

Women Empowerment and Family Life: A Study of Dhanmondi Area in Dhaka City

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Abstract: This article has a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which aims to find out how the women experience different crises and facilities in their family life due to their empowered status. It also aims to study how the women have become empowered through different programs. A purposeful cluster sampling was used to depict different categories of respondents from the study area. To collect empirical data interviews with open and structured questions were used that opened up for conversation and the possibility to understand a range of experiences and nuances of meanings. Despite Worldwide evidence of the low level of female participation in social, educational, economic and political spheres, there is still a tendency to see it as a real problem only in a limited number of countries. The past three decades have witnessed a steadily increasing awareness of the need to empower women through measures to increase social, economic and political equity, and broader access to fundamental human rights, improvements in nutrition, basic health and education. The reality is that no country in the World no matter how advanced has achieved true gender equality, as measured by comparable decision making power, equal opportunity for education and advancement and equal participation and status in all walks of human endeavor. The findings of this study mainly indicate that by custom the life of a woman in Bangladesh is shaped by the patriarchal nature of the social system as various elements of social system interact to make women dependent on man though women contribute a great deal to the household economy.

Keywords: Power; Empowerment; Women Empowerment; Gender; Changing relationship

Introduction

Empowerment has become a new ‘buzzword’ in international development language but is often poorly understood. The need to empower women responds to the growing recognition that women in developing countries lack control over resources and the self-confidence or opportunity to participate in decision making processes. At the same time, the realization that women have an increasingly important role to play in social and economic development has become widely accepted. Chandra (2005) states unless women are ‘empowered’ to participate alongside men in the development process, development efforts will only have partial effect. She defines ‘empowerment’ as “a person’s capacity to make effective choices and to transform choices into desired actions and outcomes” (Chandra 2005: 55). The extent to which a person is empowered is influenced by personal agency (the capacity to make a purposive choice) and opportunity

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structure (the institutional context in which choice is made). For women these could be the capacity to choose a marriage partner, a livelihood, or whether or not to have children.

'Family systems, family lives' reflects the reality of the family as both a major societal institution and as a place where individuals experience intimate relationships. At the institutional level, the family maintains patterns of privilege and inequality and is intimately connected to other institutions in society such as economy, the political system, religion, and education. At the level of experience, the family fulfills basic human needs and provides most of us with our first experiences of love and relationship as well as power and conflict. A focus of recent scholarship on the family has demonstrated that family forms are historically and culturally constructed and that family is a place for the reproduction of power relations in society. In this way, the family is a primary social unit that maintains other institutions and reinforces existing patterns of domination. As we head into the 21st century, changes within and among families in our country are striking at the heart of our notions about life and the way it functions. Such things as longer life spans, the advent of safe and effective birth control, women's increasing participation in the workforce, and a dramatic increase in divorce rates are reshaping family life in the late 21st century. The new realities of family life are in sharp contrast with idealized notions of the family that have developed over centuries. If the family is to be a healthy component in society, as it must be for society to survive we need to understand anew what family is and what it is becoming (Chowdhury and Alam 2002).

Review of Literature

Although in contemporary relevant study the term 'empowerment' has become buzzword, it is a quite complicated and multifaceted concept. The concept is first used by Paulo Fieire in 1973; he defines empowerment as "an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and to gain power in all spheres of life" (quoted in, Pillai 1999: 5). Pillai (1999) states that power is not a commodity to be transacted; nor can it be given away as alms, power has to be acquired and once acquired, it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved, Women have to empower themselves. This means that they have to understand the causes of the existing inequality of women in all sectors economic, social, political, legal and educational and take the initiative to change their status. So, the process- prescribed by the thinkers- of achieving women's empowerment has been designed to be starting from the individual's consciousness to access to resources, to the control over decision through participation. The prevalent core feature of women's empowerment has been divulged. In this paper, therefore, empowerment has been essentially understood in context of different domains: household, economic, socio-cultural, information/ legal, political and psychological as well as in terms of different levels: micro or homestead, local or intermediary or community and macro or broader arenas. Haider (2000) believes that at the close of the twentieth century, the role of women is recognized and given priority in the areas of population, development and environment. Women representing half of the world's human resources are critical and essential for any development strategy program.

Development has to be more equitable and pay more attention to the specific needs of women. It is the triad of rapid population growth, increasing environmental degeneration and pervasive poverty which development in the 1990s has to cope with. Development has to address the gender issue and redress the development imbalance by focusing on women. Eleonora and Susan (2001), argue that the goal of development is material and non material betterment for all people. Development implies change, but changes which do not ensure that the household, the basic social unit, and all individuals who are part of it share in this betterment are not development. It is therefore essential to assess development by looking at changes that affect the household. They further assert that households are constituted as a means of meeting the basic material and non-material needs of their members. The way they function is obviously affected by their different forms internal organization, and external relationships. Changes in the structure of the household brought about by broader social and economic policies and events may affect its ability to meet these needs – which may themselves be altered and to maintain its underlying values, especially in periods of rapid change. Andersen (1999), has concerned a wide range of issues about changes among the individuals, especially in the family pattern. According to him, urbanism trends to individual people, liberates them, puts them in a position favorable to making choices and being creative according to their ability. As they change, the effect of changes in ways of thinking behavior and relationships in the family giving rise to problems of social change. The changing patterns of family have other implications, involving situations of conflict between the family and members, behaving as individuals. Above these, author analyzed the women's empowerment and changing family pattern, especially women's role, families changing traditional roles and values, problems of modern nuclear family, unhappiness in the old style of family change and overall society change have not escaped from the author. This entire phenomenon's Anderson discussed critically and showed the changing pattern of family relationship in the age of urbanization and women's empowerment. Sasses (1997) turn our attention about the trends of families today. He discusses elaborately about the families in a changing world, role's and communication. Building family relationships, the challenges of family, divorce, remarriage, dating relationship, selecting a partner, skilful parenting, handling crises etc. He also concerns about the trends affect families, the impact of technology, the need for strong families etc. According to author the nuclear family is less common today. The number of single person households couples blended families and single parents families are growing. These bring new concerns and adjustments for families. The work place has seen arise in lower paying, service industry jobs. These and other factors have lead to an increase in dual income families. He also notes some positive sides to the situation of families in society today. Not only there is a growing desire for society to address family problems in a more active way, but there is also awareness that family individuals can do that family individuals can do much to help themselves if they are willing to try. Linden (2000) states that in recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of women's productive roles, mobility and contribution to development in Bangladesh. They have been found to contribute tremendously to their

households and economy and they have participated well in Bangladeshi society as teachers, lawyers, journalists, and politicians and as informal workers. In 1978, the country was one of the first developing countries that established a Ministry of women's Affairs. Moreover, the government has already prepared a National policy for Advancement of women and made some noteworthy progress in implementing the National Action plan, prepared in response to the Beijing platform for Action. However in spite of these achievements gender discrimination is wide-spread in all spheres and at all levels, as indicated by official statistics on health, nutrition, education, employment and political participation.

The scholars of different disciplines write numerous books and articles on women's empowerment and changing family relationship from different perspectives. Throughout the World, women's equality is undermined by historical imbalances in decision-making power and access to resources, rights, and entitlements for women. Either by law or by custom, women in our country still lack rights to own land and to inherit property, obtain access to credit, attend and stay in school, earn income and move up in their work. Addressing these inequalities through laws and public policy is a way of formalizing the goal of gender equality. Addressing the gaps between what the law proscribes and what actually occurs often requires broad, integrated campaigns. Through the review of various prominent literary works, it is perceptible there is serious lacking of linking between theoretical aspects and social initiatives of women empowerment. Most of the works, both conceptual and evaluative, do not reflect the various relevant theoretical positions. Especially in the context of developing countries there has not yet been conducted any empirical study on women empowerment issue in perspective of various development model on the theoretical ground of sociological theory. Considering the above reality it can be said that the present study is a sociological significant and timely effort to understand and evaluate the reality of the impact of women's empowerment on family life.

Theoretical Framework

This article attempts to relate its rationale to some of the major sociological theories: resource theory, psychoanalytic theory, rational choice theory, various feminist theories, and modernization theories. According to psychoanalytic theory, males grow up with an internalized need to emphasize separation rather than connection, and with misogynist tendencies to define themselves in opposition to whatever is female. Female grows up with an internalized need for emotional connection which often leads to a desire to be mother. The theory suggests that this cycle will only be ended when children have both men and women as equally participating parents in their early life, yet it also implies that it will be terribly hard to get men to be co-equal parents (Safflios 1970). According to resource theory, "power is generally associated with resources brought into a marriage by each spouse, consequently, the greater the resources either spouse has in comparison to the other, the greater will be his or her marital power" (McDonald 1980: 848-54). Rational choice theory indicates "a freedom of rational choice that is practically non-existent for most of the people, especially for women. This theory also believes

preferences are consequential” (Heer 1963: 139). The liberal sociological perspective wants to ensure women’s development and empowerment through legal reform and anti-discrimination policies as well as by the promulgation of laws and ordinances compatible to women’s situation whereas the radical perspective sought to bring evolution through transformation in women’s status (Kabeer 2001). Theories of modernization, the transformation of women’s status from subordination and domination to empowerment can be equated with transformation into modern. Thus the various modernization theories that emphasize on individual change can be incorporated with adequate significance.

Methodology

In this research, the researcher followed triangulation method as an integrated quantitative and qualitative approach has been taken for this study. The former focused on the association between different variables, whereas the latter helped in explaining the same between the variables. Present study mainly follows quantitative methodology; qualitative methodology is adopted to facilitate the former. The researcher used survey method as a tool of quantitative method and the researcher also conducted FGDs, Interviews and Participant observation for the collection of qualitative data. In order to conduct the research, study area was selected purposively. The researcher has chosen Dhanmondi Thana (local administrative unit) as the study location and selected some particular areas under the word 48. The sampling population of this study tends to be the all married empowered women of the Dhanmondi area. According to the information, collected from the Dhanmondi Thana office around 250 households resides in the selected word 48. The number of empowered married women is approximately 150. Each empowered married woman is the study unit in this regard. The study involves non-probability sampling technique to procure a suitable sample from the target population. A purposeful cluster sampling was used to depict different categories of respondents from the study area. The total number of respondents or sample was 100. Moreover, the researcher has collected six case studies and arranged two FGDs for indepth study. No sociological study can be purely objective because it deals with human behavior, knowledge, perceptions and level of cognition in socio-cultural domain, that’s subjective with explicit values and biased sentiments. Present research topic is more critical in this sense that main purpose of it was to discover social and cultural factors associated with changing patterns of family life. So, some problems and restrictions were confronted in terms of methodology. In spite of these limitations and constraints, it had been tried best to discover the motives of research to keep it free from personal subjectivity.

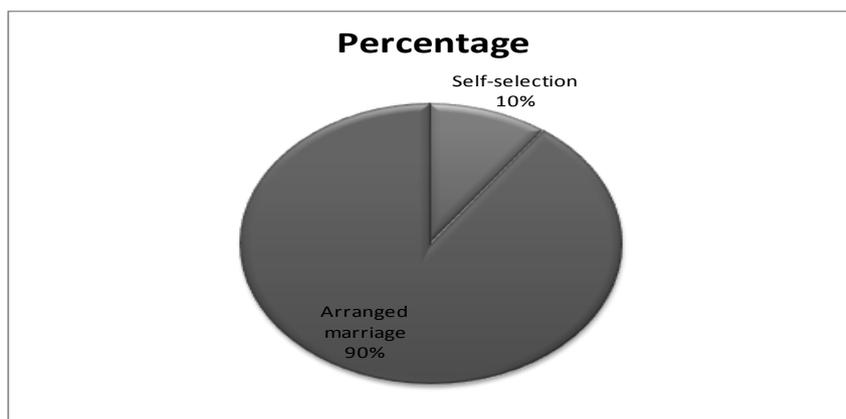
Findings

To observe the chaining pattern of family relationship due to women’s empowerment, the researcher has worked over 100 dual worker’s family of ward no: 48 in Dhanmondi Area in Dhaka city and the researcher, in this purpose, has collected information on the basis of a structured interview schedule following social survey method. The researcher has also utilized personal observation and field observation in this research. This chapter comprises analysis of data gathered from Dhanmondi area and elaborated discussion on

results obtained from these collected data. The changes in family relationship due to women's empowerment that are observed in this research are the followings:

- **Information on Personal and Household Domain**

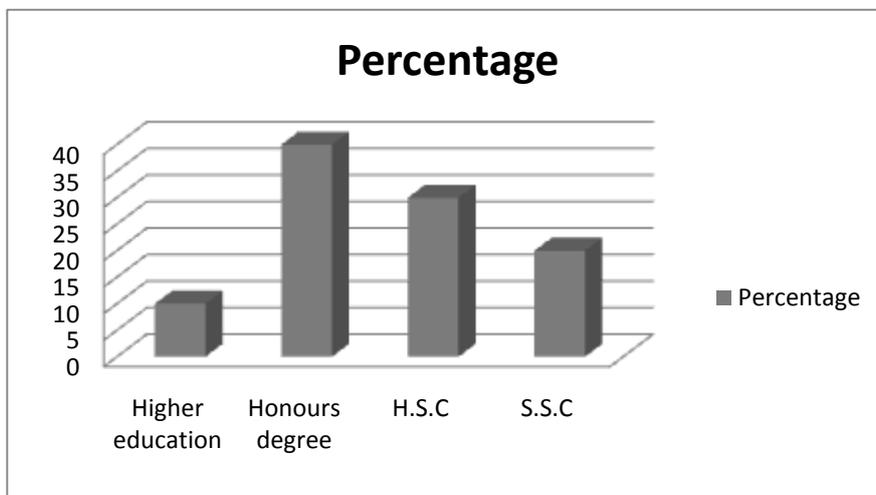
Figure 1: Percentage distribution of the respondents regarding their nature of marriage



Source: Field Survey 2014

The above figure shows that out of 100 respondents 90 percent of the respondents' nature of marriage is arranged marriage while 10 percent of the respondent married in their self-selection.

Figure 2: Percentage distribution of the respondents regarding their educational status



Source: Field Survey 2014

Figure 2 exhibits that 10 percent of the respondents have higher education and 40 percent have honors degree. The respondents, who completed H.S.C and S.S.C, account for 30 percent and 20 percent, respectively.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of the respondents regarding their opinion whether women's empowerment leads to high divorce rate or not

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	70	70
No	30	30
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2014

The above table exhibits that 70 percent of the respondents think that women's empowerment leads to high divorce rate while 30 percent don't think that women's empowerment leads to high divorce rate.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of the respondents regarding their opinion whether women's empowerment has impact on the decline of fertility & contraceptive use or not

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	90	90
No	10	10
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2014

Table 2 exhibits that 90 percent of the respondents think that women's empowerment has impact on number of children and contraceptive use while 10 percent deny that women's empowerment has impact on number of children and contraceptive use.

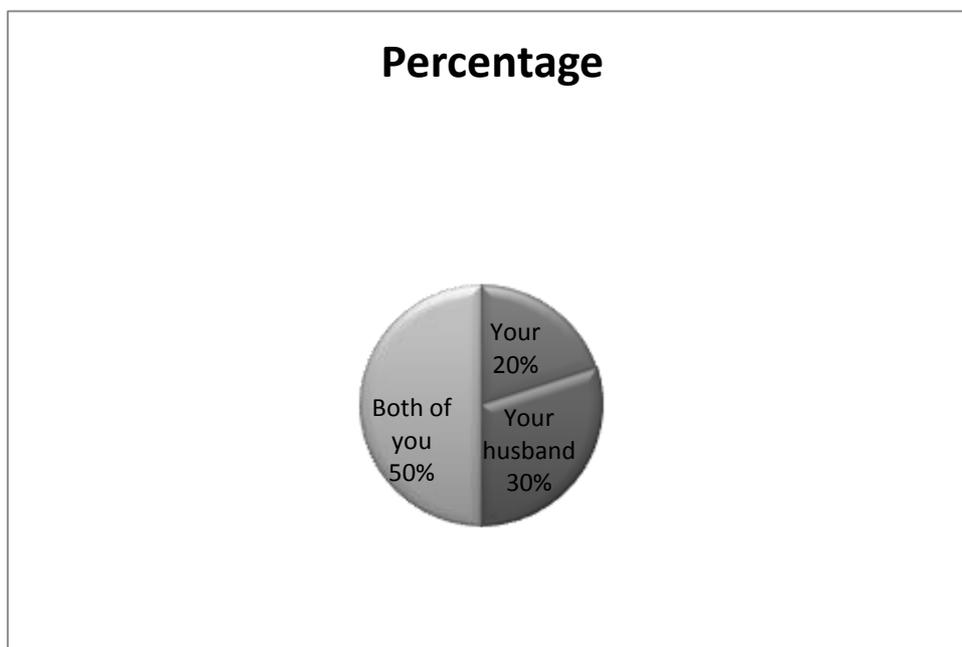
Table 3: Percentage distribution of the respondents regarding the prevalence of domestic violence in their family life

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	20	20
No	80	80
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2014

Table 3 exhibits that 20 percent of the respondents are affected with domestic violence while 80 percent are not affected with domestic violence.

Figure 3: Percentage distribution of the respondents regarding whose opinion gets priority regarding children academic affairs



Source: Field Survey 2014

The above figures shows that out of 100 respondents 20 percent of the respondents' opinion gets priority regarding children academic affairs, while 30 percent of the respondents' husbands' opinion gets priority regarding children academic affairs. About 50 percent of the respondent responded that both they and their husband's opinion get priority regarding children academic affairs.

Table 4: Percentage distribution of the respondents regarding whether they support equal status of husband and wife in family life or not

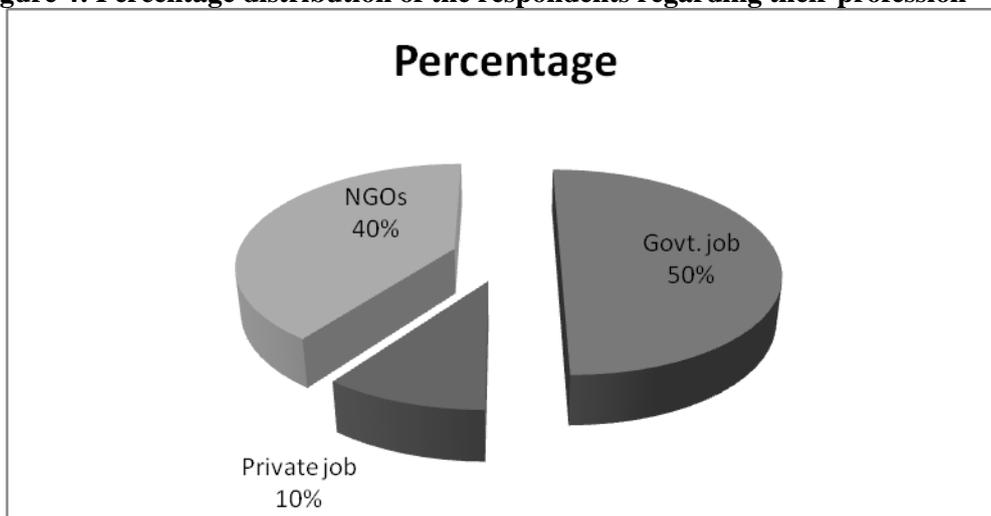
Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	90	90
No	10	10
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2014

Table 4 exhibits that 90 percent of the respondents support equal status of husband and wife in family life while 10 percent don't support equal status of husband and wife in family life.

Information on Economic Domain

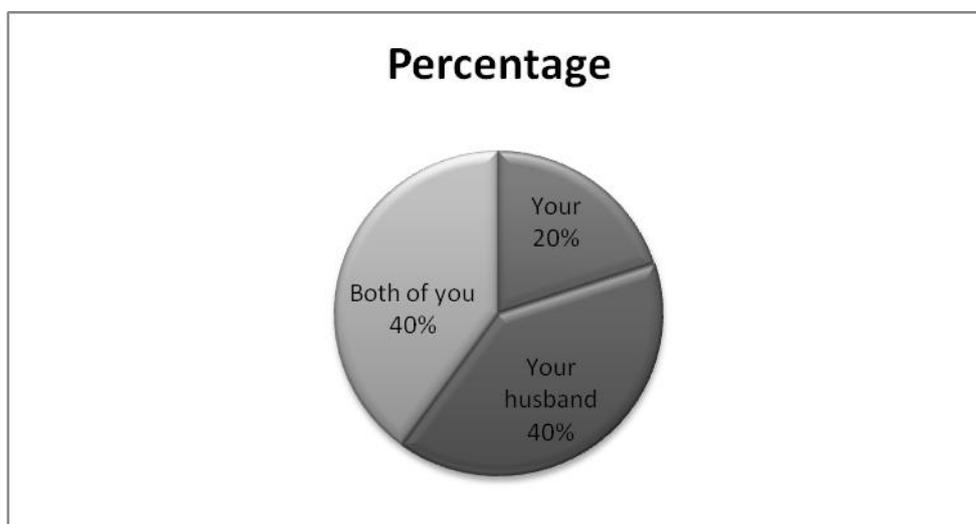
Figure 4: Percentage distribution of the respondents regarding their profession



Source: Field Survey 2014

The above figure shows that out of 100 respondents 50 percent of the respondents are govt. employees while 40 percent of the respondents are NGO activists. Those, whose occupation is private job, account only for 10 percent.

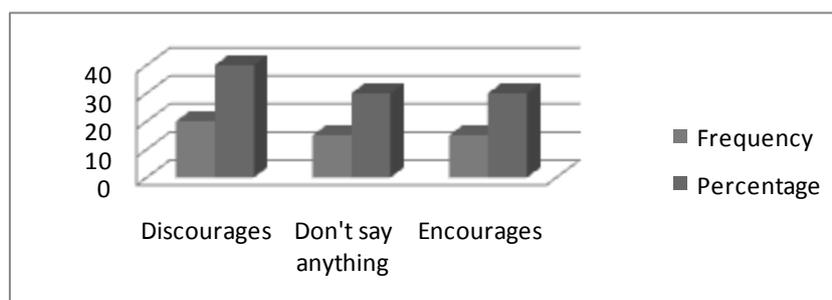
Figure 5: Percentage distribution of the respondents regarding whose opinion gets priority regarding economic affairs in family (e.g., preparing family budget, buying house, land, and car)



Source: Field Survey 2014

The above figure shows that out of 100 respondents 20 percent of the respondents' opinion gets priority regarding economic affairs while 40 percent of the respondents' husband's opinion gets priority regarding economic affairs in family. Another 40 percent of the respondent responded that both they and their husband's opinion get priority regarding economic affairs.

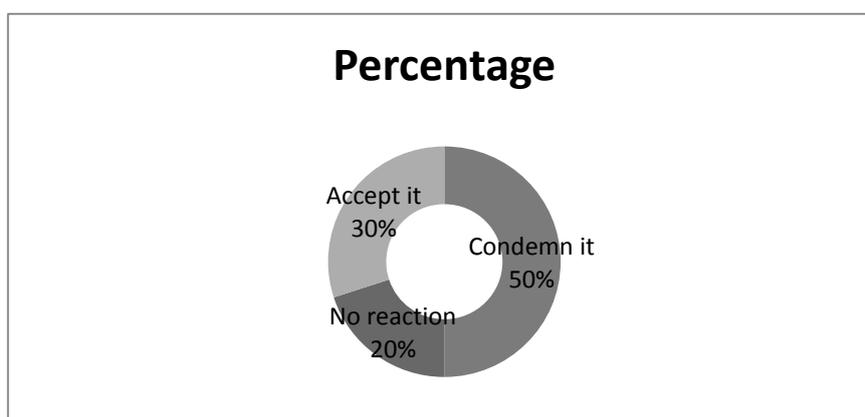
Figure 6: Percentage distribution of the respondents regarding social recognition of their financial activities



Source: Field Survey 2014

Figure 6 exhibits, that 40 percent of the respondents' society discourages their financial activities while 30 percent respondents' society does not say anything regarding their financial activities. The respondents, whose society encourages their financial activities, account for only 10 percent.

Figure 7: Percentage distribution of the respondents about their opinion regarding People's reaction to women's access to public places



Source: Field Survey 2014

The above figure shows that out of 100 respondents 50 percent of the respondents' community condemns women's access to public places while 30 percent of the respondents' community accepts it. Those, whose community does not react, account only for 10 percent.

Discussion

Household is an important domain to measure empowerment process. Women's mental development, her participation in greater social structure – is largely determined by her position and status within the household. Women's empowerment in micro level is mainly understood in context of their power relationship with other members within households (Akhter 2000). In this study, the degree of empowerment in household domain has been analyzed into three sequential levels: firstly, women's educational quality, professional skill and freedom; Secondly, women's participation in decision – making process on various household and conjugal issues; Thirdly, prevalence of violence against women in family and women's consciousness against violence. In my study, 10 percent of the respondents have higher education while 40 percent have honors degree. The respondents, who completed H.S.C and S.S.C. account for 30 percent and 20 percent, respectively. In the research, out of 100 respondents 20 percent of the respondent's opinion gets priority regarding children academic affairs while 30 percent of the respondent's husband's opinion gets priority regarding children academic affairs. Another 50 percent of the respondent responded that both they and their husband's opinion get priority regarding children academic affairs. In the research, 20 percent of the respondents are affected with domestic violence while 80 percent are not affected with domestic violence (Field survey, 2014).

Economic empowerment is considered as one of the most important determinants of women's empowerment. Women's empowerment is determined to a large extent by the degree of their economic entitlement and endowment. In describing the significance of compact interrelationship between power and resources, economic domain is a crucial one (Ahmad 1999). We can evaluate the existing empowerment situation of women in economic domain in terms of three levels of the degree of empowerment: Firstly, Social recognition of women's accessibility to job market, women's status in family and society; Secondly, Abolition of male-female discrimination in job market; Thirdly, control over income and resources; financial savings. In the research, 90 percent of the respondents think that financial activities have increased their status in family and society while 10 percent don't think that financial activities have decreased their status in family and society (Field survey, 2014).

In general, women's empowerment is a social movement, which is inevitable related to the social structure and reality. In this connection, the social aspect is considered as one of the important domains. This domain divulges women's accessibility and mobility that indeed helps to understand and outline their benefice accessibility to, and participation in , greater society, Because the more a woman gets accessibility to public places the more she is enriched with information; the more she can participate in economic and socio-cultural activities and the more she is empowered (Andersen 1997). In my study, 50 percent of the respondents have equal status and rights as of a man in family and society while 30 percent of the respondents do not have equal status and rights as of a man in family and society. The respondents, who to some extent have equal status and rights as of a man in family and society, account for only 20 percent. In the research, 70 percent of

the respondents think that women should receive equal status and rights as of men while 30 percent of the respondents do not think that women should receive equal status and rights as of men (Field survey, 2014). In the research, one of the respondents named Masuma Akhter (pseudo name), is a bank officer and her husband works as managing director of a factory. Masuma has free access to neighbor's houses but she has to take necessary consent of her husband while going to any offices, fairs, parental home and other places. However she has to shoulder most of the responsibilities of household management. Masuma's husband takes almost all the decisions on children's education, economic and political issues. Masuma often gives suggestions in these matters. However she plays a decisive role on various issues of conjugal life like number of children, time between conceptions. Masuma affirms that she is not victim of domestic valence but there is a tolerable existence of clash between Masuma and her husband. Zilik, another respondent of the study, is a higher educated Govt. Officer and her husband works as a bank officer. Her marital life is over 15 years. During this long period of times, whatever she done, she had to take her husband's or other guardians' necessary permission. Even today, she never does anything without her husband consent, though Zilik gives her opinion on various issues in household. Particularly in familial and somewhat economic issues Zilik makes the various decisions by herself. Her husband also accepts her decision but she informs that she does not have considerable participation in various decision making processes of conjugal issues. Her husband actually makes the various conjugal decisions.

In overall sense, we can say that the patterns of family relationship are changing due to women's empowerment and conventional family system has changed, give its place to new family relationship in keeping pace with time. In a capital city like Dhaka of Bangladesh where wives are engaged in different outside activities and their new type of paying role is causing new dimensional relationship between parents and children. Wives dignity is increasing and they are playing important role in familial decision - making. Husband's domination is decreasing and in place of this, dual domination of husband and wife is augmenting. As both husbands and wives are engaged in income generating activities, they are independent and husband- wives relations is adding new dimension to it which paves the way of changing the parent child relationship consequently. In keeping abreast of time, mutual understanding and egalitarianism is prevailing in family relationship. It is needless to say that this rate of changes being accelerated in keeping pace with time and familial relationship is approaching to new type of changes which is distinctly illustrated in the research (Field survey, 2014).

Conclusion

Family and familial relationship changes in keeping pace with changes of time, the conventional family system that existed in our country fifty years ago does not exist today. Due to women's empowerment family relationship especially in the urban areas has been changing, in this study the researcher found that family relationship in a city like Dhaka has adopted a new changing trend. Women in urban or industrial area must have

involved themselves in any type of income generating activities, as a result dual workers families in urban areas are increasing. The study shows that wives have pushed themselves into a prestigious position in the family or have prevented themselves from being oppressed cruelly by the husbands (which was a common scenario in past and is still somewhat so) with their participation in income generating activities and this is the consequence of women's empowerment. We have come to know from the most of the respondents that divorce, suicide, dating relationship, mental disorder have increased, change has come over habit of eating in family and at Hammond, day care centers for the children of worker mothers and care centers for elderly people have increased also. This study also found that due to modernization, urbanization the demand of children such as, modern study, new fashion, fast food culture etc. has also raised. Conventionally dominating or oppressing role of parents over children has changed; parents are giving priority over their children's taste, opinion, choice etc. In upper class family it is seen that a gap between family relationships is being created, parents are not giving enough time to their children because of their business with service, which in turn is creating a lot of problems. Family as a universal institution has not broken down; rather it has embraced new dimensions. Family system with changed pattern of itself is playing its role according to the demand of time and society and this changing trend of family is also affecting the total social structure by paving the way of the creation of different positive and negative matters. Despite family adopts different pattern due to women's empowerment and new circumstances, its role is perpetual and this role is still visible with great pride in a distinct way in our society.

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