

**WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT –  
AN EMPIRICAL STUDY AMONG DOCTORAL RESEARCH SCHOLARS OF  
MADURAI KAMARAJ UNIVERSITY**

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**Abstract:** Education and empowerment are two concepts that usually go hand-in-hand. Empowerment through education can be continuous holistic process to achieve emancipation. Empowerment does not merely concern with personal identity but brings out a broader analysis of human rights and social justice. Educated women have greater role to play in the emancipation of women and those who are in higher education have wider scope in the society to overcome social constructs of family practices, religious myths, the social and sexual division of labour, marriage customs, internalized beliefs, and expectations that are constraining the women's progress. The present paper is an attempt to analyse the views of the doctoral research scholars of Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai relating education for women's empowerment. The study reveals the fact that education and empowerment are correlated to each other and empowerment can be more effective when it is coupled with sensitization, realization of power within, and awareness.

**Keywords:** Education, Empowerment, Power relations, Women's education.

Education contributes to the development as it improves the quality of life, promotes good health, expands opportunities to employment, and increases productivity in the market and non-market work as well as facilitating social and political participation [1]. Education provides a wide range of opportunities to individuals through exposure to new ideas, new ways of perceiving and visualising the world, advancing self image and increasing decision-making role and capacity at the individual, familial and at the community level. Formal education is usually provided in the society through the schools, colleges and universities. Education is important for everyone, but it is a critical area of empowerment for girls and women. Education is not only an entry point to opportunity but also because the educational achievements of women have positive ripple effects within the family and across generations. Educated women are in the process of empowerment because through education they enhance their knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in the development process. Empowerment through education is ideally seen as a continuous holistic process with cognitive, psychological, economic and political dimensions in order to achieve emancipation. Given the complexity of political, societal and international interrelations, one has to systematically think about the strategies and concrete proposals for future action if one hopes to achieve such a goal [2].

The present paper is an attempt to analyse the views of the doctoral research scholars of Madurai Kamaraj University regarding the role of education particularly higher education in the empowerment of women. The study was conducted among 250 scholars who register for their Ph.D. degree as full-time scholar or who remained as the project staff and

perform their research in a regular basis. List was enumerated of the scholars who had registered for Ph.D. programme in the last three years (2011-2014) in various departments and the research institutions.

**Table – I Respondent's details**

S. No.	No. of scholars		Total
	Male	Female	
Arts	98	123	221
Sciences	111	86	197
<b>Total</b>	209	209	418

As the size of the universe is 418, the data collection was initiated with the idea of census method. When the scholars are approached it was understood that the scholars who are in field and who are in the verge of submitting the thesis were not able in the respective institutions. So they were left away from the study and hence size of the respondent arrived at the end of data collection was 250. The information for the study was collected from the research scholars using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was pre-tested for the validity and reliability. The information in the questionnaire are coded and data are fed in the software – Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The simple and cross percentage tables were generated taking gender as the independent variable.

**Presentation of the findings**

Madurai Kamaraj University (MKU), (originally known as Madurai University) was named after the historical city of Madurai, was inaugurated on 6th February 1966. The Directorate of Distance Education of the university was established in 1971. In 1978 the name of the university was changed to Madurai Kamaraj University.

**Table - II Distribution of the respondents on the basis of Social profile**

Features			Members (N = 250)			
			No. of Respondents		Total	%
			Male	Female		
1	Age	Upto 25 yrs	23	50	73	29.2
		26 to 30 yrs	72	75	147	58.8
		31 to 35 yrs	12	10	22	8.8
		Above 36 yrs	2	6	8	3.2
Total			109	141	250	100
2	Mean age in years		27.42			
3	Religion	Hindu	99	110	209	83.6
		Islam	0	9	9	3.6
		Christian	10	22	32	12.8
Total			109	141	250	100
4	Community	SC / ST	32	28	60	24.0
		MBC	34	26	60	24.0
		BC	41	81	122	48.8
		Other communities	2	6	8	3.2
Total			109	141	250	100
5	Marital Status	Married	12	49	61	24.4
		Unmarried	95	91	186	74.4
		Separated	2	1	3	1.2
Total			109	141	250	100
6	Locality	Rural	87	74	161	64.4
		Urban	22	67	89	35.6
Total			109	141	250	100

**Source: Data collected from the field**

Among the 250 respondents, the gender wise distribution shows that there were 56% of female respondents and 44% of male respondents. In age wise distribution majority (58.8%) of the respondents come under the age category of 26 to 30 years and followed by 29.2 % of the respondents in the age group of upto 25 years. The mean age of the respondents was 27.42 years. In the study 83.6% of the respondents are from the Hindu religion and 12.8% of the respondents follow Christianity.

Community wise distribution elucidates that majority of the respondents come under the category of Backward Communities i.e., 48.8% and Most Backward Communities and Scheduled Castes are having the equal representation i.e., 24% each. Regarding marital status 74.4% of the respondents are unmarried and 24.4% of the respondents are married. 64.4% of the respondents are from the rural areas and 35.6% are from urban setup.

**Table - III Discipline-wise distribution of the respondents**

Discipline of the respondents	Members (N = 250)			
	No. of Respondents		Total	%
	Male	Female		
Arts	51	67	118	47.2
Science	58	74	132	52.8
Total	109	141	250	100

**Source: Data collected from the field**

Among the respondents majority of them are from science disciplines i.e. 52.8% and rest of the 47.2% of the respondents are from the Arts disciplines. There were more female respondents taking doctoral degrees irrespective of arts or science disciplines. This was a positive sign in the process of women's empowerment.

The information related to empowerment and the views on relationship between empowerment and education are collected from the scholars using five-point scale which was designed using the indicators of empowerment and its link with education. For each statement the respondent has to respond as **strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and**

**strongly disagree.** The collected information using the scale were presented as follows.

To link women’s education with empowerment there should be a base of acceptance, recognition and appreciation for women’s education. Among the respondents majority of them (60.4%) strongly agree that women’s education is accepted but there was a slight reduction (54.4%) in strong agreement when it comes to recognition and there was yet another trivial decrease (54%) when it comes to appreciation. But the wave of the acceptance, recognition and appreciation seem to be more positive in the scale only 8% to 10% of disagreements. Considering educated women as the asset to the society also have a similar trend in the scale as 54% have strong

agreement. Educated women can develops the society and going hand with the India’s view on the ‘women as change agent’ 83.4% agree this with 60.2% having strong agreement. But disagreement for asset and develops society exceeds 10% mark. Strong disagreement on educated women developing society was responded by female (1.2%). Response on linking empowerment and education did not have an overwhelming agreement response but 44% of the respondents and 38% of the respondents strongly agree and agree respectively. For this statement men have more negation as 1.6% disagreement and 1.2% strong disagreement. Apart from this there was a neutral category which ranges from 11% to 14% remain as the non reactors.

**Table – IV Respondent’s view on Women in Higher Education**

Women in Higher Education	SA		Total I	A		Total	N		Total I	DA		Total I	SDA		Total I	Grand total
	M	F		M	F		M	F		M	F		M	F		
Accepted	56 (22.4 )	95 (38.0 )	<b>151</b> <b>(60.4)</b>	29 (11.6 )	31 (12.4 )	<b>60</b> <b>(24)</b>	19 (7.6 )	12 (4.8 )	<b>31</b> <b>(12.4)</b>	4 (1.6 )	2 (0.8 )	<b>6</b> <b>(2.4)</b>	1 (0.4 )	1 (0.4 )	<b>2</b> <b>(0.8)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>
Recognized	56 (22.4 )	81 (32.4 )	<b>137</b> <b>(54.4)</b>	30 (12)	42 (16.8 )	<b>72</b> <b>(28.8)</b>	20 (8)	16 (6.4 )	<b>36</b> <b>(14.4)</b>	1 (0.4 )	2 (0.8 )	<b>3</b> <b>(1.2)</b>	2 (0.8 )	0 (0)	<b>2</b> <b>(0.8)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>
Appreciated	49 (19.6 )	86 (34.4 )	<b>135</b> <b>(54)</b>	38 (15.2 )	35 (16)	<b>73</b> <b>(29.2)</b>	19 (7.6 )	14 (5.6 )	<b>33</b> <b>(13.2)</b>	2 (0.8 )	5 (2)	<b>7</b> <b>(2.8)</b>	1 (0.4 )	1 (0.4 )	<b>2</b> <b>(0.8)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>
Asset to the society	51 (20.4 )	84 (33.6 )	<b>135</b> <b>(54)</b>	31 (12.4 )	41 (16.4 )	<b>72</b> <b>(28.8)</b>	23 (9.2 )	8 (3.2 )	<b>31</b> <b>(12.4)</b>	3 (1.2 )	7 (2.8 )	<b>10</b> <b>(4)</b>	1 (0.4 )	1 (0.4 )	<b>2</b> <b>(0.8)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>
Develops society	55 (22)	97 (38.8 )	<b>152</b> <b>(60.2)</b>	28 (11.2 )	30 (12)	<b>58</b> <b>(23.2)</b>	22 (8.8 )	7 (2.8 )	<b>29</b> <b>(11.6)</b>	3 (1.2 )	3 (1.2 )	<b>7</b> <b>(2.8)</b>	1 (0.4 )	3 (1.2 )	<b>4</b> <b>(1.6)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>
Education & empowerment related	44 (17.6 )	66 (26.4 )	<b>110</b> <b>(44)</b>	37 (14.8 )	58 (23.2 )	<b>95</b> <b>(38)</b>	21 (8.4 )	14 (5.6 )	<b>35</b> <b>(14)</b>	4 (1.6 )	3 (1.2 )	<b>7</b> <b>(2.8)</b>	3 (1.2 )	0 (0)	<b>3</b> <b>(1.2)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>

SA - strongly agree, A - agree, N - neutral, DA - disagree and SDA - strongly disagree

Values in the parenthesis are percentage

Source: Data collected from the field

**Table – V View of the Respondents on ‘Higher Education – Tool for women’s empowerment’**

Women in Higher Education	SA		Total al	A		Total al	N		Total al	DA		Total al	SDA		Total al	Grand total
	M	F		M	F		M	F		M	F		M	F		
Take better decisions	52 (20.8)	94 (37.6)	<b>146</b> <b>(58.4)</b>	27 (10.8)	31 (12.4)	<b>58</b> <b>(23.2)</b>	19 (7.6)	8 (3.2)	<b>27</b> <b>(10.8)</b>	10 (4)	7 (2.8)	<b>17</b> <b>(6.8)</b>	1 (0.4)	1 (0.4)	<b>2</b> <b>(0.8)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>
Create better future	59 (23.6)	97 (38.8)	<b>156</b> <b>(62.4)</b>	25 (10)	32 (12.8)	<b>57</b> <b>(22.8)</b>	16 (6.4)	8 (3.2)	<b>24</b> <b>(9.6)</b>	6 (2.4)	3 (1.2)	<b>9</b> <b>(3.6)</b>	3 (1.2)	1 (0.4)	<b>4</b> <b>(1.6)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>
Trouble shooters/ Problem solving	32 (12.8)	47 (18.8)	<b>79</b> <b>(31.6)</b>	31 (12.4)	36 (14.4)	<b>67</b> <b>(26.8)</b>	29 (11.6)	25 (10)	<b>54</b> <b>(21.6)</b>	9 (3.6)	22 (8.8)	<b>31</b> <b>(12.4)</b>	8 (3.2)	11 (4.4)	<b>19</b> <b>(7.6)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>
Mobile	36 (14.4)	47 (18.8)	<b>83</b> <b>(33.2)</b>	32 (12.8)	54 (21.6)	<b>86</b> <b>(34.4)</b>	31 (12.4)	24 (9.6)	<b>55</b> <b>(22)</b>	5 (2)	14 (5.6)	<b>19</b> <b>(7.6)</b>	5 (2)	2 (0.8)	<b>7</b> <b>(2.8)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>

More independent	42 (16.8)	49 (19.6)	<b>91</b> <b>(36.4)</b>	30 (12)	46 (18.4)	<b>76</b> <b>(30.4)</b>	27 (10.8)	35 (14.0)	<b>62</b> <b>(24.8)</b>	7 (2.8)	8 (3.2)	<b>15</b> <b>(6)</b>	3 (1.2)	3 (1.2)	<b>6</b> <b>(2.4)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>
Emerge as good leaders	34 (13.6)	69 (27.6)	<b>103</b> <b>(41.2)</b>	36 (14.4)	50 (20)	<b>86</b> <b>(34.4)</b>	29 (11.6)	19 (7.6)	<b>48</b> <b>(19.2)</b>	5 (2)	3 (1.2)	<b>8</b> <b>(3.2)</b>	5 (2)	0 (0)	<b>5</b> <b>(2.0)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>
Women realize power within	47 (18.8)	82 (32.8)	<b>129</b> <b>(51.6)</b>	38 (15.2)	43 (17.2)	<b>81</b> <b>(32.4)</b>	16 (6.4)	8 (3.2)	<b>24</b> <b>(9.6)</b>	4 (1.6)	8 (3.2)	<b>12</b> <b>(4.8)</b>	4 (1.6)	0 (0)	<b>4</b> <b>(1.6)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>

**SA - strongly agree, A - agree, N - neutral, DA - disagree and SDA - strongly disagree Values in the parenthesis are percentage**

**Source: Data collected from the field**

Empowerment as a concept has many indicator of which decision making, trouble shooting or problem solving, being mobile, more independent, emerging as good leaders, realizing the ‘power within’ and create a better future for themselves, family and community are listed into statements and presented for response from the research scholars.

Education enhances decision making capacity was agreed by 81.6% of the respondents which indicate there was a strong scope for educations role in empowerment. Strong agreement was from 58.4% and rest of the 23.2% agreed. Educated women can create a better future was agreed by majority 62.4 - strongly agree and 22.8% agree totaling 85.2%. Regarding problem solving it was found the respondents show comparatively lesser agreement that is 31.6% strongly agreed while 26.8% agreed. This show the fact that even though they were able to take decisions but when comes to problem solving they do not find it comfortable as the patriarchal structure of the society seeks the solution mainly from male rather than female. The age old institutionalization is yet to be broken using the strategies like education. For being mobile too the response is not more welcoming (33.2% - SA and 34.4% - A) as it was for future and decision. But being mobile is an important component for empowerment as the accessibility increase with the mobility. 66.8% of the respondents stated that they agree that women’s education had made them more independent than before as they take their own

decision and they earn their money which was good way towards empowerment process that is enhancing their quality and realizing the potential. According to majority of the respondents leadership quality among women was enhanced through educational attainment. 41.2% strongly agree for it and 34.4% agreed the statement which was an indicator that women are ready to take up administrative and leadership roles.

Jo Rowlands (1999) [3] discussed empowerment in terms of power relations. Empowerment is more than simply creating access to decision making; it also includes the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to occupy that decision making space, and realizing the ‘power within’. Full scope to full range of human abilities and potential is interpreted in ‘power within’. The respondents were asked that whether education enhances or equip women to realize ‘power within’. The result reveals that 84% agree that education helps in realizing their power within. Power within is more an individual level realization about their ability which includes a sense of rights, dignity and voice, along with basic capabilities like self-confidence etc. Among the respondents who stated strong agreement i.e. 51.6%, there were more of women - 32.4%. This was a welcoming note with positive move in the process of empowerment in terms of power relation which in future makes them to organize as ‘power with’ and exercise their ‘power to’.

**Table – VI Distribution of the Respondents on the relationship between Higher education and capacity building**

Higher Education enhances	SA		Tot al	A		Tot al	N		Tot al	DA		Tot al	SDA		Tot al	Grand total
	M	F		M	F		M	F		M	F		M	F		
Capacity	45 (18)	88 (33)	<b>129</b> <b>(51)</b>	34 (13)	45 (18)	<b>79</b> <b>(31)</b>	24 (9.6)	8 (3)	<b>32</b> <b>(12)</b>	4 (1)	4 (1)	<b>8</b> <b>(3.2)</b>	2 (0)	2 (0)	<b>2</b> <b>(0.8)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>

		6)	<b>6)</b>	6)		<b>6)</b>		2)	<b>8)</b>	6)	6)	)	8)	8)	)	
Administrative qualities	51 (20.4)	71 (28.4)	<b>122</b> <b>(48.8)</b>	35 (14)	50 (20)	<b>85</b> <b>(34)</b>	17 (6.8)	16 (6.4)	<b>33</b> <b>(13.2)</b>	5 (2)	4 (1.6)	<b>9</b> <b>(3.6)</b>	1 (0.4)	1 (0.4)	<b>1</b> <b>(0.4)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>
Vision & mission	40 (16)	80 (32)	<b>120</b> <b>(48)</b>	36 (14.4)	47 (18.8)	<b>83</b> <b>(33.2)</b>	26 (10.4)	11 (4.4)	<b>37</b> <b>(14.8)</b>	5 (2)	2 (0.8)	<b>7</b> <b>(2.8)</b>	2 (0.8)	2 (0.8)	<b>3</b> <b>(1.2)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>
Women's status	44 (17.6)	91 (36.4)	<b>135</b> <b>(54)</b>	37 (14.8)	33 (13.2)	<b>70</b> <b>(28)</b>	22 (8.8)	10 (4)	<b>32</b> <b>(12.8)</b>	5 (2)	5 (2)	<b>10</b> <b>(4)</b>	1 (0.4)	1 (0.4)	<b>3</b> <b>(1.2)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>
Family status	47 (18.8)	90 (36)	<b>137</b> <b>(54.8)</b>	34 (13.6)	37 (14.8)	<b>71</b> <b>(28.4)</b>	22 (8.8)	7 (2.8)	<b>29</b> <b>(11.6)</b>	5 (2)	6 (2.4)	<b>11</b> <b>(4.4)</b>	1 (0.4)	1 (0.4)	<b>2</b> <b>(0.8)</b>	<b>250</b> <b>(100)</b>

SA - strongly agree, A - agree, N - neutral, DA - disagree and SDA - strongly disagree

Values in the parenthesis are percentage

Source: Data collected from the field

The aim of the higher education is to enhance the capacity of the individual to face the society. The respondents feel that their overall capacity enhances (83.2% agree for this) when they were educated and particularly when they take up higher education. 82.8% agree that their administrative capacity has direct related to their administrative qualities and skills. Vision and mission in the life make the life more systematic and makes the goals and objectives of the life clear this was agreed by 81.2% of the respondents. It is to be noted that the above said qualities of enhancing capacity, admin qualities, vision and mission was agreed more by female respondents than male. So the explicit empowering process was working among the women through education.

The educational status of the nation is one of the important indicators of development, thus the educational status of the individual has its impact at the personal as well as at the familial level. Particularly women's education is associated with the familial education by several national leaders like Jawharlal Nehru. Women's status enhances was agreed by 82% of the respondents. 83.2% respondents agreed that the family status enhances an individual in the family goes for education specifically higher education.

In all the above said scaling there were a group of respondents who place them safely in the neutral zone. There were some who disagree with the process and aspects of empowerment but it was relatively very low. With regard to the education tool for women's empowerment there were more of disagreements compared to other aspects of the

scaling. This ranges from 6% - 20%. This was more in the problem solving aspect which have direct link with the patriarchal power structure of the society.

#### Conclusion

In the process of expansion of the educational system large entry of hitherto excluded has represented a structural change, but the structures of inequality is yet to be overthrown. Education system has to function as a tool to mediate inequalities on the basis of class, caste and gender. Issues of equality, social access, and quality of education have created a change in the enrollment of women in higher education and there was reasonable increase too. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Studies reveal that education of women has a link with the variety of demographic indicators like fertility, infant and child mortality and morbidity [4] and [5]. Women education in India is the need of the hour for a better future for our children and better living standards for our countrymen. The capacities and qualities of women have to be recognized. More the participation of women in higher education is essential for effective empowerment.

The study concludes that women's education is welcomed but there were certain areas where the question of overcoming inequality in the power structure still exists. This was because the educational advancement of women might have created functional change but the need of structural change will speed up the process of empowerment. Higher education is considered as a pathway for women empowerment, but in reality higher

education can also creates problems for women like violence against them in place of work etc. Education and empowerment are directly correlated aspects, but the sensitization, realization of power within,

awareness etc. of the women can only empower the women or else that reality will be always distorted.

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