

Training and Empowerment of Rural Women in Kerala: The Level of Awareness Created in Terms of Knowledge, Attitude and Practice

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Abstract- The study focuses on training and empowerment of rural women in Kerala. The aim of the study is to analyse the level of awareness created among rural women about women's rights and women's issues. The level of awareness is measured in terms of knowledge, attitude and practice. A training package for the empowerment of rural women known as 'Training for Women's Groups in Rural Areas' was selected for the study. The training was implemented for the members of Mahila Samajams (women's organisations) and imparted through ten voluntary organisations working in ten districts of Kerala. The long term objective of the training was the empowerment and self reliance of women. A descriptive study was conducted selecting 175 respondents by simple random sampling method from the universe of 350 women who had attended the women's training programme. Similarly, another 175 respondents who had not attended the training programme were selected randomly for comparative purpose. Thus a total number of 350 respondents were included in the study. Personal interview with the help of interview schedule was the main tool used for collecting information from both the categories of respondents. Result of the study highlights that trained women have a higher level of awareness, more positive attitude and greater will be their responding capacity on women's rights and issues.

Index Terms- Attitude, Empowerment, Knowledge, Practice

I. INTRODUCTION

Women in the Indian society have a degraded status because of the prevalence of multiple factors such as illiteracy, exploitation, unemployment, female infanticide, child marriage, dowry, prostitution, rape, widowhood, wife beating and purdah system. It must be remembered that women's status is not a just a matter of cultural and social history of traditions but it is basically rooted in the political and economic structure of our society which needs to be changed. Women are denied the right to own or inherit property and they become dependent on men, which renders them vulnerable to exploitation. This unfortunate state of affairs is also seen in the state of Kerala, which claims a higher literacy rate and a better health care system as compared to other states. Also the sex ratio of 1084 females for every 1000 males is favourable to women in Kerala when compared to other states; unfortunately the same is not the case with their status in real life. In order to pave the way for a healthier and more progressive future of the nation it is imperative to help women

rise from their shackles and to empower them so that they may be able to contribute to society constructively and significantly.

Empowerment of Women

Women's empowerment can be viewed as a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components. Empowerment is an active, multidimensional process, which enables women to realize their full identity and potential in all spheres of life. Women's empowerment allows women to be appreciated and acknowledged for who they are and what they do. It is not particularly the ideology of feminism that empowers women, but rather their capacities to face bravely the individual and social facts of their actual situations.

Most poor women have never been allowed to think for themselves or to make their own choices except in unusual circumstances when a male decision maker has been absent of has abdicated his role. Women must be convinced of their innate right to equality, dignity and justice. An empowerment process is one which tackles the condition and position of women, a process which questions about the power structures and gender subordination within these are continually revised and explored. This empowerment process however may most effectively be instigated by means of implementing appropriate training programmes for the selected section of women.

Training and Empowerment of Rural Women

The purpose of training is to achieve a change in the behaviour of those being trained. The general overall objective of the training for rural women is to equip them with the basic knowledge, attitude and skills to play effective roles in promoting the process of development. Training of women functionaries in rural development has become an important issue with special concern for women in development. While the basic concepts of training viz. transfer of knowledge, skill, change of attitudes would remain the same for any training. The identification of the training needs of women and monitoring and evaluating such training would require greater attention. Training has to bring about definite changes in the trainees, like promoting achievement, particularly in the areas of knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices. In training the focus is on learning by an individual of the new ways of doing things. Training structural and organised efforts through which an atmosphere of learning, sharing and synthesizing of information, knowledge and skills are transmitted to the trainees with the help of trainers.

Training can be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. Training brings about a change in the self image of women, awareness of their inner strength, helps them in making valuable contributions to society and enables them to take on new roles, and to develop the use of questioning and enhances their decision making skills. Training for empowerment places great stress in the creation of an atmosphere of learning. The basic rationale for training women leaders is to promote leadership among the members of Mahila Samajams (women's organisations) and the womenfolk in the village. Training helps women to empower women's organisations to act as catalysts at the local level and as pressure groups with other agencies securing social and economic justice for women. It helps them to plan out their objectives and action programmes and also to identify the areas in which they need to bring a change. Training has become a need for women since they have to enhance their self esteem learn new behaviour for managing the situations and develop leadership and learn building skills. Thus training becomes the most vibrant component of human resource development programmes.

II. RESEARCH ELABORATIONS

Training for Women's Groups in Rural Areas

A training package for the empowerment of rural women known as 'Training for Women's Groups in Rural Areas' was selected for the study. The training was implemented by a Dutch Charitable organisation known as CEBEMO for the members of Mahila Samajams (women's organisations) and imparted through ten voluntary organisations working in ten districts of Kerala. The long term objective of the training was the empowerment and self reliance of women. The specific objectives of the training were:

1. To improve the level of awareness of women on women's rights and women's issues.
2. To change the socio economic status of women in family and society.
3. To strengthen the functioning of Mahila Samajams.

The training was given for forty days in different phases over a period of two years. The methodology for the training was lectures, group discussions, debates, workshops, role plays, audio-visual programmes and paper presentations. As part of the training the participants were given individual assignments like preparation of essays on social problems and women issues, home visits, conducting awareness programmes in the local areas, conducting social survey of the villages and making a study of the people's organisations.

Objective of the Study

The aim of the study is to analyse the level of awareness created among rural women about women's rights and women's issues.

The level of awareness is measured in terms of knowledge, attitude and practice.

The hypothesis formulated to study this objective is that trained women will have a higher level of awareness, more

positive attitude and greater will be their responding capacity towards women's rights and issues.

Universe

The universe of the study consists of 350 Mahila Samajam (women's organisation) members who have attended the women's training programmes known as "Training for Women's Groups in Rural Areas" implemented through ten voluntary organisations working in ten districts of Kerala.

Sampling

One hundred and seventy five respondents were selected by simple random sampling method from the universe of 350 women who had attended the women's training programme. Similarly, another 175 respondents who had not attended the training programme were selected randomly for comparative purpose. They were selected from the same Mahila Samajams from which some women attended the training programmes and having similar socio economic profile. Thus a total number of 350 respondents were included in the study.

Design

The design of the study was descriptive and diagnostic in nature. While the descriptive design helps to study in depth the characteristics of individuals, group and situation, the diagnostic design helps to explain the association between variables related to the study.

Sources of Data

The source consisted of primary and secondary data. The primary data source was the respondents. The secondary data for the study were books and journals, reports and records related to the topic.

Tool of Data Collection

Personal interview with the help of interview schedule was the main tool used for collecting information from both the categories of respondents. The same interviews schedule was administered for both the categories of respondents who have attended the training and who have not. Methods like observations, focused group discussions and informal discussions were also used for eliciting data. The interview schedule was very helpful in collecting information directly from the respondents and besides it was the ideal tool since the respondents were not highly educated.

III. MAJOR FINDINGS

The study had been conducted with the purpose of gaining insight into the empowerment of women through training programme.

Among the 350 respondents, 121 (34.6%) belonged to the age group of 36-40 years followed by 87 (24.9%) in the age group of 31-35 years. In the group wise distribution of both categories of respondents i.e. those who attended training and those who did not attend the training programme, the highest percentage belonged to the age group of 36-40 years.

With respect to education it was found that among the respondents, 31.7 per cent are educated up to the high school level and 27.1 per cent of the respondents have completed their SSLC. The highest level of education among respondents in both categories is Pre-degree level. However 4.3 per cent of the respondents can only read and write. This further indicates that all the respondents are literate.

The study indicates that 320 respondents hail from nuclear families and 30 respondents live in joint families. Among the 350 respondents, it is seen that 333 (95.1%) are married and the remaining 17 (4.9%) are widowed.

The occupational profile of the respondents shows that the highest percentage (36.8%) is engaged in domestic work and 28 per cent in wage labour. A few respondents (3.4%) have salaried jobs and others are engaged either in cottage industries or in cultivation.

It was also seen that the majority of the respondents in both categories hold some positions in the Mahila Samajam.

Knowledge

The researcher made an attempt to study the level of knowledge of women regarding different Acts relating to women's rights and various welfare measures for women and children. It was found that the respondents who attended the training have higher mean score (mean=77.18, SD=6.50) when compared to the respondents who did not attend the training (mean=49.05, SD=6.85). The observed difference is statistically significant since the 't' value (39.41) is significant at 0.05 level.

For instance, the knowledge level of both categories of respondents on Hindu Succession Act varies. Significantly among the attendees of training, half (49.7%) of the respondents have good knowledge followed by 48.6 per cent have very good knowledge. While for non attendees more than half (54.9%) of the respondents have only a little knowledge and 41.7 per cent have very little knowledge whereas only 3.4 per cent have a good knowledge on the topic.

Hence it can be stated that the respondents who attended the training have more knowledge on women's rights and women's issues. It may be pointed out that one of the main reasons for the prevalence of dowry system, disparity in wages, inequality in the distribution of land, sexual abuse, existence of child marriage is due to lack of adequate knowledge on women's rights.

The two categories of respondents do differ statistically with regards to knowledge of Acts, source of Acts, government welfare programmes and problem solving. Hence it can be pointed out that training is a powerful tool and key to greater knowledge for the women.

Attitude

It is found that there is a significant difference in the attitude of women who attended training and who did not attend training regarding women's status and education. The mean score for the attendees of training is 37.01, SD= 2.57 and for non attendees 27.83, SD =2.78. The observed difference is statistically significant, as the 't' value (32.03) is significant at 0.05 level. Thus it shows that it is the training which makes difference in the attitude level of women.

This indicates that training definitely accounts for a better attitude and it may be stated that the women who have undergone training have a better understanding of the concept of equality between men and women. Only if one has a positive attitude can this concept and equality be fully understood and accepted. In order to attain this social change is required and for this women need to come into the main streams of society. It must be remembered that in rural areas women are not very receptive to change as they are bound by age old customs and traditions. Therefore it is only through constant education and training can new perception and changes be brought about.

Practice

From the analysis it is found that the respondents who attended training have a greater questioning and responding capacity than those who did not. The mean score for the attendees is 18.83, SD=3.94 and for non attendees is 13.62, SD =3.32. The difference is statistically significant as the 't' value (13.36) is significant at 0.05 level. Training helps women to have more responding and questioning capacity.

It is observed that the respondents who attended the training have a better capacity in questioning and responding to social issues especially those pertaining to women. They take initiative in protesting against issues like eve teasing, dowry harassment, rape, wife beating and disparity at both places of work and worship. The issues are brought before government authorities by way of oral and written complaints, public meetings, rally etc. The training has helped them to be more aware of the seriousness of problems especially those concerning women. In the case of those who have not attended the training it was observed that there is a lack of initiative in responding to issues which affect them.

It may be concluded that the training programme prompts women to think for themselves and to consider the importance of issues and to execute appropriate action in this direction. Thus training helps in enhancing the bargaining power and reacting mentality of women giving them a stronger hold in society.

The analysis of the study reveals that the hypothesis is proved correct i.e. trained women have a higher level of awareness, more positive attitude and greater will be their responding capacity on women's rights and women's issues.

IV. CONCLUSION

The process of women's empowerment begins in the mind, by changing women's consciousness. The process of empowerment involves not just an improvement in physical and social conditions, but also ensuring equal participation in decision making process, control over resources and mechanisms for sustaining these gains. The findings of the study show that there were remarkable changes in women in the level of awareness as a result of the training programme. It is strongly suggested that other voluntary organisations and nongovernmental organisations could implement similar training programmes for the empowerment of women. It can be concluded that training helps women to increase their level of awareness regarding women's rights and women's issues.

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