

## **Economic Empowerment of Staying Behind Women Whose Husbands have Migrated**



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**ABSTRACT:** Women's empowerment is one of the major topics of debate today. On the one side, we pledge to reduce gender inequality, talk about their fundamental rights, and make efforts to make them empowered and on the other side, several cases of their exploitation and extortion come across in our family and society. The male-dominant society and mindset are assumed to be the most notorious cause of gender inequality. In this paper, we try to analyse women's empowerment in the absence of male members. Male out-migration is common everywhere and largely prevailed in Indian rural society. Hence, the empowerment of 'staying behind women' whose husbands have migrated is analysed through the NFHS-5 data by using the z-test of difference of proportion. The result shows that 'staying behind women' are significantly empowered in many aspects including decisions over their own health, control over using their money, visiting relatives' houses, household purchases, and others.

**KEYWORDS:** migration, economic empowerment, rural India, staying behind women, households

### **INTRODUCTION**

The standing of women in a society, which impacts their access to social and economic possibilities, and the growth of that society are both strongly influenced by women's empowerment, which is a key problem in the developing world. Many attempts to conceptualize women's empowerment have been undertaken since the discussion on gender inequality began. It is described in Naila Kabeer's study as "a process through which women gain the capacity for exercising a strategic form of agency in relation to their own lives as well as in relation to the larger structure of constraint that positioned as subordinating to men" (Kabeer, 1999). "Women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and determine choices; their rights to have access to opportunities and resources; their rights to have the power to control their own lives both inside and outside of the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social changes to create a more just and social and economic order, nationally and internationally" are the five elements that the United Nations (2001) outlined as essential to women's empowerment. Economic empowerment includes the economic aspect, which is evident in the current policy paradigm. The need to encourage women's economic independence was also mentioned in the Beijing Platform. One could argue that women cannot be empowered without economic independence. Having access to economic opportunities and resources is necessary for economic empowerment as well as social and political empowerment. To realize women's rights and accomplish larger development goals such as economic growth, poverty reduction, health, education, and welfare, it is vital to empower women. The UNDP aimed to expand on the five elements listed by the UN Taskforce, according to which women's empowerment may be accomplished through expanding their economic prospects, enhancing their legal standing, and ensuring that their voices are heard and included in economic decision-making.

Women's economic empowerment is described as a "process, which increases women's real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in society" by Tornqvist and Schmitz (2009). Women's economic empowerment can be achieved through equal access to control over critical economic resources and opportunities and the elimination of structural gender inequalities in the labour market including a better share of unpaid care work. The question of women's empowerment is related to how women develop in terms of education, employment, health, quality of life, and decision-making ability. Empowerment does not necessarily mean winning elections to public offices; rather, it must primarily involve women at the family level, allowing them to take control of their own lives and make decisions for themselves and their families. Strengthening economic empowerment is another effective way to advance gender equality and women's rights. In accordance with the Beijing Declaration from 1995, equality and progress cannot be achieved without women being fully empowered and participating in all aspects of society on an equal footing, including decision-making. (Source: DAC 1998). The process of empowerment, in the opinion of Schuler and Hashemi (1993), starts at the level of a woman's individual consciousness and externalizes through increased physical mobility, paid work, a significant role in the household, and ultimately, meaningful participation in the larger community.

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### **Women's economic empowerment: an Indian perspective**

In Indian society, women have a lower standing than their male counterparts. The current patriarchal systems ensure that women are oppressed (through their roles as mothers, homemakers, and unpaid household workers). It has been shown in several research (Browning and Chiappori 1998, Duflo 2003, Blumberg 2005) that economic issues play a significant role in the empowerment of women. However, economic considerations alone won't cause this given the cultural and societal restrictions placed on women in India. Other development activities, such as education, political quotas, awareness raising, and property rights, are just as crucial for empowering women (Malhotra and Mather 1997; Deshmukh-Ranadive 2003). Economic interventions are significant, but they are not the only means of empowerment.

Women's empowerment may be demonstrated by their ability to make decisions on their own health, mobility, and household expenditures, as well as their access to jobs and education. According to several studies, women may be empowered in some areas of life but not in others (Hashemi et al. 1996, Malhotra and Mather 1997, Kishor 2000). Here, the impact of a woman's husband's relocation is investigated. As a result of a male family member moving away, families must alter their lifestyle and take on more responsibility (Gulati 1993). The wife is left with the in-laws or with the parents and other relatives, which is a significant consequence of marital separation. Rarely are the mothers and kids left behind by themselves (Gulati 1993, citing Parasuraman 1986). The immediate aftermath of the migrant's initial departure is the time when assistance and direction are most needed (Gulati 1993).

### **The rationale for the study**

Women's autonomy and decision-making capability are severely affected by the migration of male members. The likelihood of one or more family members migrating will have an impact on how the family works. Family structure will be affected by the absence of certain family members, whether that absence is permanent or only temporary (Hugo 1987). In order to keep the family going while the husband is away, the woman may step into some of his obligations, such as managing additional agricultural duties or serving as the de facto home leader (Colfer 1985, Rodenburg 1993). For the women left behind, the migrant's absence from the home can have major social and economic repercussions, particularly if he serves as "the head of the family" (Sekher 1997). However, there are a variety of opinions on how the movement of males has changed the standing of women in the home. On the one hand, it is argued that women should have greater authority and influence in decision-making (Findley and Williams 1991), while on the other, it is noted that the exodus of males has little to no impact on women's decision-making abilities (Shaheed 1981). Women may gain autonomy without males, but they also face increased stress and susceptibility, a heavier workload, and a higher likelihood of intervention from extended family members. Therefore, the movement of males may have an impact on home cultural norms to the advantage or disadvantage of women (Jolly et al. 2003). In this paper, the empowerment of staying behind women is analysed when their husbands are migrated. The study is based on the National Family Household Survey Data of Round 5.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Empowerment, in Naila Kabeer's opinion, contains both theoretical and practical potential and deserves to be more than just a catchphrase. For her, empowerment must be deconstructed via the prism of power in order to be considered. She adds that the multifaceted nature of power suggests that empowerment tactics need to be based on 'the power inside' as a fundamental instrument to manage resources, set agendas, and make decisions. Consequently, she took control of her own life's events.

According to Sreelatha Batliwala (1993), the word "power" is ingrained in the phrase "empowerment," suggesting that shifting the balance of power in a particular culture is the goal of empowerment. Power is the ability to manage resources and ideologies. The process of empowerment emphasizes the redistribution of power, especially within the family.

It is presumable that employment and women's economic empowerment are related. On the other hand, it is a known reality that women's labour and work have not been adequately recognized and have mostly gone unnoticed. Patriarchal concepts of the hierarchy have always limited and regulated women's labour, and all of these institutions of hierarchical control operate under the cover of culture, norms, and values. (Bhattacharya). year missing

Numerous measures have been used to gauge the empowerment of women. Education (Berti et al., 2004; Smith and Haddad 2000), control over income (Andersen, 2012; Berti et al., 2004; Leroy et al., 2009), gender of household head (Kennedy and Peters, 1992), and control over assets at the time of marriage (Maluccio and Quisumbing, 2003) are a few of the previously used indicators of women's empowerment. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), which measures gender inequality globally, is an example of a multidimensional indicator. Health, education, economic involvement, and political empowerment are the four major outcomes that are measured (World Economic Forum, 2014). In order to protect women's rights, give them control over their lives, and help them find their position in society, economic engagement is essential. So long as women are allowed to participate, progress can be inclusive.

Amartya Sen came up with the phrase "missing women," which perfectly describes the world in which we live. The focus of this word is on how gender inequality still exists in society. Six million women are reported missing each year, according to a World Bank report (2011), of these, 23 per cent are never born, 10 per cent vanish in their early infancy, 21 per cent do so throughout their reproductive years, and 38 per cent do so after the age of 60.

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### DATA AND METHODOLOGY

To examine the empowerment of 'staying behind women' whose husbands have migrated, the National Family Household Survey (NFHS) Round 5 data is used. The data is available on all India levels with a total sample size of 724115. The NFHS data doesn't have any direct variable on staying behind women and therefore, we need to filter out this variable from other available variables. First, the married women are filtered out by using the variable on 'status of marriage' and then, those married women are filtered out who are not living with their husbands for 1 year or more at the place of residence. It is also ensured here that their husbands have no other wives so the migration of husbands can be ensured. The final data on women we get is the data on 'staying behind women' which has a sample size of 6,355.

To examine the empowerment of 'staying behind women' we also need to get the data on women who are staying with their husbands and by filtering out with other variables, we get their sample size of 66,377. By comparing the empowerment-specific variables from these two samples of women, we can effectively determine whether the husband's migration leads to the empowerment of women.

The following variables are selected from the NFHS-5 as an indicator of women's empowerment-

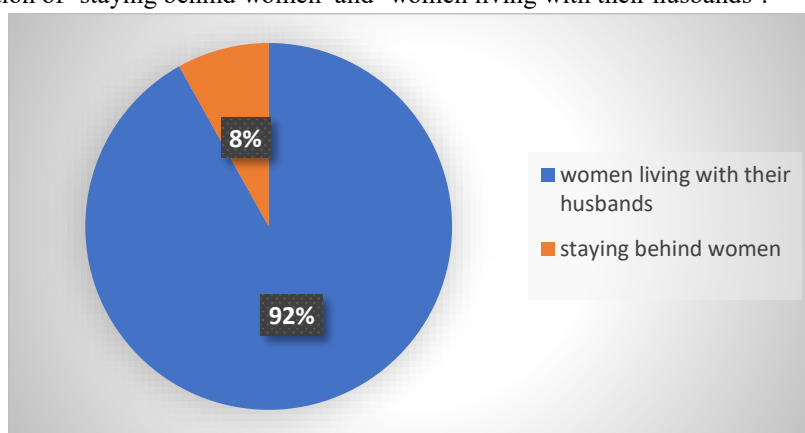
- Control over usage of own money
- Go to the market alone
- Go to health facilities
- Go outside the village
- Decision over own healthcare
- Control over household purchase
- Go to relatives
- Control over husband's earnings
- Usage of mobile phone
- Financial transactions through mobile
- Having a bank account
- Usage of internet

All these variables are coded as 1 or 0 where 1 for a 'yes' response and 0 for a 'no' response. Thus, all these indicators are categorical variables with binary outcomes – 1 and 0.

To compare the status of women's empowerment between 'staying behind women' and 'women living with their husbands' the z-test for the difference of proportion is used. All the analysis is conducted in the SPSS Ver. 25 and results and presented through the tables and graphs.

### RESULTS AND ANALYSES

Graph 1 shows the proportion of 'staying behind women' and 'women living with their husbands'.



**Graph 1: Proportion of staying behind women**

In the sample, around 8% of women are categorized as 'staying behind women' and the rest of 92% are women living with their husbands.

Table 1 shows the proportion of empowerment indicators among 'staying behind women' and 'women living with their husbands.'

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**Table 1: Proportion of empowerment indicators (in percent)**

Empowerment indicators	Staying behind women	Women living with their husbands
Control over usage of own money	59.5	52.2
Go to the market alone	62.0	58.7
Go to health facilities	58.6	53.2
Go outside the village	56.3	51.5
Decision over own healthcare	18.3	8.7
Control over household purchase	12.7	6.4
Go to relatives	13.9	7.1
Control over husband's earnings	10.3	5.3
Usage of mobile phone	77.0	54.0
Financial transactions through mobile	16.9	19.7
Having a bank account	85.0	80.0
Usage of internet	35.4	26.4

As we can observe that the proportion of 'staying behind women' is higher than 'women living with their husbands' across all the empowerment indicators except the 'financial transaction through mobile'. It is due to the reason that the financial transaction can be successfully done by those who are literate and have adequate knowledge of banking services. Therefore, instead of migration of husbands, the financial literacy is the major cause of financial transaction through mobile and hence, it is a weak indicator of empowerment. The preliminary analysis shows that the migration of husbands provides a larger autonomy and decision-making power to women in many aspects including the healthcare, purchase for households, visiting outside the home, and others. Thus, the empowerment seems to improve in 'staying behind women'.

Table 2 shows the result of 'z test for the difference of proportion' between the 'staying behind women' and 'women living with their husbands' for all indicators on economic empowerment.

**Table 2: Result of z test for the difference of proportion**

Empowerment indicators	Difference in proportion	Std. error	Z score	95% confidence interval	
				Lower limit	Upper limit
Control over usage of own money	7.321	0.006	11.18***	0.082	0.058
Go to the market alone	3.356	0.006	4.73***	0.041	0.017
Go to health facilities	5.471	0.006	7.68***	0.060	0.036
Go outside the village	4.722	0.006	6.41***	0.052	0.027
Decision over own healthcare	9.567	0.005	26.34***	0.106	0.088
Control over household purchase	6.254	0.004	20.76***	0.075	0.058
Go to relatives	6.821	0.003	21.34***	0.080	-0.063
Control over husband's earnings	4.987	0.004	17.41***	0.058	-0.044
Usage of mobile phone	7.062	0.002	11.03***	0.013	0.053
Financial trans. through mobile	0.044	0.005	0.021	0.032	0.056
Having a bank account	5.063	0.004	13.21***	0.026	0.054
Usage of internet	9.082	0.001	15.67***	0.076	0.095

\*\*\*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05; \*p<0.1

The 'decision over own healthcare' and 'usage of internet' are two empowerment indicators where the 'staying behind women' are far ahead of 'women living with their husbands'. The percentage increment in proportion of 'staying behind women' in these two indicators are 9.57 and 9.08 respectively. The next major empowerment indicators where the 'staying behind women' are ahead of 'women living with their husbands' are 'control over usage of own money' and 'usage of mobile phone' with percentage increment of 7.32 and 7.06 respectively. The empowerment indicators such as 'control over household purchase' and 'go to relatives' are other areas where the 'staying behind women' are better-off than 'women living with their husbands'. In rest of other empowerment indicators, the 'staying behind women' are significantly ahead of 'women living with their husbands'. Overall, it is concluded that the 'staying behind women' get more empowered in comparison to 'women living with their husbands'. Nonetheless, the migration of husbands or any male member adversely affect the family structure and its members. Children are mostly affected by the migration of their fathers as they are left with lack of love and affection. Women, who mostly depend upon their husbands or male members for most of household works, find themselves devastated and alone. However, other male members in the family including elders extend their support but they can't replace husbands of 'stayed behind women' in support, care, and solving family-

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related issues. Perhaps, the lack of adequate supports and care due to migration of husbands and male members make the women empowered to take decision in various household-related issues and encourage them to stand strong to take care of their family, children, and themselves.

### CONCLUSION

The analysis suggests that the migration of male members or husbands of women leaves the 'staying behind women' empowered in many aspects. Women get more empowered in deciding about their own healthcare, household purchases, spending of own money, going to relatives' houses and others. There are two major causes of such empowerment. First, due to the migration of male members, male dominance in family setup gets reduced and therefore, women find themselves more free and autonomous in making household-related decisions. Second, when male members are migrated, the family structure also changes. The kinship may still remain in the hands of elder women, but unmarried women or 'staying behind women' find themselves in higher positions in the family. They partially or fully take the position of men in several household activities such as household purchasing, community meetings, looking after the health and education of family members including children, and taking care of elders and the disabled. Overall, the 'staying behind women' gets empowered. However, after the return of migrated men, their empowerment is usually reduced. Hence, the empowerment of women due to the migration of male members is a time-bound phenomenon that can be made permanent through better education and sensitization of society and families for gender equality and women's rights.

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