Muslims is observed to be very low in Jorebunglow Sukiapokhri and Rajarhat. The CD block Samserganj of Murshidabad district along with some numerically Muslim-dominated blocks of Murshidabad and Maldah represent a high female work participation rate. However, this is not the true reflection of the high women's empowerment status of Muslim women in those areas because a large percentage of women in those regions are engaged in 'Bidi' making industries; this is not associated with high women's empowerment.

The CD block-wise spatial distribution of Crude Birth Rate (CBR) exhibited by Fig. 3 indicates that in the Muslim-dominated areas (numerically) like Maldah, Murshidabad, Uttar Dinajpur, etc. where the level of women empowerment is low, the CBR is quite high. This indicates much possibility of the prevalence of a negative correlation between women's empowerment and fertility rate. It is also derived from the analysis that the rate of fertility is higher in the regions where the concentration of scheduled cast and scheduled tribe people is significantly high, like Puruliya, the South-western part of the state, Cooch Behar, etc.



Source: Census of India, 2011 Fig. 2

Table 1. ANOVA Table for Multiple Regression Model Showing the Impacts of the Variables of Women Empowerment on Fertility Level of Muslims in Sample CD Blocks

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	878.45	7	125.49	96.25	< 0.001
Residual	771.84	592	1.30		

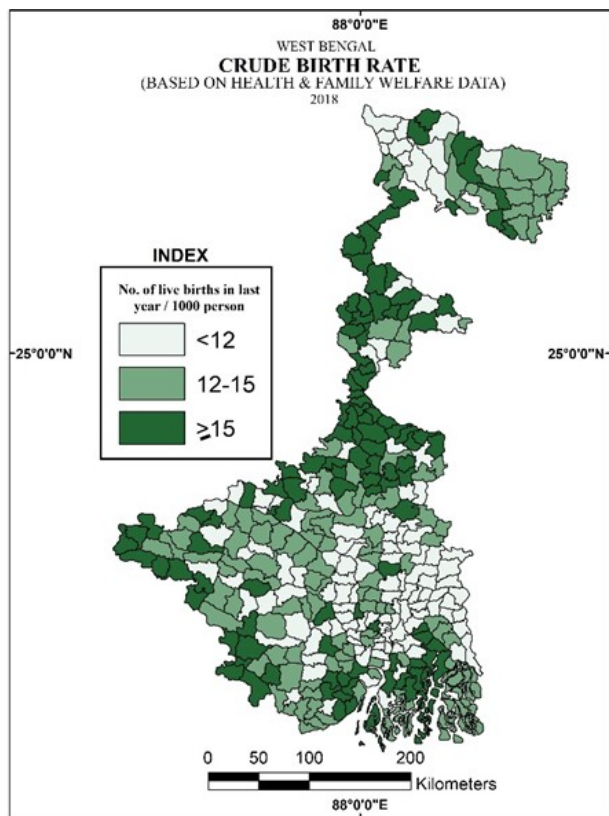


Fig.3

Source: Computed by authors based on Health and Family Welfare Data 2018

The analysis of field survey data shows that the status of women's empowerment of Muslim women is quite disappointing (Fig. 4). For calculating the level of women empowerment, seven independent variables are considered; they are 'economic self-sufficiency', 'freedom of mobility', 'participation in the family's decision-making processes', 'political freedom', 'assault and torture' 'educational attainment of women', and 'ownership of assets'. The analysis of the primary survey shows that around 54 percent of Muslim married women have no rights on land assets and around 24 percent of Muslim married women's educational attainment is below primary. The Muslim married women who experienced assault and torture from the side of the groom's family members is 13 percent. The participation of married Muslim women is very important to lower the overall fertility level of Muslims. However, the present study shows that around 10 percent of married Muslim women can't participate in the process of family decision-making. The analysis of Overall women empowerment status (computed through composite method) of six sample CD blocks also represents a negative relation between women's empowerment and fertility. The CD blocks Suti – I, Farakka – I, Raghunathganj – I betray better women empowerment status with low fertility for Muslims (Fig. 5). By contrast, CD blocks Samserganj, Raghunathganj–II, and Suti – II represent low empowerment of married Muslim women with high TFR.

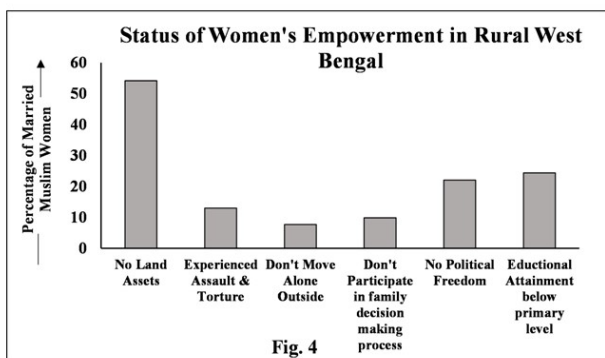


Fig. 4

Multiple regression analysis is conducted to assess the impact of women's empowerment on fertility behaviour. For calculating the level of women's empowerment, seven independent variables are considered; they are 'economic self-sufficiency', 'freedom of mobility', 'participation in the family's decision-making processes', 'political freedom', 'assault and torture' 'educational attainment of women', and 'ownership of assets'. In this model, it is noticed that the combination of all the seven independent variables accounted for 53.20 percent of the variability in fertility behaviour of Muslim women, where $R^2 = 0.532$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.527$, $F(7, 592) = 96.25$, $p < 0.001$ (Table 1). The result of this multiple regression model exhibits that there is a strong negative relationship (statistically significant) between the level of women empowerment and the fertility level of Muslims in the state.

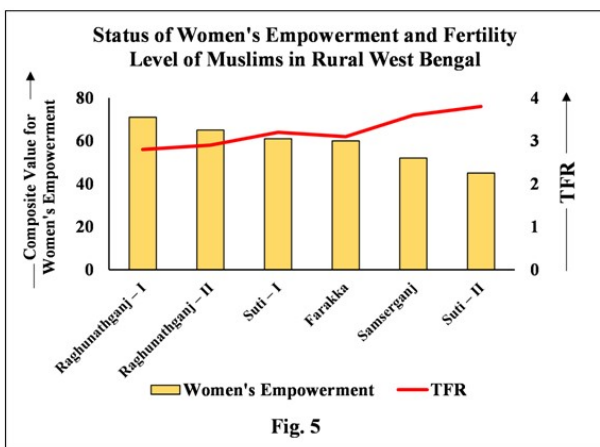


Fig. 5

CONCLUSION

The above analysis points out the prevalence of strong negative correlations between women's empowerment and the fertility level of Muslims in the state. The analysis indicates a poor scenario of the empowerment status of Muslim women. Muslim women are far backward in terms of educational attainment, work participation rate, financial autonomy, etc. which significantly lowers their empowerment rate in the state and is highly associated with their high fertility rate. In the end, it can be concluded that to reduce the fertility level of Muslims in the state it is crucial to focus on the improvement of the overall women's empowerment status of Muslims through the improvement of 'economic self-dependency' and 'participation in family's decision-making process'. It is also necessary to lower incidents of domestic violence (assault and torture) on Muslim married women in the state. The findings of this study justify the continuation of the provision of special treatment for Muslim women through government policies to improve their level of empowerment.

The highest and lowest rate of CBR is viewed in the CD blocks Sankrail – I (4.91) of Howrah district and Samserganj (37.04) of Murshidabad district. Thus, it can be concluded from the analysis of secondary data that the regions that are backward in terms of development and women empowerment are associated with high rates of fertility.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The scholar Dr Soleman Khan is the awardee of the ICSSR Post-Doctoral Fellowship. This paper is largely an outcome of the Post-Doctoral Fellowship sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). However, the responsibility for the facts stated, opinions expressed, and the conclusions drawn is entirely of the author.

REFERENCES

- Affairs, 64(3), 663-672. <https://economicaffairs.co.in/Journal/abstract/id/Mzc5MA==> Census of India. 2011. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, New Delhi. <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/>
- Alonge, S. K., & Ajala, A. O. 2013. Fertility Behaviour and Women's Empowerment in Oyo State. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 418, 33-41.
- Atake, E.-H., & Ali, P. G. 2019. Women's empowerment and fertility preferences in high fertility countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. *BMC Women's Health*, 5419, 78-89. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-019-0747-9>
- Basu, U. (2019). Migration corridors: A study on Murshidabad, West Bengal. *Economic*
- Das, A. R. (2020). Socio-economic problem and challenges of migrant workers in Murshidabad district: A study in the context of covid-19. *Journal of People's History and Culture*, 6(1), 140-145. <https://gsmp.in/uploads/journal/20220116092438.pdf>
- Graff, H. J. 1979. Literacy, Education, and Fertility, Past and Present: A Critical Review. *Population and Development Review*, 51, 105-140.
- Jain, S. 2018. Scenario of Women Empowerment in India. *RESEARCH REVIEW International Journal of Multidisciplinary*, 39, 75-77.
- Mahata, D., Kumar, A., & Rai, A. K. 2017. Female Work Force Participation and Women Empowerment in Haryana. *International Journal of Social, Behavioral, Educational, Economic, Business and Industrial Engineering*, 114, 992-997.
- Malhotra, A., Vaneman, R., & Sunita, K. 1995. Fertility, Dimensions of Patriarchy, and Development in India. *Population and Development Review*, 212, 281-305.
- Ohlan, R. 2020. Muslim Women in India: Status of Demographic, Socioeconomic and Health Inequalities. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 403, 429-440.
- Rawat, P. S. 2014. Patriarchal Beliefs, Women's Empowerment, and General Well-being. *VIKALPA*, 392, 43-56.
- Saberi, T., Ehsanpour, S., Mahaki, B., & Kohan, S. 2018. Comparison of the Relationship between Women' Empowerment and Fertility between Single-child and Multi-child Families. *Iranian Journal of Nursing and Midwifery Research*, 232, 131-135.
- Saeed, M. S. 2005. Status of Muslim women in India. *Strategic Studies*, 253, 118-139.
- Sk, M. M. (2023). Migration, diversity and development in the villages in Murshidabad district, West Bengal. *Journal of Development Policy and Practice*, 8(2), 243-263. <https://doi.org/10.1177/24551333221140716>
- Upadhyay, U. D., & Karasek, D. 2012. Women's empowerment and ideal family size: an examination of DHS empowerment measures in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 382, 78-89.
