

Structural & Psychological Empowerment in Rural India

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Rural women can be effectively utilized if empowerment can be used as a strategy for working women in rural settings. The author deciphers the transformation of structural empowerment to psychological empowerment through the mediating mechanisms of self-efficacy and perceived resource adequacy. Through a questionnaire administered to 80 women gram pradhans from rural India, it was found that self-efficacy and perceived resource adequacy mediate this relationship. The author then interviews ten of these eighty women to refine the understanding of the results.

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Empowerment of Rural Women

The rural populace in India represents a significant segment of human capital that is not employed full-time. A section of this segment consists of women who are confined only to their domestic sphere of activity. Advancement in Indian economy warrants inclusion of these untapped resources and bring them par with their male counterparts. The potential inherent in this unused human capital can be realized through empowerment (Spreitzer, 1992).

Panchayatraj

Panchayatraj is a system of local self-governance in the Indian subcontinent. This system of governance is institutionalized in India and is aided by a separate ministry of Panchayati Raj whose mission is "Empowerment, enablement & accountability of panchayati raj institutions to ensure inclusive development with social justice, and efficient delivery of services" ("Ministry of Panchayat Raj," n.d.). Women were rarely part of the panchayat system in pre-Independence days. However, the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, to In-

dian constitution mandated reservation of at least 1/3rd of the seats in all panchayat councils and 1/3rd of the gram-pradhan (head of the panchayat) positions for women. It was a landmark in women's political empowerment ("Women's Empowerment through Panchayati Raj," 2015). A gram-pradhan or sarpanch is the leader of the panchayat for the village.

Background to the Study

We chose women from rural areas for this study as scholars are of the view that studies relating to empowerment should focus on those areas where fewer choices exist for individuals in lives (Kabeer, 2005). Further, we chose the jobs of gram-pradhan (village head) for the study as they constitute the structurally powerful leadership position and at the same time practically and psychologically they remain powerless (Maeroff, 1988). It has also been found that empowerment level among women is lower as compared to the males (Hechanova, Regina, Alampay & Franco, 2006), thus, providing more reasons for such a study. From a sociological frame of reference, empowerment is warranted for changing the imbalance of power and structure in society (Leonardsen, 2007). In the pre-Independence era of India, women empowerment was assessed through access to education, the extent of child marriage, widow remarriage, etc (Subramaniam, 2004). Though the previously mentioned

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problems still plague the country, the present discourse centers on equality in the workplace and psychological aspects of empowerment. The economic angle to women empowerment relates to their share of the earned income and employment (Jayaweera, 1997). From a political frame of reference, empowerment refers to the presence of women in decision-making posts and elected offices (Beteta, 2006) with access to political and economic networks (Lindberg, 2004).

This structural empowerment through reservation in posts of sarpanch had led to the emergence of the husbands of these women as power centers.

The first step involves inclusion through granting them positions which are further strengthened by grant of empowerment. Women are now gaining structural empowerment through government actions and policies. Reservation in positions for women among panchayat members is one such constitutional provision in India (234D [2] of Indian Constitution). Democratic participation of women in female sarpanch villages have seen a rise. However, the improvements in service delivery is still an issue of concern (Sathe, Klasen, Priebe & Biniwale, 2013). The other side of the story is that this structural empowerment through reservation in posts of sarpanch had led to the emergence of the husbands of these women as power centers. An informal salutation has surfaced to denote the center of

actual power. There have been efforts by the government to curb this (“PM Modi seeks an end to proxy rule, says no more ‘sarpanch pati,’” 2015). The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by Government of India on International Women’s Day in 2010 with the aim to strengthen overall processes that promote all-round Development of Women (“National Mission for Empowerment of Women,” n.d.). Gender equality and women’s empowerment are central to UNDP’s strategy for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and bringing about transformational change (“Women’s Empowerment and Inclusion,” n.d.). Taking these coordinates in mind, we study the dynamics of the conversion of structural to psychological empowerment for structurally empowered women (through reservation as gram-pradhan) in rural India.

What & Why?

Empowerment have been referred to as “interesting fodder for academic debates” (Potterfield, 1999: 30), as “socialism, democracy gone wild, or worse yet, a form of communism” (Lawler, 1986: 9) and as “emperor’s new clothes” that are talked about but are not actually present (Argyris, 1998). However, many researchers acknowledge the effects of empowerment at the workplace. In a bunch of critical HR activities empowerment was found to be of great importance (Agarwal & Ferratt, 1999). In the particular context of women, empowerment is the process through which they know and then correct gender issues that

impede their development (Longwe, 1998). In the context of jobs and organization employee empowerment aims at transforming employees who have absence of control over work processes to employees that have personal control over their work and work lives (Wilkinson, 1998) and granting autonomy to employees to make choices that have an effect on how and in what ways completion of their work takes place (Ford & Fottler, 1995). The importance of empowerment lies in its association with many benefits desired by the organization. It has been found to be positively associated with job satisfaction (Spreitzer, Kizilos & Nason, 1997), motivation and organizational loyalty (Nykodym, Simonetti, Nielsen & Welling, 1994), organizational citizenship behavior (Cushman, 2000) work engagement (Bhatnagar, 2012), to name a few.

Different scholars have conceptualized as well as operationalized empowerment in different ways. Employment literature can be divided into three areas of structural, motivational and leadership empowerment (Menon, 2001). However in the context of organizations, empowerment has been conceptualized in two ways, psychological empowerment (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) that is the belief that one has control over decision making (Parker & Price, 1994:911) and structural empowerment “which encompasses elements such as opportunities to grow and develop, resources that include supplies and equipment, flexibility, and access to data” (Andrews & Kacmar, 2014 :46). We see that structural empowerment depends on workplace conditions

whereas psychological empowerment characterizes a response of employees to conditions of structural empowerment.

Researchers have dissected empowerment in terms of its complexity and elasticity that is exhibited conceptually. It takes many forms and is implemented through many initiatives (Cunningham, Hyman & Baldry, 1996). Spreitzer (1995: 1444) suggests empowerment not to be seen as a dichotomous construct, instead it should be regarded as a continuous variable i.e. employees to be seen as less or more empowered instead of empowered and not empowered. Two main dimensions carry forward the operationalization of empowerment concept first involving the content of the decisions on which influence is authorized to employees and second with the extent of influence granted to them with to carry out these decisions (Cotton et al, 1988). The content may range from operational to strategic (Bacharach, 1990).

Hypotheses

Structural empowerment and psychological empowerment are two different constructs. It can be argued that the structural empowerment leads to psychological empowerment since the former forms the precursor to the latter. Studies have also brought forth this positive relation (Knol & Van Linge, 2009; Laschinger et al, 2001; Manojlovich & Laschinger, 2007). It has been shown that even collectivization of women like self-help groups (Pandey & Roberts, 2012) or voluntary work like health activism in the case of ASHAs (Pandey & Singh,

2015c) lead to empowerment in women in rural India. In our case, women who have been structurally empowered by a leadership position i.e. gram pradhan experience a sense of empowerment i.e. psychological empowerment. We, therefore, propose:

Hypothesis 1: Structural empowerment is positively associated with psychological empowerment.

An individual's assessment of a situation to be empowering depends on his/her belief that he/she can handle the situation.

Personality variables play a significant role in empowerment dynamics and have been studied by researchers (Samad, 2007) as empowerment is perceived by different people differently (Ford, 2011). A work situation might be considered empowering by one and stressful by other. An individual's assessment of a situation to be empowering depends on his/her belief that he/she can handle the situation. Conger and Kanungo (1988) define psychological empowerment as the motivational concept of self-efficacy. Psychological empowerment is a workplace construct and its effect on every employee cannot be same in magnitude and direction. Employee's psychological empowerment has been seen to increase stress in some cases and satisfaction in others. An individual's personality is thus a major determinant of the direction in which empowerment affects these constructs. Therefore, self-efficacy is an important variable that would decide how empowerment initiatives are

perceived by the employee. Self-efficacy is the belief that one's actions are responsible for successful outcomes (Bandura, 1977). Scholars contend that differences between self-efficacy levels in employees are primarily responsible for differences in a displayed engagement where engagement can be defined as expressed empowerment pertaining to a role (Pati & Kumar, 2010). However, as has been proposed by researchers, there exists a difference between the two constructs of self-efficacy and psychological empowerment (Lee & Koh, 2001). In our case women tend to believe that they can accomplish the leadership position i.e. gram pradhan and associated tasks of the job once they receive a chance to occupy that position (i.e. through reservation). We, therefore, propose:

Hypothesis 2: Self-efficacy will mediate the relation between structural empowerment and psychological empowerment.

Resource adequacy is an important variable in the work environment (Lake, 2002). Resource adequacy has been found to be an important variable for structural empowerment (Armstrong &

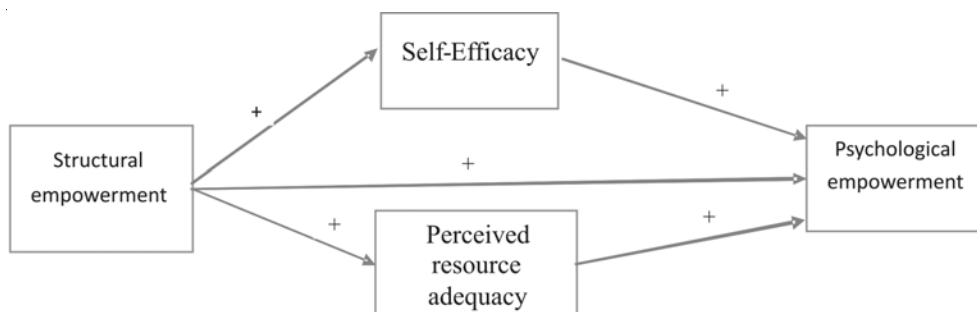
Laschinger, 2006). A similar finding has also been reported in the case of teachers (Dorman, 1996). In the case of psychological empowerment, the perceived resource adequacy takes a greater role. The perceived resource adequacy will guide the impact of structural empowerment on psychological empowerment. Structural empowerment would lead to a sense of availability of resources and which would further lead to psychological empowerment. In our case, the position of gram pradhan brings in many powers to take decisions and allocation of resources, which leads to women feeling psychologically empowered. We, therefore, propose:

Hypothesis 3: Perceived resource adequacy will mediate the relation between structural empowerment and psychological empowerment.

Resource adequacy has been found to be an important variable for structural empowerment.

The combined model developed from all hypothesis is presented in Figure 1

Figure. 1 Proposed Model



Research Design & Participants

The study was conducted in the villages located at the hills of Uttarakhand in India and uses a sequential combination of quantitative followed by qualitative approaches. Since empowerment also has its rooting in a feminist methodological paradigm which focus exclusively on women; a single prescribed methodology does not exist (DeVault, 1996). The remote locations with difficult geography (Pandey & Singh, 2015b) and low access to facilities (Ghanshala, Pant & Pandey, 2013) added complexity to the study of the phenomenon in rural settings which are prone to many natural disasters (Pandey & Joshi, 2011). The fact that the state of Uttarakhand reserved fifty percent (higher than national) seats for women in panchayat was also a motivating factor. We then adapted a survey instrument anchored on a seven-point scale; composed of established scales and personally administered the instrument to 90 women gram-pradhans individually and in groups. Since the respondents were Hindi-speaking, we needed the questionnaire to be in Hindi. The items which were not in Hindi were translated to Hindi by a bilingual, a back translation of these measures in English was done by a different person, and it was found to be similar. After slight changes in language based on feedback from pretest which is essential in research involving respondents who are not familiar with English (Pandey & Singh, 2015a), the Hindi questionnaire was given to four experts for content validity and to five villagers to interpret the items for face validity. Based on their inputs suitable contextualization of the questions was done.

We received back 80 usable questionnaires after the exercise. In this sample mean age of the respondents was 38.5 years (SD = 9.5 years) and among them 21 (26.25%) had studied till 10th standard or lower, 20 (25%) had studied till 12th standard, 36 (45%) held bachelors' degree and (3.75%) had master's degree. All of them were married. After the analysis of quantitative results a post hoc qualitative analysis through interviews of 10 women gram-pradhans was done to gain a deeper understanding of our findings. These interviews were conducted at their workplace and were gathered to elicit their perspective on empowerment. In both stages of data collection i.e. questionnaire and interviews the purpose of the study was explained to the respondents, and then verbal permission was taken after assuring complete anonymity of individual-level responses.

Measures

Structural empowerment was assessed through the Conditions for Work Effectiveness Questionnaire (CWEQ-II) (Laschinger, Finegan & Shamian, 2001). The 19 item scale is designed to measure the four empowerment dimensions: access to opportunity, support, information and resources in an individual's work setting; and two types of power that enhance access to empowerment structures, formal and informal power. The alpha coefficient for the scale was 0.85.

Psychological empowerment scale (Spreitzer, 1995) was used to measure psychological empowerment. It consists

of 12-item divided into four components of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.83.

Self-efficacy was measured by the available Hindi version of the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). It is composed of ten items and assesses optimistic self-beliefs to cope with a variety of difficult demands in life. Cronbach alpha was 0.88.

Perceived resource adequacy was measured by the perceived adequacy of resources scale (Rowland, Dodder & Nickols, 1985). It consists of 28 items that assessed "the adequacy of resources categorized as physical environment, health/physical energy, time, financial, interpersonal, knowledge/skills, and community resources" (Rowland et al., 1985 :218). The scale had Cronbach alpha of 0.77.

Preliminary Analysis

Initially, we examined the convergent as well as the discriminant validity of the measurement model by means of confirmatory factor analysis followed by regression analysis.

Convergent Validity: Cronbach's alpha and average variance extracted values are above the desired cutoff of 0.7 (Nunnally, Bernstein & Berge, 1967) 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) respectively.

Discriminant Validity: The average variance extracted was higher than all squared correlations of first-order latent

variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and the factor scores weighed high on their own and low on other constructs.

Common Method Effect: Common method bias was tested through Harman's single-factor test which was performed before the main analyses. Exploratory factor analysis was done for evaluation of the amount of variance in the observed variables that can be explained by a single factor (Podsakoff et al, 2003). Exploratory factor analysis, using un-rotated principal components factor analysis was done. The number of factors to be extracted was constrained to one. This single factor accounted for 48 % of the total variance which is less than 50%. Thus, no universal factor was observed, and the presence of common method variance can be negated.

Analysis

The dependent variable in our study was psychological empowerment; the independent variable being structural empowerment. Perceived resource adequacy and self-efficacy are mediators of this relationship. Following Baron and Kenny (1986), three separate hierarchical regression analyses were performed to test for the mediating effect of perceived organizational support and self-efficacy on the relationships between structural and psychological empowerment. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviation, and zero-order correlations for the study variables. Self-efficacy has the largest mean value (4.37) and standard deviation (1.90), whereas psy-

chological empowerment has the smallest mean value (2.51). All variables are significantly and positively correlated with each other at $p < .001$.

Table 1 Mean, Standard Deviation, Cronbach’s Alpha & Zero-Order Correlation among Variables

	Mean	SD	PE	SE	S-E	PRA
PE	2.505	0.934	(0.85)			
SE	3.344	0.715	0.689***	(0.83)		
S-E	4.365	1.897	0.895***	0.749***	(0.88)	
PRA	3.958	0.666	0.769***	0.557**	0.787***	(0.77)

N=80*** $p < .001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < .05$ SD= standard deviation. Cronbach’s alpha in parentheses PE=Psychological empowerment, SE= Structural empowerment, S-E= Self-efficacy, PRA= Perceived resource adequacy

A linear regression showed that structural empowerment had a significant and positive effect on psychological empowerment ($F = 91.57$, $b = 12.96$, $R^2 = 0.445$, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting hypothesis 1.

There is a complete mediation of self-efficacy on the relationship between structural and psychological empowerment.

Table 2 shows the regression analysis results to test mediation for self-efficacy. In order to test all conditions of mediation three regressions were evaluated. First step (model 2) showed that structural empowerment had a significant effect on psychological empowerment ($b = 0.689$, $R^2 = 0.474$, $p < 0.001$). Second step (model 1) showed that structural empowerment had a significant effect on

self-efficacy ($b = 0.749$, $R^2 = 0.561$, $p < 0.001$). In the third step (model 3), self-efficacy was added to structural empowerment. Our results showed that self-efficacy predicted psychological empowerment ($b = 0.863$, $R^2 = 0.801$, $p < 0.001$) and the effect of structural empowerment on psychological empowerment was not significant ($b = .042$ n.s.). The results indicate that at a significance level of 0.001, there is a complete mediation of self-ef-

Table 2 Results of Regression Analysis for Mediation Test for Self-efficacy on Structural Empowerment - Psychological Empowerment Relationship

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	Self-efficacy	Psychological Empowerment	Psychological Empowerment
R^2	0.561***	0.474***	0.801***
Independent Variable			
Structural empowerment	0.749***	0.689***	0.042 (n.s.)
Mediator Variable			
Self-efficacy			0.863 ***
F	99.63***	70.39***	155.43***

Standardized beta weights are shown. n.s.= not significant*** $p < .001$,

ficacy on the relationship between structural and psychological empowerment.

Table 2 shows the regression analysis results to test mediation for perceived resource adequacy. In order to test all conditions of mediation three regressions were evaluated. First step (model 2) showed that structural empowerment had a significant effect on psychological empowerment ($b = 0.689$, $R^2 = 0.474$, $p < 0.001$). Second step (model 1) showed that structural empowerment had a significant effect on perceived resource adequacy ($b = 0.557$, $R^2 = 0.311$, $p < 0.001$).

In the third step (model 3) perceived resource adequacy was added to structural empowerment. Our results showed that perceived resource adequacy predicted psychological empowerment ($b = 0.559$, $R^2 = 0.690$, $p < 0.001$) and the effect of structural empowerment on psychological empowerment was also significant ($b=0.377$, $p < 0.001$), there was, however, a decrease in the strength of the relationship. The results indicate that at a significance level of 0.001, there is a partial mediation of perceived resource adequacy on the relationship between structural and psychological empowerment.

Table 3 Results of Regression Analysis for Mediation Test for Perceived Resource Adequacy on Structural Empowerment - Psychological Empowerment Relationship

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	Perceived resource adequacy	Psychological Empowerment	Psychological Empowerment
R ²	0.311***	0.474***	0.690***
Independent Variable			
Structural empowerment	0.557***	0.689***	0.377***
Mediator Variable			
Perceived resource adequacy			0.559 ***
F	35.150***	70.39***	85.588***

Standardized beta weights are shown. n.s.= not significant*** $p < .001$, R^2 change from model 2 to model 3 = 0.215***

Sobel test was conducted to evaluate the mediations. The test showed that there is a mediation effect of self-efficacy (Sobel test: $Z = 7.454$ $p < 0.001$) and perceived resource adequacy (Sobel test: $Z = 4.579$ $p < 0.001$) for the relationship of structural and psychological empowerment. Thus, the hypotheses 2 and 3 are supported.

Post hoc Analysis

As mentioned in the research design we interviewed 10 women to refine our

understanding of the findings. Following were the conclusions from the interview. Structural empowerment was seen as an motivational tool which led to an increase in their confidence levels and they felt that the resources that were provided were adequate. A woman who was famous for the work she had done for the village said: “I have a lot of autonomy. I am educated, and I can decide on many things...it boosts my confidence, I keep track of the fund that I have been allocated by the government...also, I am

ready to accept challenges and work in any difficult situation”.

Structural empowerment many times did not translate into psychological empowerment as women felt that the task they were required to perform is a difficult one. This can be seen from the narrative of a sarpanch: “I am the grampradhan but the work is very challenging. My family told me to stand in the election, and I won, but I am not a very literate person though I can read and write. My husband handles all the associated works. I am afraid if I do something wrong then who will be accountable.?”

Further, the amount of resources provided was also many times perceived as low. For example one of them said: “I really want to do something for the village but look at the infrastructure and facilities they (Govt.) have provided... how much can we do? We try our best, but we need more infrastructure as well as monetary support”. These findings hinted at the importance of empowerment as such in rural lives and role of self-efficacy and perceived resource adequacy in translating structural empowerment to psychological empowerment.

Discussion

The results provide a useful insight into the black box of how structural empowerment leads to psychological empowerment especially for women employees in rural India. The two variables of self-efficacy and perceived resource adequacy help translate the structural

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empowerment to psychological empowerment. A significant theoretical contribution that this research brings forth is the importance of these two psychological variables in realizing actual empowerment. The psychological individual level variables decide whether structural empowerment turns out to be felt as empowering by individuals. The roles that they are required to perform as part of the structural empowerment should be seen as those that they believe they could perform, else these are seen as burdening and may lead to negative consequences. Perceived resource adequacy captures whether the resources provided as part of empowerment initiatives are seen by employees as adequate to carry out the required roles. Thus, it reveals the existence of a gap between what may be considered as actual resources allocated and the allocation that is felt or perceived by those for whom these allocations are done. It was also observed that women many times were not aware of the power that their jobs entail them therefore, they need to be made aware of the choices that exist for them and induce them to use those choices (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005). A loss of self-efficacy was seen among educated grampradhans also, the social upbringing, their background (Charmes & Wieringa, 2003) and attachment to domestic sphere of work (Kantor, 2005) where they have lim-

ited choices accentuated this phenomenon.

Unplanned empowerment initiatives which are basically structural in nature may end up being just ornamentations.

The implications of this study for practice are that unplanned empowerment initiatives which are basically structural in nature may end up being just ornamentations without actual empowerment being felt by those for whom it is intended. Theory suggests that on the intensity of empowerment it has been divided into surface and deep empowerment (Biron & Bamberger, 2011). Surface initiatives are based on the perception of empowerment whereas, deep initiatives grant actual authority to employees in order for them to feel empowered. Thus, policy makers must take into cognizance whether a structural empowerment initiative is perceived favorably by those for whom it is intended especially in rural settings. Further capacity building initiatives should be encouraged that help to improve the self-efficacy of rural women coupled with making them aware of the existence, adequacy, effectiveness and efficiency of resources available to them. Use of technology can also be a boon for difficult geographies with low access (Pandey & Pathak, 2013; Pathak & Pandey, 2012). These findings hold special significance for organizations that are targeting of expansion of their bases in rural India and hire women from rural India.

Initially, we had targeted 150 women but many of them refused to respond, and only 90 responded out of which 80 were complete in all respects. The sample size for the study poses limitation for this study which can be mitigated by future large scale studies. Also, multiple rater perspectives and time series data with more variables can shed more light on the phenomenon. Since their work and family lives are entwined, future studies can look at variables like family support, work-family and family-work conflict to better understand factors from the sphere of the family that affect this relationship.

Conclusion

The study tries to bring forth the issue of empowerment of rural women in India. It highlights how self-efficacy and perceived resource adequacy are important for the transformation of structural empowerment initiatives to psychological empowerment. A strong focus on the perception of structurally empowering tasks needs to be done in order for empowerment initiatives to be felt as actually empowering women. Self-efficacy and perceived resource adequacy must be instituted, inculcated and encouraged in women leaders to better take advantage of the reservation provided to them. The empowerment of rural women warrants delicate and dedicated efforts to gain the expected results.

Self-efficacy and perceived resource adequacy must be instituted, inculcated and encouraged in women leaders.

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