

Effect of Socio – Economic Status, Community and Locality on Empowerment of Minority Women

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Abstract

The present study aimed to study the Effect of Socio – Economic Status, Community and Locality on Empowerment of Minority Women. The objectives of the study were to study the status of empowerment among minority women in Tehsil – Huzur, Bhopal; and to study the effect of socio-economic status on wellbeing of minority women in Tehsil – Huzur, Bhopal. The descriptive data was collected using Socio Economic Status Scale developed by Bharadwaj and Empowerment among Minority Scale to be developed by the researcher. The sample comprised of 300 women for all the minority communities residing in Huzur tehsil of Bhopal. It results revealed that empowerment among minority women in Tehsil – Huzur, Bhopal, is strongly influenced by their socio-economic status.

Prologue

Empowerment for minority women involves enabling them to gain control over their lives, make informed decisions, and access opportunities to improve their quality of life. Minority women face compounded challenges stemming from intersecting factors such as gender, socio-economic status, community identity, and locality, making targeted interventions essential (Sen, 1999). Empowerment is multidimensional, encompassing economic, social, political, and psychological aspects that collectively enhance autonomy and agency.

Economic empowerment provides minority women with access to financial resources, education, skill development, and entrepreneurial opportunities, enabling them to achieve independence and reduce reliance on others. It is essential for breaking cycles of poverty and fostering financial stability (Kabeer, 2005). Similarly, **social empowerment** emphasizes inclusion, reducing cultural and systemic barriers, and improving access to healthcare, education, and social services. This fosters participation in decision-making within families

and communities, addressing societal inequalities (Nussbaum, 2000). **Political empowerment** enables minority women to participate in political processes, advocate for their rights, and influence policies that impact their lives. It strengthens collective action and ensures their representation in governance, addressing power imbalances (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). **Psychological empowerment**, on the other hand, focuses on building self-confidence, resilience, and a sense of agency. It helps women overcome internalized oppression and fully leverage opportunities in other domains (Zimmerman, 1995). These dimensions are interconnected. For instance, economic empowerment enhances social and political participation, while psychological empowerment strengthens the capacity to pursue opportunities. Addressing all aspects is crucial for fostering sustainable empowerment and overcoming systemic barriers for minority women (Kabeer, 1999).

Minority women worldwide face socio-economic challenges stemming from the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Globally, they experience higher poverty rates, limited education, healthcare disparities, and employment discrimination. In developed nations, systemic racism compounds these issues, while in developing countries, cultural norms often restrict their participation in economic and social spheres (UN Women, 2020; Crenshaw, 1991). In India, minority women from communities such as Muslims, Christians, and Scheduled Castes encounter barriers like poor access to education, patriarchal norms, and employment discrimination. Reports like the Sachar Committee (2006) highlight that these women face socio-economic marginalization due to systemic and cultural constraints, further exacerbated in regions like Tehsil Huzur, Bhopal.

Socio-economic status (SES) is a key determinant of empowerment. Higher SES provides better access to education, healthcare, and financial independence, while lower SES perpetuates poverty and exclusion (Kabeer, 1999). Community identity also impacts opportunities, with minority women often facing cultural stigmatization and discrimination, as seen among Muslim women in India (Hasan & Menon, 2004). Locality adds another layer of disparity. Urban areas offer relatively better access to resources, but even there, minority women face challenges like housing discrimination. Rural regions, with inadequate infrastructure and services, further marginalize these women (UNDP, 2016).

Relevant Theories or Concepts

This study is framed by key theoretical concepts, including intersectionality, social capital, and gender empowerment theories, which help contextualize the challenges and opportunities for minority women.

Intersectionality, introduced by Crenshaw (1991), highlights how overlapping identities, such as gender, socio-economic status, and community identity, create unique forms of discrimination and disadvantage. For minority women, these intersecting factors amplify vulnerabilities, restricting their access to opportunities and resources. Understanding these intersections is essential for addressing systemic barriers.

Social capital theory emphasizes the value of social networks, trust, and cooperation in empowering individuals. For minority women, social capital can serve as a critical resource to overcome exclusion and build collective agency, especially in marginalized communities (Bourdieu, 1986). Strengthening social ties can foster resilience and improve access to economic and social opportunities.

Gender empowerment theory underscores the importance of enabling women to exercise agency and participate fully in economic, social, and political spheres (Kabeer, 1999). This approach emphasizes enhancing women's access to education, employment, and decision-making to achieve sustainable empowerment. These theories collectively provide a framework for examining the relationship between socio-economic status, community, and locality in shaping the empowerment of minority women.

Need and Importance of the Study

Studying empowerment in the context of minority women is crucial for addressing the unique challenges they face due to intersecting identities. Minority women experience compounded disadvantages arising from their gender, socio-economic status, and cultural or community identity, which significantly restrict their access to resources and opportunities (Crenshaw, 1991). These intersecting factors contribute to higher rates of poverty, limited access to education, healthcare disparities, and exclusion from political and social participation (UNDP, 2016). Empowerment, defined as the process of enhancing an individual's agency and

opportunities to make strategic life choices (Kabeer, 1999), is critical for advancing inclusive societal development.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of minority women's empowerment, there are notable gaps in existing research. Studies often focus on gender or community identity in isolation, overlooking how socio-economic status (SES), cultural identity, and locality (urban vs. rural) intersect to influence empowerment. For instance, reports such as the Sachar Committee (2006) highlight the socio-economic marginalization of Muslim women in India but fail to explore how rural-urban disparities compound their challenges. Similarly, research on empowerment tends to emphasize economic or educational factors without adequately addressing the role of community norms or systemic discrimination (Hasan & Menon, 2004). Addressing these gaps is vital for understanding and mitigating the unique challenges faced by minority women.

The compounded disadvantages faced by minority women are deeply rooted in systemic inequities. Women from low SES backgrounds often lack access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, which limits their ability to exercise agency (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). Community identity further exacerbates these barriers, as cultural norms and social stigma can restrict participation in mainstream activities. For example, Muslim women in India face significant obstacles due to both religious identity and gendered expectations (Ali, 2018). Additionally, locality plays a pivotal role, with rural women experiencing greater marginalization due to inadequate infrastructure, limited access to services, and fewer employment opportunities compared to their urban counterparts (UN Women, 2020).

This study seeks to address these gaps by examining how SES, community identity, and locality collectively shape the empowerment of minority women. It employs an intersectional framework to provide a nuanced understanding of the systemic barriers these women face and their implications for empowerment. By uncovering these dynamics, the study aims to contribute to the academic discourse on intersectionality and provide evidence-based insights for policy development. Policymakers and practitioners can use the findings to design targeted interventions that address the root causes of disempowerment and promote equitable access to resources.

The societal implications of this study are profound. Empowering minority women is essential for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to

gender equality, poverty eradication, and social justice (UNDP, 2016). Empowered women can actively contribute to economic growth, community resilience, and inclusive governance, creating a ripple effect that benefits society as a whole (World Bank, 2012). By addressing the systemic barriers that minority women face, this study aligns with global and national efforts to foster an equitable and just society.

Method of Study

The current study employs a descriptive research approach to examine how socio-economic status impacts the empowerment of minority women in the Tehsil Huzur area of Bhopal district. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure adequate representation across different groups, including locality, socio-economic status (SES), and religious affiliation. The study's sample consists of 300 minority women from Tehsil Huzur, Bhopal, drawn from both urban and rural settings, with various socio-economic statuses and religious backgrounds. Among the urban participants, distributed across SES categories as follows: 15 Muslims, 5 Christians, 4 Sikhs, 4 Buddhists, and 4 Jains in the high SES group; 44 Muslims, 9 Christians, 21 Sikhs, 9 Buddhists, and 4 Jains in the average SES group; and 67 Muslims, 2 Christians, 5 Sikhs, 6 Buddhists, and 2 Jains in the low SES group, totaling 201 urban women. For the rural participants, the sample includes 99 women, with 8 Muslims, 2 Christians, 1 Sikh, 2 Buddhists, and 3 Jains in the high SES group; 18 Muslims, 4 Christians, 11 Sikhs, 5 Buddhists, and 2 Jains in the average SES group; and 35 Muslims, 2 Christians, 3 Sikhs, 2 Buddhists, and 1 Jain in the low SES group. Data collection was carried out using the Empowerment among Minority Scale to be developed by the researcher, along with the Socio-Economic Status Scale by Rajeev Lochan Bharadwaj. Upon gathering the data, statistical methods such as percentage analysis, arithmetic mean and standard deviation, Pearson's product moment correlation, and factorial ANOVA were applied to analyze and interpret the findings. The data analysis was performed using MS Office 2016 and SPSS 26.

Objective

1. To study the status of empowerment among minority women in Tehsil – Huzur, Bhopal.
2. To study the effect of socio-economic status on wellbeing of minority women in Tehsil – Huzur, Bhopal.

Research Question

The research questions developed for the present study are given below.

1. What is the status of empowerment among minority women?
2. What is the status of empowerment among minority women from different social economic status?
3. What is the status of empowerment among minority women from different communities?
4. What is the status of empowerment among minority women from different localities?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the mean empowerment scores across the different levels of socio-economic status.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The first objective of the study is to study the status of empowerment among minority women in Tehsil – Huzur, Bhopal, for which four research questions were prepared. The research question wise analysis regarding the status of empowerment among minority women is presented in lines that follow.

Status of Empowerment Among Minority Women

The first research question is ‘What is the status of empowerment among minority women?’ The empowerment among the minority women was measure using the Empowerment among Minority Scale to be developed by the researcher. On the basis of the scores obtained the minority women were classified as having high, average and low level of empowerment. The results are shown in table 4.5 and figure 4.5.

Table 1

Status of Empowerment among Minority Women

Level Of Empowerment	Frequency	Percent
High Level Of Empowerment	50	16.7
Average Level Of Empowerment	109	36.3
Low Level Of Empowerment	141	47.0

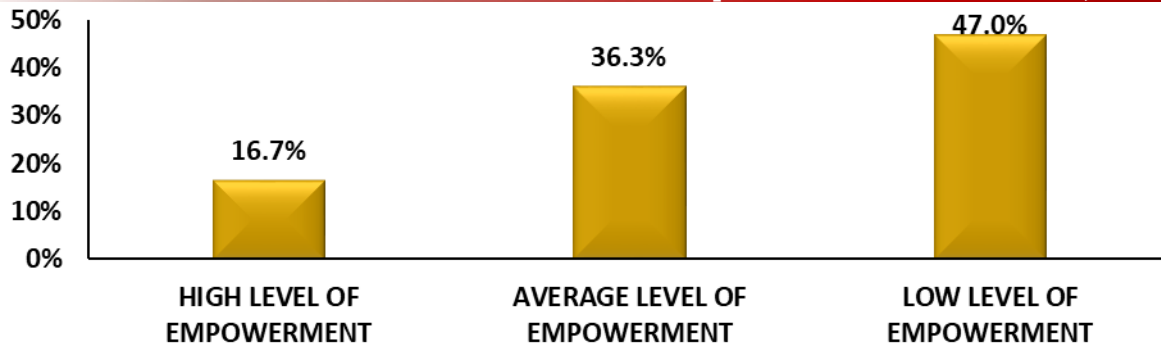


Figure 1 Status of Empowerment among Minority Women

From table 1 and figure 1, it can be seen that 16.7% of the minority women experience high level of empowerment, 36.3% experience average level of empowerment while a noteworthy 47% of the minority women experience low level of empowerment. Hence it can be inferred that almost half of the minority women are experiencing a low level of empowerment.

Status of Empowerment among Minority Women from different Social Economic Status

The second research question is ‘What is the status of empowerment among minority women from different social economic status?’ The minority women were classified as having high, average and low level of empowerment based on their socio economic status. The results are shown in table 2 and figure 2.

Table 2

Status of Empowerment among Minority Women from different Social Economic Status

Level of SES	Level of Empowerment	Frequency	Percentage
High SES	High empowerment	40	83.3
	Average empowerment	8	16.7
	Low empowerment	0	0
Average SES	High empowerment	10	7.9
	Average empowerment	93	73.2
	Low empowerment	24	18.9
Low SES	High empowerment	0	0
	Average empowerment	8	6.4
	Low empowerment	117	93.6

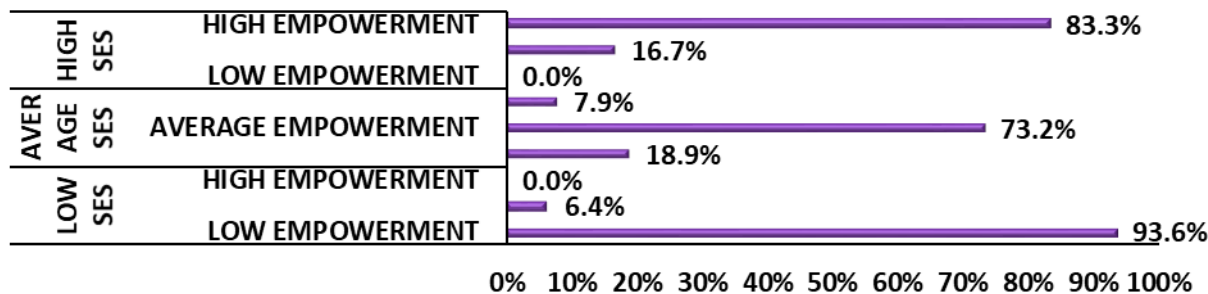


Figure 2 Status of Empowerment among Minority Women from different Social Economic Status

From Table 2 and figure 2, it can be seen that among minority women with high socio-economic status (SES), 83.3% have a high level of empowerment, 16.7% experience an average level of empowerment, and none report a low level of empowerment. For women with average SES, only 7.9% experience a high level of empowerment, while a majority (73.2%) report an average level of empowerment, and 18.9% experience a low level of empowerment. Among women with low SES, none report high empowerment, only 6.4% experience an average level of empowerment, and an overwhelming majority (93.6%) report low empowerment. Hence, it can be inferred that women with high SES exhibit significantly higher levels of empowerment, while those with low SES experience low empowerment.

Status of Empowerment among Minority Women from different Communities

The seventh research question is ‘What is the status of empowerment among minority women from different communities?’ The minority women were classified as having high, average and low level of empowerment based on the communities they belong to i.e. Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist and Jain. The results are shown in table 3 and figure 3.

Table 3

Status of Empowerment among Minority Women from different Communities

Community	Level of Well Being	Frequency	Percent
Muslim	High empowerment	19	10.2
	Average empowerment	61	32.6
	Low empowerment	107	57.2
Christian	High empowerment	7	29.2
	Average empowerment	10	41.7
	Low empowerment	7	29.2
Sikh	High empowerment	10	22.2
	Average empowerment	23	51.1
	Low empowerment	12	26.7
Buddhist	High empowerment	6	21.4
	Average empowerment	11	39.3
	Low empowerment	11	39.3
Jain	High empowerment	8	50
	Average empowerment	4	25
	Low empowerment	4	25

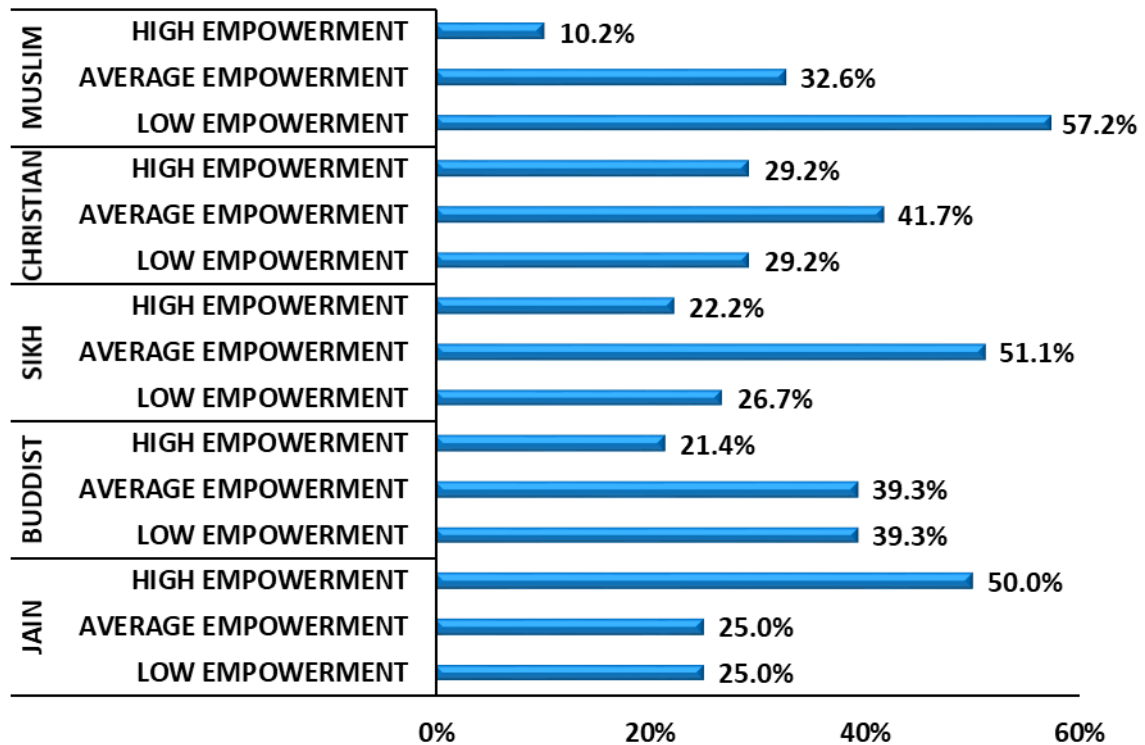


Figure 3 Status of Empowerment among Minority Women from different Communities

From Table 3 and figure 3, it can be seen that among minority women from the Muslim community, only 10.2% report a high level of empowerment, 32.6% experience an average level of empowerment, and a significant 57.2% report low empowerment. Among the Christian community, 29.2% of women report a high level of empowerment, 41.7% experience an average level, and 29.2% report low empowerment. For the Sikh community, 22.2% of women report a high level of empowerment, 51.1% experience an average level, and 26.7% report low empowerment. In the Buddhist community, 21.4% of women report a high level of empowerment, 39.3% experience an average level, and 39.3% report low empowerment. Lastly, in the Jain community, 50% of women report a high level of empowerment, 25% experience an average level, and 25% report low empowerment. Hence, it can be inferred that Jain and Christian women exhibit relatively better empowerment outcomes, while Muslim women are more likely to experience low levels of empowerment.

Status of Empowerment among Minority Women from different Localities

The eighth research question is ‘What is the status of empowerment among minority women from different localities?’ The minority women were classified as having high, average and low level of empowerment based on the localities they reside in i.e. Urban and Rural. The results are shown in table 4 and figure 4.

Table 4

Status of Empowerment among Minority Women from different Localities

Locality	Level of Well Being	Frequency	Percent
Urban	High Well Being	31	15.4
	Average Well Being	77	38.3
	Low Well Being	93	46.3
Rural	High Well Being	19	19.2
	Average Well Being	32	32.3
	Low Well Being	48	48.5

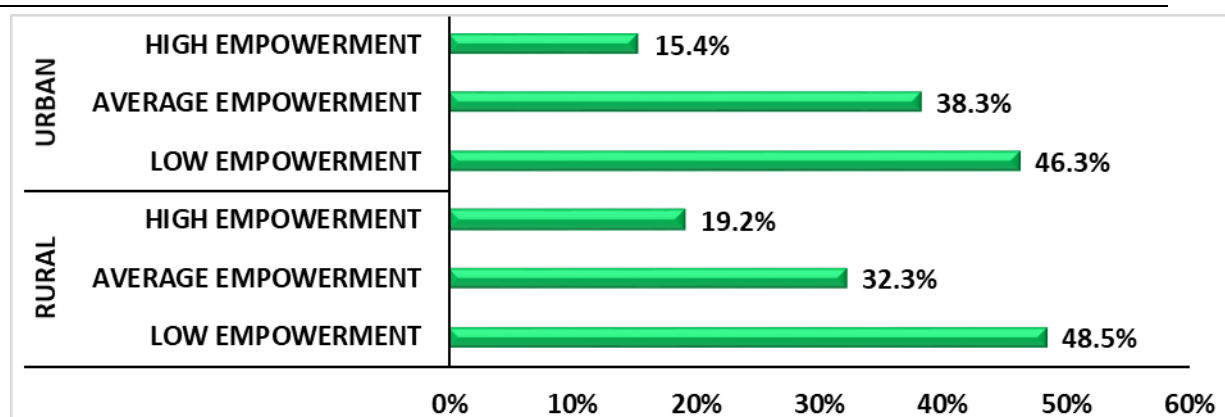


Figure 4 Status of Empowerment among Minority Women from different Localities

From Table 4, it can be seen that among minority women in urban areas, 15.4% report a they experienced high level of empowerment, 38.3% experience an average level of empowerment, and 46.3% report they experienced low level of empowerment. In rural areas, 19.2% of women report that they experienced a high level of empowerment, 32.3% experienced an average level of empowerment, and 48.5% reported that they experienced low level of empowerment. Hence, it can be inferred that urban women tend to report a higher proportion of average empowerment, while rural women have a slightly better outcome in terms of high empowerment.

Effect of Socio-Economic Status on Empowerment of Minority Women

The second objective of the study is ‘To study the effect of socio-economic status on empowerment of minority women in Tehsil – Huzur, Bhopal’ for which the hypothesis prepared is ‘There is no significant difference in the mean empowerment scores across the different levels of socio-economic status.’ The effect of different levels of socio economic status on empowerment of the minority women was found using One-Way ANOVA. The results are shown in table 5.

Table 5

Result of ANOVA for Effect of Socio Economic Status on Empowerment

Source	SS	df	MS	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	435931.455	2	217965.728	343.031	p < .01
Within Groups	188717.141	297	635.411		
Total	624648.597	299			

The ANOVA results shown at Table 4.12, reveal a statistically significant effect of SES on empowerment, $F(2, 297) = 343.031, p < .01$, indicating that the mean empowerment scores differ significantly across the three SES groups: high, average, and low. Since the value is significant hence the null hypothesis namely, "there is no significant difference in the mean empowerment scores across the different levels of socio-economic status," is **rejected**. Hence

it can be inferred that empowerment of minority women in Tehsil – Huzur, Bhopal is dependent on their level of socio economic status. This significant result indicate that there is need for further exploration through descriptive statistics and post hoc analysis to identify the specific nature of these differences. The same is shown in table 6 and 7.

Table 6

N, Mean and Standard Deviation for Empowerment Scores Across Socio-Economic Status

SES Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
High SES	48	169.06	22.989
Average SES	127	118.34	31.391
Low SES	125	63.34	17.898
Total	300	103.54	45.707

Table 7

Tukey Post Hoc Test Results for Pairwise Comparisons of Empowerment Across SES Levels

SES (I)	SES (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	p-value
High SES	Average SES	50.724	4.271	< .01
	Low SES	105.727	4.280	< .01
Average SES	High SES	-50.724	4.271	< .01
	Low SES	55.003	3.176	< .01
Low SES	High SES	-105.726	4.280	< .01
	Average SES	-55.003	3.176	< .01

From Table 6, it can be seen that minority women with high SES had the highest mean empowerment scores (M = 169.06, SD = 22.99), followed by those with average SES (M = 118.34, SD = 31.39), and low SES (M = 63.34, SD = 17.90). These findings indicate a clear pattern where higher SES is associated with greater empowerment.

Table 7, presents the results of the post hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD test. The analysis revealed that all pairwise comparisons between SES groups were statistically significant ($p <$

.01). Women with high SES reported significantly higher empowerment scores compared to those with average SES (Mean Difference = 50.72) and low SES (Mean Difference = 105.73). Similarly, women with average SES demonstrated significantly higher empowerment scores than those with low SES (Mean Difference = 55.00).

The current study's findings align with the findings of Kabeer (2005) who highlighted that higher SES provides access to resources and decision-making opportunities, while Malhotra and Schuler (2005) noted that women with higher SES have greater autonomy and mobility. Similarly, Narayan et al. (2000) find that economic stability enhances empowerment, a view supported by Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001), who show that women with higher SES have more control over finances and household decisions. Swain and Wallentin (2009) further argue that access to microcredit linked with SES boosts women's empowerment by increasing confidence and community participation. However, some studies challenge the direct link between SES and empowerment. Alkire et al. (2013) suggest that even women in higher SES groups may be limited by patriarchal norms. Kandiyoti (1988) adds that cultural constraints can restrict agency, regardless of economic status. Chant (2006) argues that women in low SES groups can be empowered through community support, while Rao and Kelleher (2005) emphasize that collective action within low SES groups can lead to empowerment gains. Batliwala (1994) suggests that empowerment is more about shifts in power dynamics than economic status, with politically active low SES women experiencing empowerment despite their financial disadvantages.

The significant difference in empowerment scores across socio-economic status (SES) levels can be attributed to several factors. Women with higher SES typically have better access to resources like education, healthcare, and financial independence, which enhance their autonomy and decision-making power. They also have more opportunities for personal growth, social networking, and leadership roles. In contrast, women with lower SES face structural barriers, including limited access to education and economic opportunities, which restrict their ability to achieve empowerment. Additionally, social factors such as greater community involvement and social support for higher SES women further contribute to their empowerment, while lower SES women may experience social exclusion or gender norms that limit their agency. These differences highlight the significant role SES plays in shaping empowerment outcomes.

Findings from the Study

1. Almost half of the minority women are experiencing a low level of empowerment.
2. Most of the minority women with high SES have high level of empowerment and most of the minority women with low SES have low level of empowerment.
3. More than half of the Muslim women reported low level of empowerment while more than half of the Jain women have high level of empowerment.
4. Almost half of the urban and rural minority women have low level of empowerment.
5. Empowerment among minority women in Tehsil – Huzur, Bhopal, is strongly influenced by their socio-economic status, with women of higher SES reporting substantially greater empowerment than their counterparts with average or low SES.

Implications

To empower minority women in Tehsil Huzur, stakeholders must collaborate effectively. Governments should provide financial aid, vocational training, and inclusive policies, while local authorities promote entrepreneurship and welfare awareness. NGOs and religious leaders must challenge societal barriers and build support networks. Educational institutions can offer scholarships and empowerment-focused programs, while the corporate sector supports with mentorship and employment opportunities. Researchers should evaluate disparities and program effectiveness, and communities must foster supportive environments and celebrate role models. Together, these efforts can drive meaningful and lasting change.

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