

**IMPROVEMENT OF SELF RELIANCE AMONG THE ADOLESCENT GIRLS WITH THE HELP OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY OF DINHATA SUBDIVISION, COOCHBEHAR**

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**ABSTRACT**

Dinhata is one of the five sub divisions of Coochbehar district that belongs to the state of West Bengal in India. The study area has a distinct cultural camouflage with population of various religions. With high concentration of Rajbanshi population belonging to schedule caste (SC) category and Minority(OBC-A) population, few strong cultural and socio-economic factors are found here that influence the adolescent girls of this area. Socio-economic and cultural taboos push them in the most strenuous path of life from which very few of them return with success but most of all can't. Because of less moral support from the family and society, they grow up with less confidence and self reliance. Therefore, question arises that within those hurdles and obstacles, whether the economic support able to bring any difference in their life or not. This study focuses on the relationship between economic empowerment and self reliance of the adolescence girls in Dinhata subdivision of Coochbehar district. The findings reveal that girls are capable of doing better if they are provided with better parental and social support. Economic empowerment is one of the important ways to encourage them to step ahead and to make a confident individual.

**Keywords:** Adolescent girls, Economic empowerment, Self reliance.

**INTRODUCTION**

Autonomy and self reliance refers to own capability and belief to make decision better for individual and this ability does not end up rather it grows throughout the life. Autonomy need to be generated in early stages of life for adolescent girls to combat the challenges in daily and future life. Self reliance comes from the relationships within and beyond the family and people

(Russel and Bakken, 2002). Family as a major Institution, supports for carrying out essential production, consumption, reproduction, and accumulation of functions that are associated with the social and economic empowerment of individuals and societies (Mokomane, 2012). But globally 600 million adolescent girls are far behind from this support due to poverty and financial disadvantage of the family. The financial deprivation limits their confidence and self reliance socially and personally by limiting accessibility to society and lack of health facilities (Fewer, Ramos, and Dunning 2013). Economic empowerment allows adolescent girls to maximise their own capabilities, desires and opportunities, providing them with the knowledge and skills to take advantage of the choices made available to them. At the same time, they are given the power and voice to determine how to do so by influencing the individual, social, and political context in the world they live in (Kwauk, Petrova and Robinson, 2016). In the society under strong cultural taboos, adolescents are taken for granted and prohibitive to take part in household decision making or decision making for their own as they are treated unworthy for that and they feel isolated as they do not fall under child group or adult group. Thus, within them psychological constrains continue and the economic hurdles aggravate the situation worst. The study area, Dinhata subdivision is not exception from this and here also, girls face these hurdles and fight to come back to their own track. But most of them can't due to lack of family and social support. The initiatives of Govt. of West Bengal to support the needs of adolescent girls are well known as *Kanyashree*, *Shikshashree*, *Sabuj Sathi* along with central government projects like National Means Cum Merits Scholar Ship (NMCMS) for minorities and health schemes under Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and schemes under Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)–'Sabla'. This study focuses on the financial support that can influence personal thinking and feelings of individual to make wise decisions in their own life to make changes. This study also focuses on the changes they achieved in their life with this financial support.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives of this study are to find out the level of self reliance among the adolescent girls at Dinhata subdivision and to find out the nature of relationship of economic empowerment with the self reliance of the adolescent girls of the study area.

## **DATA BASE AND METHODOLOGY**

To understand the level of empowerment of the adolescent girls of Dinhata sub division, Coochbehar district, predetermind questionnaire has been used to understand the ground reality.

For the purpose of the study, 20 schools have been chosen with random sampling method and 10 girl respondents have been interviewed from different castes within the age group of 14-18 years

from each school. Adolescent Girls Empowerment Scale (AGES) developed by Devender Singh Sisodia and Alpana Singh has been used to determine the self reliance status of the girls with specific indicators. Pearson's correlation method has been used to determine the internal relations of the indicators or sub-scales and reliability test with Cronbach alpha has been calculated to understand the internal consistency of the indicators used for the scale. Composite index has also been calculated with the reference of women empowerment in agriculture index to understand the level of empowerment of the girls and regression analysis has been used to analyze the relationship of self reliance with the economic empowerment of the adolescent girls.

### **FINDINGS AND RESULTS**

Coochbehar district is well known for its distinct cultural mosaic and the socio- economic condition of the people, mostly influenced by the cultural parameters. Coochbehar is the district with highest Schedule Caste (sc) population concentration of the state and it is found that minority population also dominates many parts of the district specially at the periphery zones of Dinhata subdivision. All these have a great impact upon the condition of adolescent girls present there.

To find out the level of self reliance of the girls, the reference of indicators have been taken from 7 domain scale suitable for adolescent empowerment developed by Devender Singh Sisodia and Alpana Singh (2009) along with self created indicators. This scale has 7 domains with 49 indicators and the most appropriate indicators considering the condition and suitability to the girls of the district has been chosen. As a subscale corresponds to the continuum of a scale, it is obvious that there would be a correlation between the subscales. In self reliance and autonomy index, it is investigated by correlation matrices (Table 1) and the values depict the high correlation between the subscales. At this point, a reliability rest has been done to assess the consistency of the scale as a whole. Cronbach's alpha reflects the internal consistency of the scale within the set of items selected. Generally alpha value above 0.9 is considered excellent in social science. Here is the calculation which depicts the high acceptance of the selected items to construct the scale.

$$\text{Cronbach's alpha} = \frac{k \cdot \text{mean (variable's mean)}}{1 + \text{mean (variable's mean)} \cdot (k-1)} = 0.996$$

**Table 1: Correlation of sub-scales of self reliance domain**

	Power in peer group	Autonomy in class decision	Autonomy in household decision	Regular in class	Self esteem	Group members	Speaking in public	Workload for supporting family	Trained for karate/n.c.c/vocational/tuitions	Health problems
Power in peer group	1									
Autonomy in class decision	0.970	1								
Autonomy in household decision	0.995	0.978	1							
Regular in class	0.990	0.959	0.985	1						
Self esteem	0.963	0.896	0.948	0.951	1					
Group members	0.964	0.934	0.963	0.950	0.984	1				
Speaking in public	0.995	0.951	0.987	0.996	0.961	0.952	1			
Workload/trained for family support	0.978	0.984	0.981	0.988	0.917	0.940	0.976	1		
Trained for karate/N.C.C/vocational/tuition	0.974	0.931	0.964	0.988	0.972	0.966	0.984	0.971	1	
Health problems	0.973	0.984	0.976	0.984	0.901	0.923	0.971	0.998	0.961	1

Source: Calculated by authors

Self reliance and autonomy means a lot to the targeted group of adolescent girls. Independency from parental and household decision making, restraint from peer group, self governing attitude, moral support, political motivation, social problem solving attitude, all create multidimensional psychological influence within an individual at this sensitive stage of life. In the Table 2, the fact can be conceptualised by the score they achieved in the survey. At this stage, Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) has been used to calculate the index value ( $I = (P - A) / P$ ) where P = total no. of indicators × total no. of observation, A = total score of the indicators. The value ranges from 0 to 1 where higher the value, lower the level of empowerment.

**Table 2: The autonomy and self reliance index**

Category	No. of respondents	Power in peer group	Autonomy in class decision	Autonomy in household decision	Regular in class	Self esteem	Group members	Speaking in public	Workload for supporting family	Trained for karate/n.c./vocational/tuitions	Health problems	Total score of indicators	P=total no. of respondents ÷ no. of indicators	Autonomy and self reliance index
SC	50	10	6	5	28	16	27	9	51	69	112	333	500	0.33
ST	5	4	4	1	3	4	3	2	4	3	18	46	50	0.08
OBC -A	55	10	17	7	25	2	12	7	73	36	184	373	550	0.32
Gen	50	15	17	10	26	19	47	9	62	55	132	392	500	0.22
OBC -B	40	13	8	8	26	11	17	10	41	39	97	270	400	0.33
Total	200	52	52	31	108	52	106	37	231	202	543	1414	2000	0.29

Source: Computed by authors

The autonomy and self reliance scores depict that the values are higher for the schedule Caste (SC), other backward classes(OBC-B) and Minority (OBC-A) girls which reflects low level of autonomy and self reliance among them, but the value is lower for schedule Tribe (ST) girls (0.08) which means the high level of empowerment. For the unreserved (Gen) girls, values found are lower (0.22) than schedule Caste (SC) (0.33) and Minority (OBC-A) girls (0.32) which show the better level of their conditions. But overall trend is much satisfactory regarding the empowerment or improvement in this domain.

**Table 3: Economic empowerment index for the adolescent girls**

Category	No. of respondents	Ownership of assets	Control over income or assets	Schemes enjoy	P= total no. of respondents ÷ no. of indicators	Total score of indicators	Economic power index
SC	50	2	28	152	350	182	0.48
ST	5	2	2	2	35	6	0.82857
OBC-A	55	16	3	158	385	177	0.54026
Gen	50	11	39	106	350	156	0.55428
OBC-B	40	8	26	136	280	170	0.39285
Total	200	46	107	554	1400	707	0.495

Source: Computed by authors

It is clear that the higher level of economic empowerment has been achieved by OBC-B category students (0.39) followed by SC (0.48) Minority (0.54) and General (0.55) category students (Table 3). This is due to the economic benefits they enjoy from different Govt. schemes and local authority supports. Higher level of empowerment of OBC category can be explained by the properties of ancestors or local business their family have with well socio-economic status in the society.

To understand the relationship between financial empowerment and the personal level empowerment among the adolescent girls, correlation and regression model have been applied for better understanding of the real fact. The findings are shown in the table - 4 which reveals that around 98% of variability can be explained by the independent or explanatory variable leaving only 2% by something other contributors not mentioned. At 0.05 significance level p-value (0.8001486) is higher, which suggests that there is a significant relationship between economic empowerment and personal level empowerment of adolescent girls and the value indicates the strong association between these two variables.

**Table 4: Regression of self reliance level by economic empowerment**

<i>Regression Statistics</i>		<i>F</i>	<i>Significance p-value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>
Multiple R	0.990228625	17.53	0.8001486	1	0.017775	0.017775
R Square	0.98055273			4	0.049161	0.01229
Adjusted R Square	0.97569091			5	0.066936	
Standard Error	0.07043437					

Source: Calculated by authors

By testing the significance of F – value from anova table, it can be said that the critical F-value (18.51) at the df 1 is higher than the calculated F value which suggests to accept the fact that there exists a significant relationship between economic empowerment and self reliance among adolescent girls in Dinhata subdivision.

**Table 5: Description of achievements in different sub-scales of self reliance**

Sl. no	FACTS	% of girls	FINDINGS
1	Autonomy in peer group	17.5%	Popular among friends makes the feeling of appreciation
2	Autonomy in class decision	35%	Cherish the ruling authority outside the home
3	Autonomy in household decision	07%	Makes more confident to take decisions
4	Regular in class	20%	Interest to improve own quality
5	Higher self esteem	32%	Ability to face adverse conditions
6	Engagement in group activity	29%	Ability to enhance own capability with others
7	Ability to speak in public	5.5%	Have strong ideology and motivation
8	Enough workload to support family	50.5%	Have enough courage to manage home or social environment
9	Avail training for self improvement	31%	Makes confident to perform better
10	Faces many health problems	59%	Hinders the focus from improvement and low self esteem
11	Holding own assets	23%	Feeling confident to support the required needs
12	Control over own assets	53.5%	Enjoy the financial liberty to access their daily requirements
13	Enjoy various govt. and non govt financial benefits or other benefits	98%	More motivational to go ahead

Source: computed by authors

Direct measures of autonomy are economic decision-making authority, child-related decision-making authority, mobility, freedom from threat, access to economic resources, and control over economic resources as well as the traditional indirect measures, such as education and economic activity (Khan,2014). But in this study, it has been found out that (Table 5) many hurdles are there for them. Only 7% girls can take their own decisions, though more than 50% girls support their family by their household chores. 59% girls have been facing health problems. But it has been examined that 53% girls have their own control on their own assets which has been

achieved through good motivation of economic empowerment plannings (98%) initiated for the girls.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Govt agencies, local authorities, service sector stakeholders, political leaders, Non-Governmental Organisations are ready to accept the fruitfulness of social investment specially for the young sections who are going to be the future commanders of the country. For their better social well-being, it is extremely beneficial to motivate them to become strong and influential, so that they can achieve the capability to change their own lives, their families and in broad aspect, their known societal practices also. As a miniature of the society, within the school environment, girls perform their best and prove their capability but the society does not accept them as decision maker for their own and for the family or society also. Here, we need to focus our attention. Like social investment, Social sensitisation programmes and large monitoring system with good investment are necessary to make people aware about the girl power to bring changes in their mind and to break the socio-cultural taboos. Involvement of all sections of people is essential in this field to bring areas where girls will be able to share their ideas, values, and take wise decisions for their own and for the well-being of the society.

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