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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Women Empowerment in the Southern States of India

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment is the process of improving women's economic and social status in society while simultaneously protecting them from all forms of violence. This study has been made in this to assess women empowerment and decision-making in the four southern states in India. According to the needs of this study, all of the data was taken from the fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5). The major objectives of this study are: (i) To identify the socio, economic and demographic characteristics of women among the four southern states (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Telangana); (ii) To compare women empowerment and decision-making in these southern states; (iii) To compare the type of violence against women in these southern states. In the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana, most of the women in the sample belong to the age group of 25-29. In Kerala majority of women belongs to the age group 35-39 and 45-49. About 23.6 percent of households are in the female headship in the three states except for Andhra Pradesh. According to household structure, more than half of them belong to the nuclear family in these four southern states. Regarding employment, more than half percent of the women were not employed in the past 12 months in all states. The percentage of women who are not employed was highest in the state of Kerala and lowest in the state of Telangana. Among the employed women majority of them are engaged in the non-agriculture sector. 91percent of women in Kerala decide how to spend their cash earnings, but in all other three southern states, this proportion is less than 80 percent. It is a positive indicator of women empowerment. Many married women are unemployed, and they do have not their own money, even though they have the decision-making power for how their husband's cash earnings are spent. The majority of decisions are made jointly by husband and wife. The women in nuclear families have more autonomy in decision-making in all the states studied. Considering socio-demographic variables, the state of Kerala has a larger proportion of women engaging in decision-making than other states.

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More than three-quarters of women in all four southern states have a personal banking or savings account. Physical violence occurs at a higher rate than sexual violence in all of the states studied. Kerala women are subjected to less physical and sexual violence. Women's educational attainment aids them in playing a substantial part in family decision-making. As a result, comprehensive measures to improve women's educational status are important.

KEYWORDS

• Women Empowerment • Educational Attainment • Decision-Making Power • Socio-Economic Status • Violence Against Women

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women is the process of upliftment of the economic, social and political status of women in society. The empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of the 21st century, not only at the national level but also at the international level. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women's conference at NAROIBI in 1985. Women play important roles in society's development. Men and women are considered two wheels of the same cart. A cart cannot move without either of the wheels; the cart like society also cannot formulate without either men or women. They are equally needed in society. Women constitute half of the population of the world. Women in Western nations enjoy equal rights and status to males in all aspects of life.

The achievement of universal primary education has been a key goal of Indian planning since independence. Continued economic development cannot be sustained with a population that has merely completed primary school; it needs a dependable supply of highly educated and skilled human capital for which a high level of educational attainment for both women and men is necessary. Higher education has the potential to empower women with knowledge and ways of understanding and manipulating the world around them. (Sunita Kishor and Kamala Gupta, 2009)

Sudatta, B. *et al.* (2015) look into the factors that influence female autonomy in different Indian states. This report examines the state of female autonomy in India and the factors that influence it. The data for the study comes from the National Family Health Survey 3 and covers the years 2005-06 across India's states. Their findings imply that women's autonomy, which is an essential indicator of a country's success, is mostly influenced by social variables. In India, social backwardness and religious conservatism have weakened women's decision-making capacity in comparison to men. The findings also suggest that a boost in household wealth may lead to an increase in female autonomy.

OBJECTIVE

Women's empowerment is an important tool for improving women's access to resources and the ability to make meaningful life decisions. It is the process of improving women's economic and social status in society while simultaneously protecting them from all forms of violence. An attempt has been made in this research to assess women empowerment and decision-making in the four southern states in India. According to the needs of this study, all of the data was gathered through secondary sources.

The major objectives of this study are:

i. To identify the socio, economic and demographic characteristics of women among the four southern states (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Telangana);

ii. To compare women empowerment and decision-making in these southern states

iii. To compare the type of violence against women in these southern states.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data for this study was taken from the fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), which was conducted during 2019-20. The NFHS data represented demographic

and health indicators among national and state populations. Interviews were open to all women aged 15 to 49 in the selected sample houses. The NFHS covers women empowerment regarding participation in three household decisions (health care for herself, household purchases, and visits to family or relatives), employment status over the last year and ownership of physical assets like bank accounts and mobile phones. The four southern states, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Telangana, were examined for this article.

States	AP	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana
Number of women	10,974	30,455	10968	27518

First, the background characteristics of women aged 15 to 49 years are examined, as well as the control over and magnitude of currently married women's financial earnings. Women's participation in their own health, household decision-making and freedom of movement are addressed in the second set. Many factors influence women's decision-making authority, including age, urban/rural residence, work status, number of live children, household structure, religion, and caste. The decision-making power of currently married women and their background factors were studied using a bivariate approach. Women's rights are fundamentally violated when they are subjected to violence. Finally, the issue of women's experiences with violence in selected southern states was discussed.

RESULTS

1. Back ground characteristics of the sample women

For the study purpose, we have taken four southern districts. The respondents are women in the reproductive age groups 15-49. Their background characteristics are shown here.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of 15-49 age group of women and their background characteristics bystates

States	AP	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana
Background characteristics				
Age group				
15-19	12.4	14.4	13.4	12.3
20-24	14.0	14.3	13.0	14.9
25-29	16.6	16.8	12.1	16.9
30-34	14.5	14.5	14.1	14.0
35-39	15.3	15.0	16.0	15.3
40-44	12.6	11.5	15.3	12.3
45-49	14.6	13.4	16.0	14.2
Total	100.0	100.0		
Female headship	18.4	23.2	23.6	23.6
Household Structure				
Nuclear	66.7	55.8	56.2	67.7
Non-nuclear	33.7	44.2	43.8	32.3
Religion				
Hindu	82.7	87.5	57.0	87.1
Muslim	7.0	10.2	24.0	9.6
Christian	10.1	1.7	19.0	3.0
Other	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.2
Caste				
SC	21.1	20.0	10.9	87.1
ST	4.1	10.2	1.8	9.6
OBC	50.3	1.7	50.3	3.0

States	AP	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana
Family size				
3-5 members	67.8	40.0	53.0	63.8
6 or more members	68.1	39.9	53.6	59.8
Schooling				
No Schooling	27.9	19.5	0.8	32.6
<5 years	5.5	5.2	1.8	3.2
5-9 years	26.9	25.1	20.5	18.7
10-11 years complete	18.5	22.7	25.8	19.0
12 or more years complete	21.2	27.5	51.2	26.5

In the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana, most of the women above 16 per cent belongs in the age group of 25-29. After that the age of women is 35-39, above 15 percent. In Kerala majority of women belongs to the age group 35-39 and 45-49. About 23.6 percent of households are in the female headship in the three states except for Andhra Pradesh. According to household structure, more than half of them belong to nuclear families in these four southern states. In Karnataka and Telangana, around 66.7 percent and 67.7 percent reside in the nuclear family. Considering the religion, more than 82 percent belong to Hindus except in Kerala. In Kerala, only 57.0 percent are Hindus, and the remaining are in Muslims and Christians. Regarding caste, about half of them (50.3 percent) are OBC in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. In Karnataka majority are in the forward caste and in Telangana, 87.1 percent are in the SC category. More than half of the percent of women (51.2) in Kerala have completed 12or more years of schooling compared to the other three South Indian States. The number of women who had never been schooled was highest in Andhra Pradesh (27.9) and Telangana (32.6 Percent).

2. Employment and control over Income

Assessing the relative status of women requires employment and control over income. The women employed for cash have financial independence and have greater access and control over resources if they are primary earners in a household. Women who worked for cash in the one year preceding the survey were also asked who mainly decides how the money they earned would be used and presented in table 2.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of 15-49 age group of women who were employed at any time in the past 12months by sector and type of earning

States	AP	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana
Employed	47.7	40.9	26.1	48.2
Not employed	52.3	59.3	73.9	51.8
Sector				
Agriculture	11.3	10.7	13.8	6.8
Non Agriculture	88.7	89.3	86.2	93.2
Type of earning				
Cash only	84.8	82.0	96.7	91.4
Cash and in-kind	3.5	8.3	2.2	2.1
In-kind only	0.9	1.6	0.1	0.4
Not paid	10.8	8.1	1.0	6.1

Table 2 shows that more than half percent of the women not employed in the past 12 months in all states.The percentage of women who are not employed was highest in the state of Kerala (73.9) and lowest in the state of Telangana (51.8). Among the employed women majority of them are engaged in the non-agriculture sector. In Kerala, 97 percent of women received only cash earnings, whereas in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, the figure is less than 90 percent. The number of women who have not received any type of earnings is highest in Andhra Pradesh (10.8 percent) followed by Karnataka (8.1 percent) and Telangana (6.1 percent).

3. Control Over Cash Earnings of Women

Women earning cash is not likely to be a sufficient condition for financial empowerment. Financial empowerment requires control over the use of one's earnings. In NFHS 5, currently

married women who were employed at any time in the 12 months preceding the survey were asked, 'Who decides how the money you earn will be used: mainly you, mainly your husband, or you and your husband jointly?. This was to measure relative control over the use of their earnings.

Table 3: Percent of married women who usually make decisions about women's and men's cash earnings

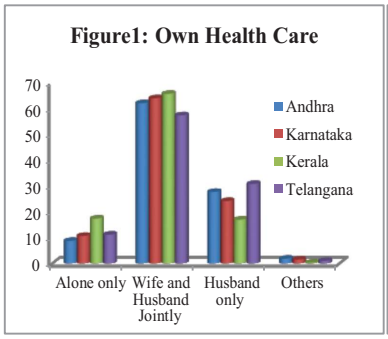
States	AP	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana
Alone or jointly with their husband decide how their own cash earnings are used	78.5	73.9	91.0	75.2
Alone or jointly with their husband decide how their husband's cash earnings are used	70.9	68.2	68.6	68.7
Earn more or about the same as their husband	37.8	36.6	32.9	38.5

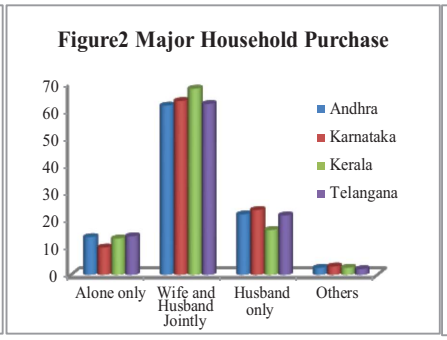
From table 3, we obtained that about 91percent of women in Kerala decide how to spend their own cash earnings, but in all other three southern states, this proportion is less than 80 percent. It is a positive indicator of women empowerment. Many married women are unemployed, and they do not have their own money, even though they have the decision-making power for how their husbands' cash earnings are spent. Here observed that in all these four southern states more than 68 percent of women have the decision making power for spending men's cash earnings. The increasing household budget allocated to child welfare is positively associated with women's participation. Women were also asked 'Would you say that the money that you earn is more than what your husband earn, less than what he earns, or about the same? This is to assess the relative magnitude of women's earnings in comparison to their husband's earnings. Here more than 30 percent of women earn more or about the same as their husband.

4. Women's Participation in Household Decisions

An empowerment perspective does not imply that women take decisions 'alone'; it minimally requires that women participate in making the decisions that affect their lives is essential. NFHS-5 collected information from currently married women on their participation in three different types of decisions: their own health care, major household purchases and visits to their family or relatives.

Percent distribution of currently married women by a person who usually makes decisions about three kinds of issues in southern India, 2019-20





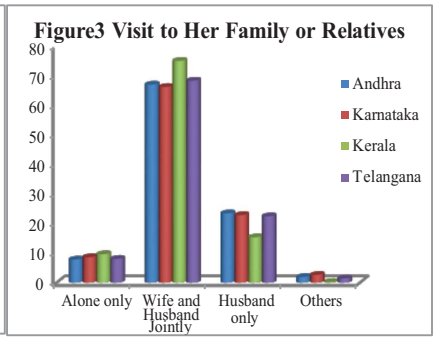


Figure 1 shows the women's limited participation in decisions about their own health care. With the exception of Telangana, more than 61 percent of households decide on their wife's health care together. In Telangana, 30.7 percent of husbands decide on their wife's health care. Excluding Kerala, the number of women who make decisions about their own health care is low in all three southern states. It will have an impact on women's overall health.

Majority of the households in all four southern states, major household purchases were made jointly by husband and wife. In all four southern states, husbands have more decision-making power when comparing wives' and husbands' alone decision-making power to purchase major household items. In short, the husband has a major role in the decision-making than the wife about the major household purchase.

The women's freedom of movement was indirectly enquired that she needed permission to visit her family and her relatives. Above 66 percent of the household in all four southern states, husband and wife jointly decide to visit the wife's family or relatives. Only less than ten percent of women in these states have made the decision to visit their family or relatives on their own.

In summarize, in all four southern states, the majority of decisions are made jointly by husband and wife. Equal participationof husband and wife at all levels of decision-making is considered for effective action in all areas of management.

Table 4: Decision making by background characteristics

Background characteristic	Own health care				Major household purchases				Visits to her family or relatives				Percentage of women allowed to go to three specified places alone1			
	Andhra	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana	Andhra	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana	Andhra	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana	Andhra	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana
Age																
15-19	58.7	69.8		49.2	69	52.7		55.7	68.9	64.8		55.8	22.8	23.1	2.8	15.6
20-24	65.4	70.5	76.2	62.6	69.9	66.9	69.5	68.5	59.1	66.2	79.3	71.2	33	29.3	10.5	24.4
25-29	64.2	70.9	76	65.4	69.4	70.1	80.9	76.6	72.7	73	80.3	70.9	37	26.6	11	36.2
30-39	74.7	76.3	86.5	68.4	77.3	75.9	82.9	76.9	76.9	77.3	85.8	77.4	46.1	35.1	17.3	45.5
40-49	73.6	76.2	82.8	74	80.8	76.4	81.7	80.6	80	76.8	85.9	82	55.2	36.9	20.8	55.4
Residence																
Urban	67.6	77.6	81	71.2	73.7	79.4	79	77.4	74.4	78.4	82.9	78.7	40.8	37.1	14.1	38
Rural	71.8	72.4	84.6	66.6	76.3	69.6	83.2	75.8	74.8	72.3	86.2	74.7	43.2	28	15.8	40.7
Employment (past 12 months)																
Employed	75.5	74.4	87.1	71.2	81.1	72.2	84.2	79.2	79.1	74	88.3	77.2	50.8	36.3	26.9	51
Not employed	65.7	74.4	81.1	65	70	74.3	79.9	73.2	70.3	75.2	83	75	34.8	28.4	10.7	29.2
Number of living children																
0	62.9	68.7	80.6	55.8	72.1	65.5	77.3	66.5	72.7	69.4	85.5	69.8	30.3	30.5	10.2	24.6
1-2	70.5	76.8	84	68.7	75.4	76.6	81.9	76.7	74.3	77.1	85	76.1	46	33.2	16.9	44
3-4	74.2	71.1	79.6	70.4	77.2	68.8	80.2	79.1	76.8	70.7	82.3	78.5	47.2	29.9	16.5	47
5 or more		68.3		78.6		65.6		73		70.8		73		26.3		36.8
Household structure1																
Nuclear	73.3	77.9	82.5	70.5	79.2	78.6	82.5	77.7	78.2	79.6	85.7	77.7	42.9	35.9	15	41.4
Non-nuclear	66.6	71.4	83	65.1	70.1	68.8	80.2	74.5	69.4	70.3	83.8	73.9	41.8	27.7	15	37.2

Table Conti...

Background characteristic	Own health care				Major household purchases				Visits to her family or relatives				Percentage of women allowed to go to three specified places alone1			
	Andhra	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana	Andhra	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana	Andhra	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana	Andhra	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana
Religion																
Hindu	69.9	75.2	84.4	68.6	74.4	74.1	82.7	77.2	73.9	75.6	86.4	76.6	43.4	33.7	16.4	41.8
Muslim	74.3	66.7	77.8	66.8	82.4	66.5	77	72.1	81.3	66.2	79.1	75.3	33.5	15.3	12.1	27.7
Christian	74.4	73.9	87.9	67.9	80.9	68.5	84.5	72	75.8	70.2	90	66.9	42.3	31.7	15.5	44.9
Caste/tribe																
Scheduled caste	70.7	73.7	84.5	70.2	74.5	70.8	79.4	78.9	72.1	75	87.1	74.1	45.5	31.3	21.6	42.9
Scheduled tribe	69.3	76.5	90.7	63.9	76	74.2	85	75.8	77.1	74.3	78.7	70.6	42.5	36.1	10	40.7
Other backward class	69.7	75.3	81.3	68.6	75.5	74.6	82.2	75.4	73.6	75.4	84.7	77.2	41.1	31.4	14.8	39.1
Other	73.1	66.9	85.4	67.4	76.7	69.1	78.9	81.1	79.3	68.3	83.9	80.3	42.8	30.1	13.3	36.8
Total	70.6	74.4	82.8	68.3	75.5	73.4	81.1	76.4	74.7	74.7	84.6	76.2	42.5	31.6	15	39.7

Women's empowerment is believed to occur only when they hold roles in decision-making bodies. Table 4shows the percentage distribution of currently married women age 15-49 that usually make specific decisions either by themselves or jointly with their spouse by their background characteristics based on NFHS-5

Women who are currently married were asked who controls decisions about their personal health care, important household purchases, and visits to family and relatives. It was found that the proportion of womenin Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala who have decision-making power over their own health care improves up to the age group of 30-39 and significant falls in the age group of 40-49. In Telangana, however, it rises rapidly with age. Women's participation in major household purchases and visits to her family and relatives grows with age in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. In Kerala, the proportion of womenwith decision-making power over major household purchases increases with age until 30-39, after which itsomewhat drops. At the same time, the proportion of women with decision-making power over visiting family members and relatives increases with age. In Karnataka, women's decision-making power improves with age in terms of household purchases, but it diminishes significantly after the age group 30-39 in terms of visiting family members.

In Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, currently married rural women have more decision-making power than urban women when it comes to their health care, major household purchases, and visiting family membersand relatives. But in Karnataka and Telangana, rural women have comparatively less autonomy.

Women have a distinct edge in terms of decision-making power when they are employed. It was discovered that currently married women who are employed in all of the selected states except Karnataka are more empowered. Women who are employed are more likely to

engage in all decision-making processes.

According to a study, women's decision-making power in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana is much higher among those who have more children. In Karnataka and Kerala, married women with one to two children have more decision-making authority than women without children, although it's worth noting that those with more than two children have a lower level of involvement in home activities.

Women in nuclear families have more autonomy in home decision-making in all of the states studied. In comparison to non-nucleus families, currently married women from nucleus families have more freedom in terms of movement.

Hindu women play a smaller influence in household decision-making in Andhra Pradesh. Women played a larger role in decision-making in Kerala among Christians. In Karnataka and Telangana, married Hindu women have more control over domestic decisions. According to the findings, scheduled tribal women in Kerala have a larger proportion of engagement in personal health care (90.7%) and major household purchases (85), but a lower share in visiting family members (78.7%).

Kerala has a larger proportion of women engaging in decision-making than other states in terms of socio-demographic variables.

5. Access to Bank or Savings accounts and the mobile phone that women themselves use

While having a bank or savings account is an indicator of women's ability to manage money.

Table 5: Distribution of women who have a bank or savings account and mobile phone that they themselves use

States	Andhra	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana
Percentage who have a bank or savingsaccount that they themselves use	81.8	88.7	78.5	84.4
Have a mobile phone that they themselves use	48.9	61.8	86.6	60

According to the table, more than three-quarters of women in all four southern states have a personal banking or savings account. Karnataka (88.7%) has the highest percentage of women with a bank or savings account, while Kerala has the least (78.5 percent).

In the case of women having a mobile phone, there are significant differences between southern states. The highest percentage of woman who has a mobile phone that they themselves use is Kerala (86.6 percent) and the lowest in Andhra Pradesh (48.9 percent). The number of the women who have bank accounts increasedafter the launch of Jan Dhan Yojana. However, the number of women who own a mobile phone has not increased significantly.

6. Experience of physical and sexual violence

Violence against women, particularly domestic or marital violence, is recognized by the World Health Organization as a major public and clinical health problem as well as a violation of women's human rights, reflecting the degree of gender inequality and discrimination against women. NFHS-5 gathered data on domestic abuse from women aged 18 to 49 about their husband's actions that caused physical, sexual, or emotional harm

Table 6: Percent of married women who have experienced any type of violence

Type of violence experienced	Andhra	Karnataka	Kerala	Telangana
Physical violence only	30.4	33.5	8.4	33.6
Sexual violence only	0.2	0.8	0.4	0.4
Physical and sexual violence	3.2	9.0	1.0	4.1
Number of women	1,233	3,035	1,178	2,962

Table 6 displays the percentage of women who have been victims of physical and sexual violence in various forms and combinations. Physical violence occurs at a higher rate than sexual violence in all of the states studied. Kerala (8.4) has a lower percentage of women who have been physically abused. All of the states analyzed had less than one percent of women who had experienced sexual violence. Karnataka had the highest number of women

who had suffered both types of violence among the states studied (9.0).

CONCLUSION

In this study, women's empowerment and decision-making capacity in the four southern districts were investigated. This analysis used data from the fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), which took place in 2019-20. Women between the ages of 15 and 49 are the respondents. The majority of women in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Telangana are between the ages of 25 and 29, where as the majority of women in Kerala belong to the age group 35-39 and 45-49. With the exception of Andhra Pradesh, 23.6 percent of families in these states are headed by a woman. Moreover, half of the people in these four southern states belong to a nuclear family. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana had the most women who had never attended school. The state of Kerala had the greatest percentage of unemployed women, while Telangana had the lowest. Kerala had the highest percentage of unemployed women, while Telangana had the lowest. In these southern states, the majority of women have the power to spend their own and their husband's cash earnings. Women's participation in decisions concerning their own health care is limited in these states. In all of the four southern states, the majority of households make joint decisions about women's health care, major household purchases, and women's freedom of movement.

Currently, married rural women in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala have more decision-making power, whereas urban women in Karnataka and Telangana have comparatively more autonomy. Working women are more likely to participate in all decision-making processes. According to a study, women with more children had more decision-making power in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. But in Karnataka and Kerala, it's worth noting that those with more than two children have less autonomy. In all of the states examined, women in nuclear households enjoy higher decision-making autonomy.

More than three-quarters of women in all four southern states have a personal banking or savings account. There are considerable variations between southern states when it comes to women owning a mobile phone. In all of the states studied, physical violence is more common than sexual violence.

In Kerala, more than half of the women have completed 12 or more years of schooling, while in the other three South Indian states, less than 30 percent of women have completed higher education. In terms of socio-demographic characteristics, Kerala has a higher proportion of women involved in decision-making than all other states. In addition, Kerala women are subjected to less physical and sexual violence.

Women's educational attainment aids them in playing a substantial part in family decision-making. As a result, comprehensive measures to improve women's educational status are important.

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