

Legal Awareness and Utilization of Empowerment Services among Rural Women

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ABSTRACT:

Introduction: In India, socioeconomic development is intricately tied to the role of rural women, who play a significant part in driving the agricultural industry, ensuring food security, meeting dietary needs, and promoting environmental sustainability. **Objective:** To assess the level of legal awareness among rural women, including their understanding of basic legal rights and entitlements and examine the factors influencing the utilization of empowerment services by rural women. **Methodology:** This research employs a descriptive design, investigating legal rights awareness among rural women in Byahatti village, Dharwad district. Purposive sampling selects 50 participants based on research Data collected through interviews to understand the rural women's legal awareness and challenges, informing policy interventions for legal empowerment. **Results:** The study presents survey results on legal awareness and empowerment services. It shows high awareness levels for most topics, such as women's property rights (94%) and helpline numbers for women (56%). However, awareness of the women's welfare center (34%) and services provided by self-help and women's welfare centers (34%) requires improvement. Despite this, a majority (62%) participated in programs related to women's legal rights and services, and 90% expressed satisfaction with women's welfare services. **Conclusion:** The study results revealed both areas for development and strengths about the existing level of awareness among women regarding their legal rights.

INTRODUCTION:

In India, socioeconomic development is intricately tied to the role of rural women, who play a significant part in driving the agricultural industry, ensuring food security, meeting dietary needs, and promoting environmental sustainability. However, their progress is hindered by various challenges that limit their access to resources, opportunities, and services. Among the key areas demanding attention is the legal domain, where rural women need to be better informed and empowered. Legal empowerment entails equipping these women with the

knowledge and skills to understand, utilize, and influence the law, thereby safeguarding their rights and interests. By fostering legal empowerment, rural women can become more active participants in decision-making processes at different levels, from local to national. The position of women is partially determined by the law. Social situations, values, religion, and economic disparities are significant factors that shape their status. The most crucial and prevalent aspects that influence their situation are often related to laws in India. To improve the status and position of women in India, there is an urgent need for immediate and essential social reforms.

In 2016, B. Shambhunath's research titled "Awareness on Legal Rights of Women: A Study of Kalaburagi District" offers valuable insights into rural women's awareness of their legal rights. Despite legislative progress for women in independent India, the study reveals persistent barriers hindering rural women's rights, including early marriage, domestic violence, and abuse. These obstacles not only impact their well-being but also impede socio-economic progress in rural areas, inhibiting a fair and progressive society. The research highlights education as a key factor in empowering rural women and improving their legal awareness. Ignorance and illiteracy are identified as contributors to the lack of understanding of rights and obligations. Harmful practices like child marriage and dowry perpetuate gender inequality, hindering rural women's advancement. The study also sheds light on the historical neglect of women's legal rights in Indian culture, indicating the prevalence of gender bias. Addressing the growing gender inequities requires transformative cultural shifts.

The overall development of rural women and society depends on their utilization of empowerment services and legal awareness. Legal awareness equips rural women with an understanding of their fundamental rights, including the right to property, healthcare, and protection from discrimination and abuse, empowering them to challenge social norms and strive for gender equality. Access to empowerment programs not only protects and assists women but also reduces gender-based violence. By providing microcredit programs and vocational training, these services expand economic opportunities for women and their families, resulting in increased financial security and economic well-being. Moreover, through education on healthcare rights and family planning, legal awareness and empowerment programs enhance health and well-being, leading to healthier families and communities. Encouraging literacy among women breaks the cycle of illiteracy and promotes education. Empowerment services also foster political participation, encouraging women to

advocate for women's rights and increasing their political involvement. By breaking societal barriers, empowered rural women gain recognition for their contributions to society. Additionally, they act as change agents within their communities, promoting programs and initiatives for the benefit of all. The investment of mothers in the education and health of their children further promotes long-term sustainable development. Legal empowerment and awareness programs also cultivate resilience in women, enabling them to overcome obstacles and serve as role models for others, creating a positive feedback loop. Overall, prioritizing legal education and empowerment services for rural women is crucial to building an inclusive society that thrives through the collective progress of all its members.

This study aims to examine how much legal knowledge rural women have and how much they use services for their empowerment. The study intends to give significant insights that help educate policymakers, civil society groups, and stakeholders about the present gaps and potential solutions to better serve the needs of rural women by throwing light on this important part of women's empowerment.

METHODOLOGY:

This research article adopts a descriptive research design to explore the awareness of legal rights among rural women in Byahatti village, located in Dharwad district. The study utilizes purposive sampling to select a sample size of 50 participants. The choice of purposive sampling ensures that the selected participants have specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. Byahatti village serves as the universe of the study, providing a comprehensive understanding of the legal awareness of rural women in that specific geographical area. Data collection methods such as surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions are employed to gather information on the participants' knowledge and comprehension of their legal rights. The research methodology aims to present a detailed analysis of the awareness levels and challenges faced by rural women in Byahatti village regarding their legal rights, contributing valuable insights to inform policymaking and interventions to enhance legal empowerment among rural women.

TABLE 1: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Sl.No	Questions	Response	Respondents	Percentage
1.	Age of the respondent	20-25 years	15	26.5%
		26-30 years	8	16.3%
		31-35 years	13	26.5%
		36-40 years	15	30.0%
2.	Religion:	Hinduism	45	90%
		Islam	4	8%
		Christianity	0	0
		Others	1	2%
3.	Marital Status:	Married	40	80%
		Unmarried	5	10%
		Divorced	1	2%
		Widowed	4	8%
4.	Education of the respondent	SSLC	18	36%
		Inter	11	22%
		Diploma	12	24%
		Illiterate	9	18%
4.	Family Type	Nuclear	26	52%
		Joint	17	34%
		Extended	7	14%
5.	Occupation:	Government job	1	2%
		Semi-Government job	9	18%
		Private job	11	22%
		Self employment	11	22%
		Unemployed	18	36%

The table one shows an insightful data interpretation on the respondents' varied demographic characteristics. The majority of people lie in the age range of 20 to 40 years, according to the age distribution, which shows a well-balanced representation across all age groups. Hinduism is the most common religion among the respondents, accounting for 90% of them, followed by Islam with 8%, and other religions with very little representation. An overwhelming majority (80%) of people is married, with a lesser number being either single (10%), divorced (2%), or widowed (8%). The interviewees' educational backgrounds are varied, with the biggest share (36%) having passed SSLC. According to family type, the majority (52% of respondents) are members of nuclear families, followed by joint families (34%), and extended families (14%). The distribution of occupations reveals a range of employment situations, with the biggest percentage (36%) of jobless people, while others are working in

the private sector (22%), on their own (22%), in semi-government (18%), and in government (2%). These data give a thorough overview of the demographics of the respondents, allowing for focused decision-making and well-informed tactics in pertinent fields.

TABLE 2: LEGAL AWARENESS AND UTILIZATION OF EMPOWERMENT SERVICES

Sl.No	Questions	Responses	Respondents	Percentage
1.	Did you avail services at Anganwadi?	Yes	35	70%
		No	14	28%
2.	Are you aware of the Indian Constitution?	Yes	40	80%
		No	10	20%
3.	Are you aware of fundamental rights of Indian citizens?	Yes	39	78%
		No	11	22%
4.	Are there laws related to women's property rights in India?	Yes	47	94%
		No	3	6%
5.	Can a woman claim a share in her father/husband/son's property?	Yes	49	98%
		No	1	2%
6.	Can one be punished for giving or taking dowry?	Yes	47	94%
		No	3	6%
7.	Can women be paid the same wages as men for the same work?	Yes	40	80%
		No	10	20%
8.	Are you aware of helpline numbers for women?	Yes	28	56%
		No	7	14%
		Not Completely	15	30%
9.	Are you aware of helpline numbers for domestic violence?	Yes	27	54%
		No	13	26%
		Not Completely	10	20%
10.	Do you know about the available services for women's empowerment?	Yes	32	64%
		No	11	22%
		Not Completely	7	14%
11.	Are you aware of the women's welfare center?	Yes	17	34%
		No	18	36%
		Not Completely	15	30%
12.	Do you have information about the services provided by self-help and women's welfare centers?	Yes	17	34%
		No	21	42%
		Not Completely	12	24%
13.	Did you participate in any programs related to women's legal rights and services?	Yes	31	62%
		No	19	38%
14.	Are you satisfied about women welfare services?	Yes	40	90%
		No	10	20%

The second table shows the respondents' knowledge and awareness related to Anganwadi services, the Indian Constitution, fundamental rights of Indian citizens, and women's property

rights in India. In question 1, 70% of the respondents reported availing services at Anganwadi, while 28% did not. Question 2 shows that 80% of the respondents are aware of the Indian Constitution, while 20% are not. In question 3, 78% of the respondents indicated their awareness of fundamental rights, with 22% being unaware. Question 4 reveals that an overwhelming 94% of respondents are aware of the existence of laws related to women's property rights in India, leaving only 6% who are not aware. Lastly, question 5 demonstrates a significant awareness regarding women's property rights, as 98% of the respondents know that a woman can claim a share in her father/husband/son's property, with only 2% indicating otherwise. Regarding dowry, 94% of the respondents said yes, one can be punished for giving or taking dowry, while only 6% said no. As for equal pay, 80% of the respondents said yes, women can be paid the same wages as men for the same work, while 20% said no. In terms of awareness of helpline numbers, 56% of the respondents said yes, they are aware of helpline numbers for women, while 14% said no and 30% said not completely. Similarly, 54% of the respondents said yes, they are aware of helpline numbers for domestic violence, while 26% said no and 20% said not completely. The majority of the respondents (64%) said they knew about the available services for women's empowerment, while 22% said they did not, and 14% said they did not know completely. This suggests that there is a high level of awareness among the women in the area, but also some gaps in information and communication. Only 34% of the respondents said they were aware of the women's welfare center, while 36% said they were not, and 30% said they were not completely. This indicates that the women's welfare center is not well-known or accessible to many women in the area, and that more efforts are needed to promote its existence and benefits. Similarly, only 34% of the respondents said they had information about the services provided by self-help and women's welfare centers, while 42% said they did not, and 24% said they did not know completely. This implies that the services offered by these centers are not well-advertised or understood by many women in the area, and that more awareness campaigns and outreach programs are required to inform them of their options and opportunities. A high percentage of the respondents (62%) said they had participated in any programs related to women's legal rights and services, while 38% said they had not. This shows that there is a strong interest and involvement among the women in the area in learning about and exercising their legal rights and services, but also some room for improvement and expansion. A very high percentage of the respondents (90%) said they were satisfied with the women welfare services, while only 10% said they were not. This demonstrates that the women who have accessed and used

the services are generally happy and content with them, but also that there are some issues or challenges that need to be addressed and resolved.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS:

The first table provides valuable insights into the demographic characteristics of the respondents; the age distribution highlights a well-represented sample, with the majority falling between 20 and 40 years old. Religion-wise, Hinduism dominates, constituting 90% of the respondents, followed by Islam at 8% and other religions with minimal representation. Marriage status indicates that 80% of the participants are married, with smaller proportions being single (10%), divorced (2%), or widowed (8%). The respondents' educational backgrounds vary, with the largest portion (36%) holding SSLC qualifications. Family types are predominantly nuclear families (52%), followed by joint families (34%), and extended families (14%). Occupation distribution is diverse, with the largest segment (36%) being unemployed, while others work in the private sector (22%), self-employed (22%), semi-government (18%), and government (2%). These comprehensive demographic insights equip decision-makers with the necessary information to make focused and well-informed strategies in relevant fields. The study's findings can be valuable for policymakers, researchers, and organizations seeking to address specific needs and tailor interventions to different demographic groups.

The second table provides a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' knowledge and awareness regarding Anganwadi services, the Indian Constitution, fundamental rights of Indian citizens, and women's property rights in India. The findings show that a significant majority of respondents reported availing services at Anganwadi (70%) and were aware of the Indian Constitution (80%) and fundamental rights (78%). Moreover, a vast majority of participants were aware of laws related to women's property rights in India (94%) and had knowledge about women's ability to claim a share in their father/husband/son's property (98%). The study also revealed a positive awareness regarding the punishable nature of dowry (94%) and equal pay for women (80%). However, there were areas where awareness could be improved, such as helpline numbers for women (56%) and domestic violence (54%), indicating a need for more targeted awareness campaigns. Additionally, the women's welfare center and self-help and women's welfare center services were relatively unknown to a significant proportion of respondents (34% and 34%, respectively), suggesting the necessity for increased promotion and accessibility of these services. Despite some knowledge gaps, a

notable proportion of respondents (62%) participated in programs related to women's legal rights and services, indicating a keen interest in empowerment. Furthermore, a large majority of those who accessed women welfare services expressed satisfaction (90%), highlighting the positive impact of these services. Nevertheless, the study also identified areas for improvement, with 10% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction. These findings underscore the importance of continued efforts to promote awareness and accessibility of women's services and rights, ensuring a well-informed and empowered community.

Overall, the results emphasize the value of legal education and empowerment programs for the advancement of rural women. In order to advance gender equality, lessen gender-based violence, increase economic opportunities, boost health and wellbeing, and support community development, policymakers, researchers, and organizations should take these ideas into consideration. We can establish an inclusive and empowered society that values the active involvement and contributions of rural women by addressing the identified knowledge gaps and building on areas of strength.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, this study offers insightful information about rural women's understanding of legal and empowerment services in Byahatti village, Dharwad district. The research's validity and applicability are increased by the demographic characteristics table's guarantee of a representative sample that is diverse and pertinent. The study results revealed both areas for development and strengths about the existing level of awareness among women regarding their legal rights. In order to increase rural women's access to services for legal empowerment, the findings highlight the significance of focused interventions, awareness campaigns, and enhanced communication. This research can serve as a starting point for stakeholders and policymakers as they build policies to advance gender equality, justice, and advancement in the community.

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