

Family Planning: Implications of Women Empowerment- A case study

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Family planning is related to the number of children. In Indian society birth of a baby is related with the marriage relation between a man and a woman. Marriage is compulsory in Indian society. If any women give importance on her career than marriage then she will be criticized by the society. And it is usually not possible in the rural society that girl will do their work of choice without marriage. In rural area parents always try to get their daughters married in early age because of less education, lack of knowledge, poverty and societal view etc. Early age at marriage hampers the career, health, happiness of the girls due to become early mothers. At early age they obliged to maintain multiple responsibilities. Responsibilities slowly become burden for those ladies who are involved with outside work. Women Panchayat members are also carrying the burden of inside and outside responsibilities. These burdens are increased with the increase in number of children and it creates an obstruction in the way of empowerment of women. This paper will deal with age at marriage – number of children – family planning of women panchayat members of two districts, Cooch Behar and Nadia in West Bengal.

After 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India (1992), numerous of women have been elected from different strata of the society, at the village (Gram Panchayat), block (PanchayatSamiti) and district (ZillaParishad) levels. Panchayati Raj Institution plays multiple roles for village development and it works as a link between the local priorities and implementation of govt. plans and programmes. On behalf of this institution panchayat members including Pradhans do these works. The provision of the Act made it obligatory to keep reserved one-third of the total seats in all three tiers of the structure, viz. village, intermediate and district.

The objective of the Act is also to build the Panchayat as an effective decentralised political institution at the grass roots level.

The 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 inserted Part IX, is containing Articles 243 to 243-O in the Constitution. Among these Articles 243 to 243-O, Article 243-G of the Constitution stipulates with the Panchayats powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government. The responsibility is given as: i) preparing plans for economic development and social justice, ii) implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice and iii) in regard to matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule (Basu,2008). The Eleventh Schedule contains 29 items, e.g., agriculture, land improvement, minor irrigation, animal husbandry, fisheries, education, women and child development, small scale industries, rural housing, drinking water, poverty alleviation, health and sanitation etc. All the above items will be effective only by active involvement and participation of the elected Panchayat member from all sections of the society.

Except above mentioned GP's functions in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution there are many more functions in West Bengal Panchayat Act. In the West Bengal Panchayat Act, there are three types of duties of the Gram Panchayat. These are obligatory duties (sec.19), other duties (sec.20) and discretionary duties (sec.21). Besides sections 19, 20 and 21 there are other sections which also represent gram panchayats functions or power and duties. In Section 24, a gram panchayat has been given the power to do all works necessary for the improvement of sanitation in its jurisdiction. Even Sections 9 and 34 describe the power and duties of the Pradhan and the Upa-Pradhan. Women panchayat members and Pradhans are also going through this same duties and functions for village development.

Despite the constitutional safeguards (Article 14, 15(1) and 16 and Amendment Act 73 and 74), rapid expansion of educational facilities and higher degree of self-awareness among modern women, the fact is that, women (who are also in power) are treated as first 'homemakers' who is good in household chores, than the rest, women are still found in long-working hours and bearing full responsibility for the home by fetching fuel and water, by doing work in family production units, by bringing up children and looking after the sick and the aged, by doing cook, by caring husbands and other members of the family, by serving breakfast- lunch-dinner etc., by looking after the studies of their children and behaviour also, by washing cloths and utensils, by sweeping house, by caring domestic animals etc.

“Working women in India are faced with lot more challenges than their counterparts in the other parts of the world” (Dashora, 2013). For housewives, it is compulsory to do make themselves as a “homemakers” but for the working ladies also they do not get any help from their spouse or male person in the family for doing household chores (cooking, clean the house, clean the dishes, wash clothes get their children ready for school etc.).

For working mothers who are involved in any kind of outside activities, it is a burden to perform all the roles in the nuclear family (Jha and Pujari, 1996). Number of children in the family is also very important with respect to performance of the outside duties.

Methodology

For this study, two districts of West Bengal - Cooch Behar from Northern part and Nadia from Southern part of West Bengal has taken. We have considered equal number of subdivisions of each district. From Cooch Behar district four subdivisions are considered, these are Cooch Behar Sadar, Dinhata, Mathabhanga and Tufanganjand inNadia district four subdivisions are Kalyani, Ranaghat, KrishnagarSadar and Tehtta. One block has been chosen randomly from each subdivision of the districts like, from Cooch Behar Sadar subdivision Cooch Behar-II block is selected, from Dinhata subdivision Dinhata-I block is selected and in this way others are from Mathabhanga Mathabhanga-I, from TufanganjTufanganj-I. In Nadia district selected blocks are Haringhata from Kalayani, Karimpur-II from Ranaghat, Krishnagar-II from KrishnagarSadar, Ranaghat-II from Tehatta. From each block three Gram Panchayats where there are women Pradhans, are selected on the basis of their location (in terms of the distance from the block head-quarters) in the block area. From eight blocks in two districts the total number of gram panchayats are (8X3=) 24 (twenty four). Women Panchayat Pradhans and all women panchayat members under the women panchayat Pradhans are considered in this study because the present study is focused on women Panchayat representatives only.

In Cooch Behar district total number of selected women Panchayat members are eighty-eight (88) including Pradhans. In Nadia district total numbers of selected women panchayat members are seventy-two (72) including Pradhans. Therefore, total numbers of women panchayat members in two districts are one hundred-sixty (160).

Number of Children of Selected Women Panchayat Members

Number of family members is an indicator for influencing the domestic workloads of women. This number can be controlled by family planning. Before going to discuss about family planning we will discuss how many children they (women panchayat members) have. Number of children in the family is very important with respect to performance of Panchayat duties. They should have less number of children thus enabling them to spare more time for Panchayat work. The following Table-1 will show the number of children of women panchayat members of two districts Cooch Behar and Nadia.

Nothing has changed for women even after their entry into professional or political life. There is no change in the structure of division of labour according to gender. Women continue to have the

same responsibility as housewives towards their home and children irrespective of doing any job/work. They are expected to perform usual household chores even while holding higher responsible position in their career or profession.

Table: 1 Rank wise Percentage Distribution of Number of Children of Selected Women Panchayat Members in Cooch Behar and Nadia district

Number of Children	Cooch Behar			Nadia			Grand Total		
	No. of WPMs	%	Rank	No. of WPMs	%	Rank	No. of WPMs	%	Rank
No child	01	-	-	13	-	-	14	-	-
1 child	04	4.55	5	14	19.44	3	18	11.25	3
2 children	29	32.95	1	24	33.33	1	53	33.13	1
3 children	28	31.82	2	15	20.83	2	43	26.88	2
4 children	11	12.50	4	05	6.94	4	16	10.00	4
5 children	13	14.77	3	-	-	-	13	8.13	5
6 children	2	2.27	6	01	1.39	5	03	1.88	6
Total	88	-	-	72	-	-	160	-	-

Source: From field survey

Note: 1) WPM=Women Panchayat Member

2) We are not considering here 'No Child' row, because some panchayat members are unmarried and some has no child. Only child bearing panchayat members are considered here.

The results are same in first and second rank in both the districts and grand result is also same. Number of women Panchayat members having one child in Cooch Behar district is lower than Nadia district. We have seen that percentage of women panchayat members (more than 29 per cent) having more than three children in Cooch Behar district is higher than Nadia district (more than 8 per cent). The scenario of the above Table-1 arises a question whether women panchayat members in Cooch Behar district do apply the concept of family planning or not.

The following Table-2 shows the data on family planning of both the districts.

Table: 2Percentage Distribution of Family Planning of Women Panchayat Members in Two Selected Districts (Cooch Behar and Nadia) of West Bengal

Districts	Blocks	Not Response		No		Yes		Grand Total
COOCH	Cooch Behar-II	1	2.70	32	86.49	4	10.81	37
BEHAR	Dinhata -I	2	11.11	11	61.11	5	27.78	18
	Mathabhanga-I	2	11.11	6	33.33	10	55.56	18

	Tufanganj-I	1	6.67	11	73.33	3	20.00	15
	Total	6	6.82	60	68.18	22	25.00	88
NADIA	Haringhata	4	16.67	6	25.00	14	58.33	24
	Karimpur-I	3	15.79	5	26.31	11	57.89	19
	Krishnanagar-II	1	10.00	6	60.00	3	30.00	10
	Ranaghat-II	2	10.53	12	63.16	5	26.31	19
	Total	10	13.89	29	40.28	33	45.83	72
Grand Total (Cooch Behar + Nadia district)		16	10.00	89	55.62	55	34.38	160

Source: Field Survey

The above Table shows that in Nadia district women Panchayat members do more family planning (45.83 per cent) than Cooch Behar (25.00 per cent). According to NFHS-1, family planning is the various ways or methods that a couple can use to delay or avoid a pregnancy. From Table-1 and 2, we can say due to family planning programme women panchayat members in Nadia district having less number of children compare to Cooch Behar district. Family planning is the one of the reasons of controlling the number of children.

Number of children is also related with early age at marriage. Fertility peaks in the age group 15-24 years (according to NFHS) reflecting a pattern of early marriage and childbearing. Fertility rates decline steadily after age 25, reaching very low levels for women in their forties (according to NFHS). From the field survey we have seen that especially in Cooch Behar district women panchayat members are being married at an early age. The following Table-3 will show the same.

Table 3: Rank wise Percentage Distribution of Women Panchayat Members on the Basis of Age at Marriage of Selected Two Districts of West Bengal

Age at marriage	Cooch Behar			Nadia			Grand Total		
	No. of WPMs	%	Rank	No. of WPMs	%	Rank	No. of WPMs	%	Rank
Below 15	14	15.91	3	5	8.06	4	19	12.67	3
15-17	39	44.32	1	14	22.58	2	53	35.33	2
18-20	28	31.82	2	29	46.77	1	57	38.00	1
21-23	4	4.55	4	11	17.74	3	15	10.00	4
24-26	2	2.27	5	1	1.61	5	3	2.00	5
Above 26	1	1.14	6	2	3.22	6	3	2.00	6
Total	88	-	-	62	-	-	150	-	-

Source: From field survey

Note: 1) WPM=Women Panchayat Member

2) In Nadia district out of 72 selected women panchayat representatives 10 are unmarried.

Above Table-3 shows that in Cooch Behar district all members are married and among them more than 60 per cent members got married before 18 years which is peak fertile age. This is the one of the reasons in Cooch Behar district women panchayat members having more children than Nadia. In fact 2001 and 2011 census show, the total population in Nadia district is lower than Cooch Behar district.

Large number of children increases the family size which leads to increase the responsibility of mothers as well as fathers. It increases the work burden at home which helps to down the women's work capability in other areas that indicates less interest grow outside work. In Cooch Behar district out of 88 women panchayat representatives 63 said panchayati work is a burden for them as well as in Nadia district also out of 72, 64 said it is burden for them. There may be other reasons but number of children is one of the main reasons to them. But good things are that out of 160 members 21 say, it is not a burden for them and 7 were not respond.

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