



## Unveiling Women's Empowerment: Comprehensive Insights from a Review Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is a multifaceted process that involves the ability to make life choices, access opportunities and achieve economic independence. This review study examines the critical roles education and employment play in fostering women's empowerment. Based on the comprehensive analysis of existing literature, this paper highlights the interplay between education and employment as enablers of social, economic and psychological empowerment for women across diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts. Education is identified as a cornerstone for empowerment, providing women with the skills, knowledge and confidence necessary to participate fully in society. It enhances their decision-making capabilities, promotes awareness of rights and reduces vulnerability to gender-based discrimination. Similarly, employment serves as a pathway to financial independence, self-reliance and social mobility, enabling women to contribute meaningfully to household and the community development. However, structural barriers such as patriarchal norms, wage disparities and

limited access to quality education and decent work opportunities often limit the full realization of these benefits. The study also explores the role of policy interventions, such as vocational training, workplace gender parity and education subsidies in addressing these challenges. The findings emphasize that education and employment are not just pathways to empowerment but are essential for achieving gender equality and sustainable development goals. This paper contributes to the existing body of literature on women's empowerment by providing valuable insights that inform policies and practices aimed at creating a more inclusive and an equitable society.

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## **Introduction**

Women empowerment has emerged as a critical component for achieving inclusive and sustainable development, striving towards gender equality and societal progress. It refers to the process through which women gain the ability to make strategic life choices, assert their rights, and achieve economic independence. Empowerment encompasses not only individual agency but also societal transformation, enabling women to challenge the deep-rooted inequalities and contribute significantly to their families, communities and economies (Stromquist, 2015). Despite substantial advancements over the past decades, women in many parts of the world still continue to face systemic barriers such as gender stereotypes, unequal resource allocation and discriminatory practices that limit their access to education and employment which are the two fundamental pillars of empowerment (UNESCO, 2020).

Education, widely recognized as the foundation of empowerment, equips women with the tools needed to steer across the social, political and the economic dimensions of life. Beyond academic learning, education enables critical thinking, self-confidence and awareness of the legal and social rights which helps women advocate for themselves and their communities at large (World Bank, 2018). Educated women are more likely to participate in household and community decision-making processes, challenge the stereotypical gender roles and access better employment opportunities. A good example would be the meta-analysis conducted by Jain and Mathur (2024) which demonstrates that women with higher



levels of education are significantly more empowered in terms of autonomy, economic participation and health outcomes as compared to their less-educated counterparts.

Employment, on the other hand, acts as a roadmap to economic independence and an important enabling element of women's empowerment. By providing financial resources, employment enhances women's decision-making power within their households and communities while expanding their social and professional networks (ILO, 2021). Formal employment, in particular offers better wages, job security and an increased access to social benefits compared to the informal work, which often exploits women by lower pay and poor working conditions (Rubery, 2017). However, the transformative potential of employment for many women worldwide is still hindered by the systemic challenges such as the gender wage gap, lack of workplace policies supporting work-life balance and of course the occupational segregation.

The combined effect of education and employment boosts its impact on women empowerment resulting in a supporting cycle of progress. Educated women are more likely to secure better employment opportunities and then these employed women often do their best to prioritize education for themselves and their children, creating intergenerational benefits that uplift their entire families and communities in the process. This virtuous cycle, however, requires an enabling environment supported by targeted interventions to overcome persistent challenges like limited access to quality education, workplace discrimination and the cultural norms that restrict women's mobility and participation in the workforce (Duflo, 2012).

This study explores the dynamic relationship of education, employment and women empowerment gathering perceptions from the existing literature to discover their individual and collective impacts while identifying barriers and opportunities likewise. The study also highlights some successful policy measures and strategies that have mitigated these barriers, offering evidence-based recommendations for creating a more equitable society. By addressing these critical themes, this research aims to contribute to the global discourse on gender equality and inform policy frameworks that align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## Objectives

1. To study the contribution of education on women's empowerment.
2. To explore the impact of employment on women's empowerment based on existing studies.



3. To analyze the synergistic relationship between education and employment in empowering women.
4. To identify barriers to education and employment for women as reported in the literature.
5. To highlight gaps in the existing literature and propose areas for future research.

## **Literature Review**

The empowerment of women through education and employment has been extensively studied, revealing significant insights into how these factors contribute to enhancing women's autonomy, decision-making capabilities and socio-economic status. Women empowerment is a multi-dimensional process involving social, economic and political spheres, significantly influenced by education and employment. The literature review explores existing research providing an in-depth analysis of how these variables interact and support empowerment while identifying challenges and gaps at the same time in achieving unbiased outcomes.

## **Education as a Foundation of Empowerment**

Education is often referred to as the cornerstone of empowerment, offering women the knowledge, skills and confidence to claim their rights and pursue opportunities. Javid and Khan (2013) examined the impact of education on women's empowerment in Quetta. Their findings indicate that educated women are more likely to be aware of their rights and possess the confidence to challenge societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality. Education increases women's awareness of their rights and enhances their capacity to engage in social and political processes. Stromquist (2015) highlights how education has enabled women in rural Latin America to participate actively in community governance and challenging the patriarchal norms. Similarly, the World Bank (2018) emphasizes the role of education in encouraging leadership among women in sub-Saharan Africa, where educated women are twice as likely to hold political office as compared to their less-educated peers. Education directly influences economic participation by improving employment prospects. Jain and Mathur (2024) found that women with tertiary education are more likely to access formal employment with higher wages and job security. In contrast, limited educational attainment often confines women to informal sectors which are characterized by exploitative working conditions (Rubery, 2017).

Despite the transformative potential education holds, the access still remains unequal. UNESCO (2020) reports that over 130 million girls worldwide are out of school due to poverty, cultural restrictions and



inadequate infrastructure. Policies such as educational subsidies and conditional cash transfers have been effective in bridging this gap, particularly in regions with high gender disparities.

### **Employment as a Pathway to Economic Independence**

Employment empowers women by providing financial independence and a platform to engage in decision-making processes at the household and community levels. Employment serves as a significant means of women's economic empowerment, offering financial independence and opportunities for social mobility. McKelway (2022) provides a descriptive evidence linking women's employment to various empowerment measures including increased autonomy, power and enhanced decision-making. West (2006) analyzed the relationship between employment and women's empowerment in India, concluding that paid employment significantly enhances women's ability to make autonomous decisions and reduces their dependence on the male family members. Additionally, Afrin and Hossen (2013) conducted a SWOT analysis on the impact of employment on women's empowerment, identifying strengths and weaknesses such as increased self-reliance and persistent wage disparities respectively.

Formal employment offers structured benefits, including job security, health insurance and legal protections. A report from The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021) states that women in formal employment are more likely to experience enhanced decision-making power and economic stability as compared to those in informal work where often basic labor protections lack. Employment not only provides financial resources but also boosts self-esteem and social mobility. Afrin and Hossen (2013) examined the psychological impact of employment on women in Bangladesh, finding that employed women were more confident and expressive of their opinions and actively participating in community activities. However, these benefits are undermined by the absence of workplace protections and gender-sensitive policies in many developing regions. Therefore, this study highlights the need for supportive policies to maximize the benefits of employment for women's empowerment.

Persistent challenges such as the gender wage gap, occupational segregation and workplace harassment still limit the women's ability to fully benefit from employment. Rubery (2017) for instance, highlights that women on an average earn 20% less than men globally, with the gap widening in higher-income countries.



## The Relationship Between Education and Employment

The combined impact of education and employment creates a reinforcing cycle of empowerment, yielding intergenerational benefits. A study by Jayaweera (1997) examined the impact of higher education on women's socio-economic empowerment in Asia, highlighting that education serves as a significant tool for women's advancement in both social and economic spheres. Education enhances women's employability by equipping them with the required skills for the jobs in formal sector. Duflo (2012) found that educated women are more likely to access managerial and professional roles, breaking the traditional gender stereotypes in the workforce. Employed women often prioritize education for themselves and their children, continuing the cycle of empowerment. For example, a longitudinal study in Kenya revealed that mothers with secondary education and formal employment were 40% more likely to invest in their daughter's education (World Bank, 2018).

Programs that integrate education and vocational training, such as India's SEWA initiative, have successfully transitioned women from informal to formal employment sectors. These initiatives demonstrate the potential for synergistic outcomes when education and employment are addressed concurrently (Jain & Mathur, 2024).

### Research Gaps

Despite an extensive research, several gaps remain:

1. **Context-Specific Challenges:** Limited studies focus on the unique barriers faced by women in conflict zones, indigenous communities and refugee settings.
2. **Intersectionality:** Research on how intersecting identities (e.g., race, caste, disability) affect women's empowerment through education and employment is scarce.
3. **Longitudinal Studies:** Few studies provide long-term insights into the sustained impacts of education and employment on empowerment.

Addressing these gaps through context-specific studies and intersectional approaches is essential for advancing the discourse on women's empowerment. Also longitudinal researches will help better understand the dynamic changes over time.



## Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design which allows for an in-depth exploration of the studies and synergies related to education, employment and women's empowerment. A diverse range of credible secondary sources were explored and reviewed for global and regional trends including Peer-reviewed journal articles and reports from some international organizations like UNESCO, The World Bank and The International Labour Organization (ILO). Books and academic theses were also consulted. Various online platforms and databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, PubMed and Google Scholar were searched using specific keywords. Keywords included "women empowerment," "role of education," "impact of employment on women," "education and economic independence," and "gender equality policies." These keywords were chosen to capture the broad spectrum of factors influencing women's empowerment and to identify the emerging themes. The search strategy was designed to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives, focusing on the social, economic and cultural dimensions of the subject ensuring a balanced and multidimensional analysis. The integration of these various sources provides a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between education and employment in advancing gender equality.

Furthermore, this approach highlights the existing gaps in research, such as limited research on the intersectionality of socio-cultural factors and structural barriers faced by women in diverse contexts affecting their access to education and employment opportunities. Many studies fail to adequately explore how socio-cultural factors, such as traditional gender roles and family dynamics, interact with education and employment to either hinder or facilitate women's empowerment. Another critical gap is the lack of longitudinal studies that examine the sustained impact of education and employment on women's empowerment over time. The current research predominantly focuses on short-term outcomes, leaving unanswered questions about the long-term benefits and challenges faced by women as they navigate their educational and professional journeys. By addressing these gaps, the study provides actionable insights for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners striving to create effective strategies for empowering women worldwide.

## Conclusion

Women empowerment is a transformative process which is central to achieving gender equality and sustainable development. Education and employment are pivotal in this journey, providing women with



the tools to assert their rights, make informed decisions and contribute meaningfully to the society. This study provides meaningful insights from the existing literature to explore the critical roles of education and employment, their synergistic relationship and also the barriers limiting their potential to empower women. Education serves as the foundation of empowerment, equipping women with knowledge, skills and confidence to challenge the societal norms which helps them actively participate in social, economic and political spheres. As highlighted by Stromquist (2015), education enhances women's decision-making capabilities and awareness of their rights, enabling them to overcome the gender-based discrimination. King and Hill (1993) emphasized that investment in women's education generates substantial returns, including improved health outcomes and higher economic productivity. Schultz (2002) further argued that educating girls yields broad social benefits, such as intergenerational improvements in literacy and income levels. However, persistent disparities in access to education remain a significant challenge, more so in low-income and rural areas (UNESCO, 2020).

Employment offers a pathway to financial independence, enhancing women's economic security and social mobility. The International Labour Organization (2021) found that women in the formal sector enjoy greater autonomy and economic stability as compared to those in the informal employment. Employment not only contributes to financial empowerment but also fosters a sense of psychological well-being, as highlighted by Afrin and Hossen (2013). However, systemic challenges such as wage gaps, occupational segregation and workplace discrimination continue to restrict women's participation in the workforce (Rubery, 2017). Boserup (1970) was among the first to highlight the transformative potential of women's economic participation, stressing on the fact that economic empowerment is a significant factor of societal progress.

The relationship between education and employment creates a reinforcing cycle of empowerment. Educated women are more likely to secure better employment opportunities, and employed women often prioritize education for themselves and their children, creating a chain of intergenerational benefits (Duflo, 2012). Heath and Jayachandran (2016) emphasized that the combined effect of education and labour force participation amplifies economic and social outcomes, significantly reducing the gender inequalities. Awareness programs like India's SEWA initiative demonstrates how vocational training and educational integration can transition women from informal to formal employment sectors (Jain & Mathur, 2024). Despite progress, barriers such as socio-cultural norms, wage inequalities, and inadequate policies persist. Narayan (2005), and Hannum and Buchmann (2005) highlighted how





structural inequalities disproportionately impact marginalized groups, particularly women in the conflict zones and rural settings. Overcoming these barriers requires targeted interventions which must be well-structured and comprehensive. The study also emphasizes on the importance of implementing gender-responsive policies to address systemic inequities in education and employment. The OECD (2012) advocated for equal pay legislation and workplace protections as critical components of effective policy frameworks. Initiatives that combine education and vocational training have proven successful in bridging the gap between education and employment, fostering inclusive development (UN Women, 2021). Additionally, Moser's (1989) framework on practical and strategic gender needs offers valuable insights for designing holistic interventions.

In conclusion, education and employment are not merely pathways to empowerment but foundational pillars for achieving gender equality and societal progress. As Sen (1999) argued, empowering women through education and economic participation contributes to the broader development of freedoms, benefitting individuals and communities alike. By addressing structural barriers and implementing targeted interventions, societies can create enabling environments where women thrive and lead. Achieving this vision aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNDP, 2019), making women's empowerment both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity.

### **Policy Implications**

Policies play a significant role in breaking the barriers to education and employment, thereby enhancing women's empowerment. Interventions such as equal pay laws, workplace harassment protections and parental leave policies are crucial for fostering a gender-equitable work environment. The International Labour Organization (2021) highlights how the Nordic countries have achieved a greater female labour force participation through such policies.

Increased investment in girl's education and vocational training is essential for bridging the gender gap. In the same context, UNESCO (2020) emphasizes how targeted programs addressing rural and marginalized communities have yielded significant improvements in the educational outcomes.

Duflo (2012) recommends aligning economic development policies with gender-sensitive strategies to ensure long-term sustainability as adopting holistic approaches that integrate education, employment and gender equity can maximize empowerment outcomes.



## Limitations

1. **Dependence on Secondary Data:** This study relies entirely on secondary sources such as journal articles, reports and books. While these sources provide a wealth of information, they do not capture the most recent trends or developments, particularly in fast-evolving socio-economic contexts in which primary data collection through surveys, interviews or case studies provide a more nuanced understanding of individual and community-level experiences of empowerment.
2. **Context-Specific Generalizability:** Literature spanning diverse regions and socio-economic settings has been studied. However, regional nuances and context-specific barriers are not fully addressed, limiting the generalizability of the results for a specific cultural or geographic context (Narayan, 2005; Stromquist, 2015).
3. **Language Constraints:** The review included only English language publications, excluding valuable research in other languages, particularly from non-English speaking regions that may have unique insights into women's empowerment (UNESCO, 2020).
4. **Lack of Technological Insights:** The role of technology, such as digital education platforms and remote work opportunities, is underexplored despite its growing significance in improving access to education and employment for women.

These limitations highlight the need and area of further research where policymakers and researchers can focus their future efforts to bridge the gaps in knowledge and also in practice.

## Future Directions

The study identifies key gaps in the literature which provides a strong ground for future researchers who wish to contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

1. Future researchers should explore how intersecting identities such as race, class and disability influence empowerment outcomes (Blumberg, 2005). They should explore the regional and cultural variations investigating the unique challenges faced by women in specific contexts, such as conflict zones, rural areas or indigenous communities, which can provide more targeted insights (Narayan, 2005; Stromquist, 2015).
2. With the rise of digital education platforms, remote work opportunities, and e-governance tools, researchers should investigate the role of technology in enhancing access to education and



employment. Studies should explore how digital inclusion can address barriers and empower women in underserved regions (UNDP, 2019).

3. Long-term studies (Longitudinal) are needed to assess the sustained impacts of education and employment on women's empowerment. Tracking intergenerational benefits and the evolution of empowerment over time can provide valuable insights in how policies and programs create a lasting change (Duflo, 2012; Heath & Jayachandran, 2016).
4. While formal employment is often emphasized, research should focus on the dynamics of informal labour markets too, where a large proportion of women in developing countries are employed. Understanding how to improve conditions, wages and protections in these sectors can significantly enhance the economic empowerment (ILO, 2021; Boserup, 1970).
5. Beyond social and economic dimensions, future studies should explore the psychological impacts of education and employment on women's empowerment. This includes self-esteem, agency and mental health outcomes, which are some crucial components of the holistic empowerment process (Afrin & Hossen, 2013).

These future directions can help researchers navigate and contribute to a deeper, more inclusive and actionable understanding of women's empowerment, addressing gaps in knowledge and advancing efforts towards gender equality and sustainable development.

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