

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework on Socio–Cultural Status and Women’s Empowerment: Implications for Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

Although women’s empowerment varies across communities and cultures, past research has poorly conceptualized how sociocultural status influences variations in women’s empowerment between two or more subcultures within a given society. Based on theory and literature review, this chapter develops a new conceptual framework that helps understand relationships between sociocultural status and women’s empowerment between two or more subcultures in a given geographic territory or a given society. In so doing, the authors conceptualize sociocultural status into 1) socioeconomic status (e.g., education, occupation, income, or inheritance of family property) and 2) cultural status (e.g., values, norms, attitudes, tradition, autonomy) that may induce variations in women’s empowerment (e.g., control over resources and participation in decision-making), after accounting for background factors. This new broad-based conceptual framework induces cross-cultural variations in women’s empowerment across societies that may have practical implications in enhancing women’s empowerment for sustainable development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment to attain Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as poverty reduction, social change and gender equality across the societies and cultures is a fundamental issue in social and behavioral science research. This fundamental issue has been widely studied in social and behavioral sciences (Swai, 2010). Particularly, sociologists focus on how socioeconomic status (SES) and family structure influences women's empowerment in a family (Waheed et al., 2014). Economists study how earning and possession of wealth of women influences their empowerment in families as well as in social organizations (Nessa, et al., 2012). Political scientists analyze relationship between power structure and women's involvement in decision-making process in formal and informal organizations. Psychologists analyze how individualistic factors such as autonomy and independence influence women's empowerment in male-female relations and small groups (Batool & Batool, 2018). Anthropologists focus on how culture and religion mold women's empowerment in a particular society.

Although each discipline analyzes a particular factor with cross-sectional data, little cross-cultural research has directly focused on how sociocultural factors influence women's empowerment between Muslim and Hindu communities in a particular geographic region (Desai & Tamsah, 2014; Nawaz, 2019). In India, Kundu and Chakraborty (2012) examined women's empowerment of Muslim women in India. In so doing, they measured multidimensional aspects of women's empowerment: Control over economic resources, control over household decision-making, women's mobility and political awareness. Using standard statistical tools, the results suggested that women's empowerment in those dimensions was lower than men in Indian society. They argued that sociodemographic background factors such as access to media, family structure, economic hardship, household income, paid work and duration of marital life were responsible to lower status of Muslim women's empowerment in relation to men in the society. Based on secondary data from National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4) Sanu (2018) investigated and compared empowerment of Muslim women in comparison with Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain women in Indian society. In so doing, Sanu used several indicators such as participation in household decision-making, freedom of movement outside the home, political participation, and access to education and gainful employment to measure and compare women's empowerment and found that Muslim women in those indicators were disempowered compared to women of other communities in the country. Based on Sen's capability approach, Firdaus and Das (2022) measured and compared empowerment between Muslim and Hindu women in India. They found that Muslim women, compared to Hindu women, were disempowered in participation in household decision-making, family violence, and social movement outside the home.

In Pakistan, Khan and Maan (2008) studied sociocultural milieu of women's empowerment in a random sample of 340 married women of reproductive age (excluding widows and divorced). Using different statistical tools, they examined multiple factors such as family headship, paid job of women, observing veil, respondent's education, conjugal age, social networking, political participation, awareness about women rights, dowry and property given to respondent at the time of marriage and husband cooperation to have statistically significant effects on women's empowerment. The findings suggested revolutionary changes in female education that endorse gender awareness and self-esteem and legislation to develop enabling environment for women. The study urges GOs and NGOs for their active participation in mobilizing and organizing women groups in order to promote awareness, political interest, skill development and earning capabilities. Choudhry et al. (2019) narratively reviewed socio-cultural factors, affecting women economic empowerment in Pakistan. The major socio-cultural factors explored in the

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