

## **Women Empowerment: Perspectives of Social Work Students**

**Veena S Algur**

*Lecturer, Department of Community Medicine  
BLDE University's Shri B M Patil Medical College  
Hospital and Research Center, Vijayapur, Karnataka, India  
veenaalgur@gmail.com*

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### ***Abstract***

*Women empowerment is the need of the hour. It is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent need based decisions on their own personal development, which reflects in their quality of life and contributes to family welfare, community development, and also leads to national development. In order to understand what is women empowerment there is need to probe what is in the mind set of the people. The current study attempts to explore the perception of social work students, about empowerment of women with empirical evidences. Social work education at Vijayapura city, the study area has a history of about one decade. It reveals that 88 students studying in the third semester; 68 (77%) students were included in the study comprising of 42(62 %) female and 26 (38 %) male respondents.*

**Key words:** *Women Empowerment, Social Work Students, Perspectives, Social Work Education, Social Work Profession.*

### **Introduction:**

The concept of empowerment is invoked in many contexts like human rights, basic needs, capacity building, skill acquisition etc. Empowerment is a multi dimensional process which enables women to realize their potential in all spheres of life. Women empowerment is a global issue, which has gained momentum in recent decades. In India, besides ratification of international conventions, there are provisions in the constitution and several legislative Acts have been passed to ensure women empowerment. It, however, appears that on this front the situation on the ground is far from satisfactory.

Empowerment is about change, choice, and power. Women empowerment refers to women's capacity to increase self reliance the direction of change by gaining control over material and non material resources (Moser, 1989). Keller and Mbwe (1991) described women empowerment as a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination. Women's empowerment has become a critical pre-requisite of the socio economic development of any community.

Empowerment through micro finance is identified and measured in various dimensions; impact on decision making, on self confidence of women, on their status at home, on family relationships and incidence of domestic violence, on their involvement in community, on their political empowerment and rights (Chest & Kuhn 2002).

Women empowerment is the need of the hour. In the simple words women empowerment is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent need based decisions on their own personal development, which reflects in their quality of life and it contributes to family welfare, community development, and also leads to national development. There has been revolutionary changes in the legal status of women in India, but it is still unusual for women to work and even more unusual for them to demand their right to property, education and health services.

Action taken to empower women The United Nations Development Program constituted eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for ensuring equity and peace across the world .the third MDG is directly related to the empowerment of women in India the MDGs are agreed upon goals to reduce certain indicators of disparity across the world by the year 2015

Empowerment is a key element of social work practice NASW Code of Ethics (NASW,1999) begins with the statement “ The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well being and help meet the basic human needs of all people with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable ,oppressed and living in a poverty” (p.1). Although the code of ethics clearly states an obligation on the part of social workers to empower their clients, it does not define this complex concept. A 1994 article on the NASW journal of social work does define it, saying that empowerment has two parts (a) personal empowerment which is similar to self determination and recognizes the inherent uniqueness of each client and (b) social empowerment which acknowledges that individuals con not be separated from their environment and people must have access to certain resources to able to influence that environment (Cower, 1994).

The Code of ethics does not explain how ,or under what circumstances, empowerment should occur .Although the implication is that empowerment should always be a goal of social workers , it does not discuss the circumstances in which the empowerment of a client might not be beneficial, or where it is difficult to comprehend ,how the empowerment could take place within a disempowering system.

Social work profession intends to empower the needy. It is an art and science of helping people to help themselves. The scientific training in social work education aims at making a career in the field of professional social work, imparts necessary training to develop the basic knowledge, skills, techniques and attitudes in students to work with individuals, groups, and communities. Social workers help people to solve and cope with their problems in everyday lives. One among these group of social workers viz. clinical social workers, also diagnose and treat mental, behavioral, and emotional issues. Social workers are employed in a variety of settings, including mental health clinics, schools,

child welfare and human service agencies, hospitals, settlement houses, community development corporations, and private practices. They generally work full time and may need to work evenings, weekends, and holidays.

Social workers help people to overcome some of life's most difficult challenges: poverty, discrimination, abuse, addiction, physical illness, divorce, loss, unemployment, educational problems, disability, and mental illness. They help prevent crises and counsel individuals, families, and communities to cope more effectively with the stresses of everyday life. Social Work is a profession that serves individuals, families, and communities who seek preventative and rehabilitative interventions for an improved quality of life. Focused on social and emotional development within the social environment, the scope of social work extends to the very national and international level. The profession is also a social justice and action oriented.

Adopting a holistic approach and forging therapeutic relationships are not unique to social work. What makes the role of the social worker distinct is that it combines both. The social worker seeks to understand the person's entire situation (the holistic approach) and to work with this. Developing an effective helping relationship with people who use services is central to the role of the social worker in order to ensure better outcomes. Social workers need sufficient time to combine knowledge of skills and values and demonstrate the effective listening, respect and sensitive engagement which this involves. The ability to form and maintain such relationships can be eroded by a workload which exceeds resources, by over management of risks and by increasing expectations from people who use services of the social worker's capacity to meet their needs (Anupam Hazra, 2014).

The professional social workers are expected to play multiple roles to deal with complex situation; they need to have flexible and multifaceted approach to solve problems by helping individuals. The key role player need to be well oriented to the social situations ,cultural milieu, socio economic condition , occupational status, psychosocial problems, psychosomatic diseases, habits, interdependent way of living, issues related to family, community and society at large. In the process of empowering the needy clients the social worker has to have rational outlook on different dimensions of empowerment specially empowerment of women which is the need of the hour.

There has been limited research that focuses on the social work students' perceptions regarding nutrition and nutrition-based mental health interventions. As previously stated, (Shor, 2010) demonstrated that social work students placed moderate-to-high levels of importance on nutrition and felt that their limited nutrition knowledge was a barrier. However, these research findings were based on closed-ended survey questions that broadly covered their perceptions on nutrition and the barriers towards applying nutrition in their social work practice. In this study, the current researcher will explore the social work students' perceptions on nutrition, barriers they have experienced when applying nutrition to their social work practice, and suggestions for addressing these barriers. In addition, the researcher will focus the social work students' nutrition perceptions, behaviors, and nutrition-focused interventions within the context of mental health (Diana Tran).

A Study was conducted to examine the social work students' attitudes towards the social work profession's perspective on abortion in the United States. Students at a large, public, land grant university were surveyed to determine whether their personal attitudes were in line with the stance on abortion supported by the social work profession, as outlined by the IFSW and NASW. The relationship between levels of religiosity and attitudes towards abortion was also examined. Results suggest that 49% of students perceive that they would not make a referral for abortion and 41% did not know whether or not abortion was legal in their state. Further, as levels of religiosity increased, acceptance of abortion and perceived likelihood of making a referral for an abortion decreased. Implications for social work practice, education, and directions for future research are discussed. The results of the current study also suggest that social work students perceive that they will not be able to separate out their personal beliefs from their practice efforts. The typical approach to addressing personal beliefs in social work education is to encourage students to identify their biases and separate out their personal beliefs from their practice. However, if social workers are not capable of doing this, then how should this be addressed in the educational setting? (Gretchen E. Ely).

To truly understand what is women empowerment there is need to probe what is in the mind set of the people in the country not just women themselves but the men have to wake up to a world that is moving towards equality and equity . With this view point an attempt has been made to understand the concept and perspectives of social work students about issues related to women empowerment, like Opinion regarding –Need of Women Empowerment, Possibility of Women Empowerment, Who plays important role in Women Empowerment, Essential component required for Women Empowerment, Environment responsible for Women Empowerment, Action to be taken to improve Women Empowerment, age of Initiation of Women Empowerment efforts

The study entitled “Women Empowerment- Perspectives of Social Work Students” had been carried out in Vijayapur city, a district head quarter in Karnataka State. Vijayapur is a socio economically backward district of Karnataka state. Social work education at post graduation level has history of less than 10 years in this city. There are only four centers which imparts professional social work education. Out of total 88 students studying in third semester, 68(77%) students were included in the study comprising of 37(54 %) female respondents and 31 (46 %) male respondents.

### **Objectives:**

The main objectives of the study were to elicit the perspectives of social work students as regards to the basic knowledge about women empowerment; and to know the different aspects of women empowerment among the social work students.

### **Methodology:**

The study was conducted in Vijayapur city in Karnataka State. Cross sectional research design was employed. The sample size was 68 MSW students studying in third semester. For collecting the primary data the structured interview schedule had been adopted. The percentages and chi -square were test had been applied to analyze and draw

the inferences.

### **Results and Discussion:**

As the study intends to make an attempt to elicit basic knowledge about women empowerment among social work students it is found that out of total 88 students 68 (77%) have participated in study comprising of 37 (54 %) female respondents and 31 (46 %) male respondents. All the respondents have heard about Women empowerment and have knowledge about women empowerment.

Further, it is found that out of total 68 respondents 35 (51.5 %) opined that they were very well aware about the women empowerment and 33(48.5%) knew a little about women empowerment. Among the total 31 male respondents 18 (58%) knew well, 13(42%) knew a little. Among the 37 females, 17 (46%) knew well and 20(54%) knew a little. Male respondents have better knowledge than the female respondents. When X<sup>2</sup> test was applied it is found that there was no association found between gender of the respondents and their knowledge about women empowerment i.e.  $P=0.319$

As regards to the opinion about need of Women Empowerment it is found that among the total respondents 82 % opined that women empowerment is very much essential and 18 % felt essential. Further, 84% males and 81% females expressed that Women empowerment is very much essential where as 16% male and 19 % females felt that it is essential to some extent. A large percent of the male respondents felt that women empowerment is very much essential -  $P=0.764$ . Thus, it is found that there is no association between gender of the respondents and their Opinion regarding need of women empowerment

Further, an attempt had also been done to know and understand the opinion regarding – Possibility of Women Empowerment and it is found that out of the total respondents 78% opined that women empowerment is possible, while 13% felt it is possible with a difficulty. Around 11 % of female respondents felt that women empowerment is impossible. And 3% of the respondents did not answer at all. It is thus found that males are having more positive outlook about possibility of women empowerment.

One of the objectives of the current study was to know and understand the opinion regarding- who plays important role in Women Empowerment. A Majority i.e., 63% of the total respondents opined that friends play an important role, followed by 22 % who expressed that it is the family members that play an important role in this context. Around 11% female and 3% male students say that teachers play a role in Women's empowerment. It is observed that fathers and mothers are having very least role to play in empowerment process.

Another aspect that had been included in the study was to know and understand the essential component required for Women Empowerment. A Majority i.e. 51% of the total respondents revealed that education is most essential component, while 19% of the total respondents opined that economic status is important. Security was termed very least that is only 6% among total respondents.

Furtherance to the above it was also one of the objectives of the study to know

that which type of environment is responsible for women empowerment. Among the total respondents a majority i.e. 63% expressed that social environment is responsible to improve women empowerment. The home environment is told by 13% of the total respondents, educational environment is opined as very least that is 12% among total respondents not much difference was found between male and females.

It was also enquired about the action to be taken to improve the Women Empowerment. When an attempt was made to elicit perceptions about measures to improve the women empowerment the following actions were suggested and expressed - that among the total 66% respondents it is opined that there is a need to create more awareness among general public, followed by provision of more legal support was expressed by 19 % of the total respondents. A very least number of social work students, which is only 5% of the respondents, said that media can be used to improve women empowerment -  $X^2$ ,  $P=0.424$ . Thus it is found that there is no association between gender of the respondents and their opinion regarding action to be taken to improve women empowerment.

About the ideal age of the women for taking initiatives of Women Empowerment it is found that out of the total respondents 35 percent said that it should be by birth, around 18% said that it should be from the childhood itself, Around 10% said that it should be during the adolescence and remaining 14% expressed that the ideal age for the empowerment of women is adulthood. When  $X^2$  test applied, it is found  $P=0.301$ . Thus there is no significant difference between gender of respondents and their opinion regarding the age of initiation of women empowerment efforts.

As regards to the existing programs on Women Empowerment a maximum number of the respondents i.e. 65% of total respondents, 55% males and 73 % female, were having knowledge about free and compulsory education, around 25% expressed that encouragement for education programs are in force to empower women and among the total respondents - 39% males and 14 % females were having information regarding employment programs. A very less i.e. 6% of males and 4% of females were having knowledge regarding political activities like reservation was expressed. The  $P=0.029$ . Thus, it is found that there is association between gender of respondents and their knowledge regarding existing programs related to women empowerment efforts.

### **Observations:**

Male respondents have better knowledge about women empowerment. It is found that males are having more positive outlook about the possibility of women empowerment. Female students opined that it is teachers who play significant role in Women Empowerment; it is also found that the fathers and mothers are having very least role to play in Empowerment Process. Around 24% female and 13% male students opined that economic status is important. Security was termed very least that is only 6% among total respondents, 10% males, and 3% of females.

A Majority of the respondents i.e. 63% and gender wise 55% male and 69% female expressed that social environment is responsible to improve women empowerment. Among the total social work students 66%, (61% males and 70% females) opined that

there is a need to create more awareness among general public.

Initiatives for the women empowerment and the ideal age of the women for this there was a mixed response. There was no firm or a majority as such. The opinion in this context had been recorded as – the stage of process of empowerment was opined that it should be by birth 35%, during childhood 18%, Adolescence 10% and adulthood 14%. A Maximum 65% of total respondents, 55% males and 73 % female, have knowledge about educational programs, very least knowledge about political activities was also found.

### **Conclusion:**

The issues, results related to the perspectives of social work students about women empowerment varies in its nature and understanding level of the students. Social work students' knowledge and perspectives have direct impact on their grasping of social realities, social problems, understanding clients situations and helping process too. This aspect of professional social work education has to be given prime concern during training period. Social work educators have to focus on perceptions of Professional social work students about social realities during training and also curriculum should be broadly based on orientation of need for rational outlook and also personality development to suit the various needs of students and society. Every student is required to have rational outlook on existing social realities. Hence a distinguishing mark of an able social work teacher is to enable students to play the role of catalyst by empowering them to empower their needy clients!

More research is required in the area of outlook and perceptions of social work students and also social work teachers. There is a need to understand that their perspectives on any social situation have direct impact on their enabling process. A rational outlook can contribute to social development and also social work theory and practice, especially in the empowerment of women in India.

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