

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Differences in Perception and Practices Among Unmarried and Married Men Regarding Women Empowerment in the Rural Areas of Himachal Pradesh

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## ARTICLE CYCLE

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** This article explores the intricate dynamics of women empowerment in selected rural areas of Himachal Pradesh, India, where traditional gender norms and socioeconomic disparities persist. It investigates the perceptions and practices related to women's empowerment, taking into account the influence of tradition, modernity, socio-economic conditions, and regional variations. The aim is to provide insights that can inform context-specific interventions to promote rural women's empowerment. **Methodology:** The study employed an unmatched case and control design, categorizing married men as the case group and unmarried men as the comparator group. It was conducted in selected villages within the Nagrota Bagwan and Shahpur health blocks of Himachal Pradesh. The participants were selected using cluster sampling technique. The total sample size of 268 males (134 in each group) was determined with an 80% study power and a 5% level of significance, using EpiInfo (7.2.3.1) software. **Results:** The study analysed the socio-demographic profiles, education status, occupation, and socioeconomic status of both groups. It found significant differences in family type, caste, and religion among married and unmarried men. Education levels and occupations also displayed significant differences between the two groups. The participants' knowledge about women's empowerment revealed that both married and unmarried men supported women's education and work opportunities. Notably, a higher proportion of married men believed that women should share their earnings among family, partner, and themselves. **Conclusion:** The study highlights the need for an awareness approach to reinforce existing knowledge and address specific gaps among both married and unmarried men in Himachal Pradesh.

## KEYWORDS

Women Empowerment, Men Perception, Decision Making, Gender Equality

## INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is a global imperative, and it holds particular significance in rural areas of India, where traditional gender norms and socioeconomic disparities often persist. Majority of girls are now getting basic education, many of them are in key leadership position and various laws are being reformed regarding gender equality. The marriage age of girls has now increased and only a few girls are forced into early marriages. Despite of these efforts, certain underdeveloped regions still hold social stigma against women, and it is reported that 1 out of 5 women between 15 to 49 age experience physical, mental, social and sexual violence by their partner within one year of marriage. To mitigate gender inequalities the women empowerment is considered as a vital tool.(2) This paper delves into the diverse perceptions and practices linked with women's empowerment in the selected rural areas of India. It explores how the confluence of tradition and modernity, socio-economic conditions, and regional differences have shaped the status and agency of women in these areas.

## MATERIAL & METHODS

The study was an unmatched case and control design where married men were considered as a case group and unmarried men as a comparator group. This study was carried out in selected villages of Nagrota Bagwan and Shahpur health blocks. The same are urban and rural health training Centre of Department

of Community Medicine, DRPGMC Kangra at Tanda, Himachal Pradesh.

Assuming knowledge prevalence about female contraceptives 70.0% in comparator and 85.0% in case group, a sample size of 134 males in each group (total 268) was calculated assuming 80.0% study power and 5.0% level of significance. The sample size was calculated using EpiInfo (7.2.3.1) software for unmatched case-control study design. Cluster sampling was employed as the method of participant selection.

*Ethical Approval:* Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from Institutional Ethics Committee of Dr Rajendra Prasad Government Medical College Kangra at Tanda, Himachal Pradesh India [Registration No: IEC/24/2021].

## RESULTS

This was a case control study among unmarried and married participants about their perceptions and knowledge about women empowerment. The table 1 shows the social and demographic characteristics of participants. The type of family among cases, majority (57.5%) belongs to joint family whereas among controls, the majority (65.0%) belongs to nuclear with statistically significant difference ( $P=0.000$ ). The majority among both groups (cases as well as controls) belongs to the OBC category with statistically significant difference. The statistical indifference was observed for religious association, as all the respondents in the case group while 97.0% respondents in control group practice Hindu religion.

**Table 1 The socio-demographic profile of married men (cases) and unmarried men (controls).**

Characteristics	Case n=134, (%)	Control n=134, (%)	P value
<b>Type of family</b>			
Joint	77 (57.5)	35 (26.0)	0.000
Nuclear	47 (35.1)	87 (65.0)	0.000
Three generation	10 (7.5)	12 (9.0)	0.824
<b>Cast</b>			
General	48 (35.8)	31 (23.1)	0.031
SC	19 (14.2)	16 (11.9)	0.717
ST	10 (7.5)	6 (4.5)	0.440
OBC	57 (42.5)	77 (57.5)	0.007
Others	0 (0.0)	4 (3.0)	0.020
<b>Religion</b>			
Hindu	134 (100)	130 (97.0)	0.122
Sikh	0 (0.0)	4 (3.0)	0.122

The table 2 describes the study participants according to their education status. The table displays that the graduates were more 58 (43.3%) in cases and 59 (44.0%) in control group while none were illiterate in both cases as well as control group. The intermediate educational level was observed in 37 (27.6%) among cases and 59 (44.0%) among the comparator group which was statistically significant ( $P=0.007$ ).

The part B of table 2 describes participants according to their self-reported occupation status. The majority (40.3%) among case group were businessman/ shop owners followed by skilled workers (26.1%). Among controls the majority (47.8%) were unemployed followed by skilled workers (22.4%). The differences across these occupations were observed to be statistically significant ( $P=0.000$ ).

**Table 2 Educational status and occupation of married men (cases) and unmarried men (controls).**

Characteristics	Case n=134, (%)	Control n=134, (%)	P value
<b>Education status</b>			
Postgraduate	8 (6.0)	2 (1.5)	0.102
Graduate	58 (43.3)	54 (40.3)	0.710
Intermediate	37 (27.6)	59 (44.0)	0.007
High school	24 (17.9)	14 (10.4)	0.114
Middle school	4 (3.0)	4 (3.0)	0.084
Primary school	3 (2.2)	1 (0.7)	0.622
Illiterate	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	NC
<b>Occupation</b>			
Professional	7 (5.2)	2 (1.5)	0.172
Semi professional	22 (16.4)	6 (4.5)	0.002
Businessman/ shop owner	54 (40.3)	17 (12.7)	0.000
Skilled worker	35 (26.1)	30 (22.4)	0.568
Semiskilled worker	4 (3.0)	5 (3.7)	1.000
Unskilled worker	4 (3.0)	10 (7.5))	0.167
Unemployed	8 (6.0)	64 (47.8)	0.000

The table 3 describes the study participants according to their socioeconomic status. Higher proportion of participants belongs to

middle class in case group (43.2%) and control group (52.2%) with no statistically significant differences.

**Table 3 Socioeconomic status of married men (cases) and unmarried men (controls).**

Characteristics	Case n=134, (%)	Control n=134, (%)	P value
Upper class	8 (5.97)	3 (2.2)	0.216
Upper middle class	40 (29.8)	25 (18.6)	0.045
Middle class	58 (43.2)	70 (52.2)	0.178
Lower middle class	26 (19.4)	33 (24.6)	0.376
Lower class	2 (1.4)	3 (2.2)	1.000

The table 4 describes the knowledge about women empowerment among study participants. Assessment for events/ actions of women empowerment observed that almost all the participants were of the opinion, that women should go out for education at school/ college/ university, work (indoor, outdoor area) in different city, state, country. The distribution of above-mentioned events was

statistically insignificant. Statistically higher proportion of participants in case group believe that women should distribute her money among family, partner, and herself as compared to control group (41.0% vs 23.1%, 0.002). In both groups the participants perception that women should decide regarding the planning (68.7% vs 58.2%, 0.098)

and termination (47.0 vs 44.0, 0.712) about her own pregnancy was statistically insignificant.

**Table 4 The knowledge about women empowerment among married men (cases) and unmarried men (controls)**

Characteristics	Case n=134, (%)	Control n=134, (%)	P value
Women should go to school/ college	134 (100.0)	134 (100.0)	1.000
Women should go to university	132 (98.5)	133 (99.3)	1.000
Women should work indoors	132 (98.5)	129 (96.3)	0.446
Women should work outdoors	127 (98.4)	120 (89.6)	0.171
Women should work in different city	119 (88.8)	115 (85.8)	0.582
Women should work in different state	106 (79.1)	110 (82.1)	0.643
Women should work in different country	83 (61.9)	79 (59.0)	0.707
Women should give money to			
Self	50 (37.3)	59 (44.0)	0.319
Partner	16 (11.9)	26 (19.4)	0.129
Parents	13 (9.7)	18 (13.4)	0.445
All the above	55 (41.0)	31 (23.1)	0.002
Partner for marriage of women to be decided by			
Self	39 (29.1)	40 (29.9)	1.000
Parents	17 (12.7)	22 (16.4)	0.488
Both	78 (58.2)	72 (53.7)	0.538
Women should plan her own pregnancy	92 (68.7)	78 (58.2)	0.098
Women should decide about termination of pregnancy	63 (47.0)	59 (44.0)	0.712

## DISCUSSION

It was community-based unmatched case control study in which 268 participants- 134 cases (married participants) and 134 controls (unmarried participants) were recruited for assessment. As expected in present study, the average age of married participants was significantly high (32.4 years) while of unmarried participants was 24.0 years. It was comparable to most of studies conducted in the past on married and unmarried men about reproductive health and contraception. Like Chankapa YD et al(3) conducted a population based cross-sectional study among 596 married participants in rural area of Sikkim in which mean age of participants was 32.9 years. In present study among married participants majority belonged to joint family while among unmarried participants majority (64.9%) belonged to nuclear family. A hospital based cross- sectional study was done by Narang H. et al(4) at Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi among 232 married participants. In this study as well, most (60.3%) of married participants were living in joint families. J. Suresh and P. Balram (5) conducted a community based cross- sectional study among 385 married men in rural areas of

Maharashtra in which majority (60.8%) of married participants belonged to nuclear families and 39.2% belonged to joint families. Char A. et al(6) conducted a study in which 51.6% of unmarried participants living in nuclear families and 48.4% living in joint families.

In present study majority of married and unmarried participants belonged to Other Backward Classes (OBC) category followed by general category, SC category and ST category respectively. Pragyan P. et al(7) conducted a hospital based cross-sectional study among 365 married males through semi-structured questionnaire in Chhattisgarh where majority (77.3%) of them belonged to OBC category. Char A. et al(8) conducted a study among unmarried participants in which large group (60.0%) belonged to OBC category.

After assessment for social class, education level assessment showed that 43.3% participants among case group were graduate while 44.0% among controls were educated up to intermediate. This difference corresponds with the age group distribution of case and controls. As most of the participants in case group have higher mean age. J. Suresh and P. Balram (9) conducted a study among married

participants in which 28.1% were illiterate, 18.2% have completed primary schooling, 38.2% have completed secondary level education and 15.6% have completed higher secondary education. Char A. *et al* (10) conducted a study on unmarried men in which 70.2% have completed secondary level education, 20.6% middle level education, 4.1% primary level education and 5.1% were illiterate.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal: the Gender equality talks about eliminating all types of discrimination and violence directing at women at all places. (11) The decisions regarding day-to-day life and activities do not affect only women health but also family overall health. In present study the assessment for events/ actions of women empowerment observed that almost all the participants were of opinion that women should go out for education at school/ college/ university, work (indoor, outdoor area) in different city, state, and country. The 68.7% among married participants and 58.2% among unmarried participants believe that women should plan her own pregnancy. Walia M. *et al*(12) conducted a community based cross-sectional study in rural areas of Haryana among various married women's and investigated their perspective on men's involvement in the reproductive healthcare decisions of women and many of them stated that such decisions were made mutually with their spouses. Especially, 43 couples (41.3%) mutually decided on the timing of their first child. Additionally, 47 women (45.2%) stated cooperative decision making on the desired number of children, and in 48 cases (46.2%), mutual understanding for contraceptive decisions. In the same way, the choice of contraceptive methods was mutual in 55 cases (52.9%). The place of delivery was also decided mutually by 28 couples (26.9%). According to NFHS-5(13) conducted by International Institute of population Sciences in rural areas of Himachal Pradesh, 87.7% of married women actively engage in taking decisions regarding domestic matters, including their own healthcare, significant domestic purchases and social visits. The 25.6% women have worked in last one year and they were paid in cash.

Schuler S.R. *et al*(14) conducted a community-based study among men in rural areas of Bangladesh. In this study the men described female education, economic contribution, and presence in the public domain in conjunction with school, work outside the home, shopping and social visits have increased awareness, competence and confidence of women. Several men expressed a preference for women working from home. Beyond contributing to household income, men acknowledged the financial benefits of women skilled in household management and recognized the educational role of educated women in their children's lives. Many men respected the efforts of modern women in maintaining households, looking after their children, and practicing family planning.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion this study reveals a commendable level of knowledge and awareness regarding women empowerment among unmarried and married participants in Himachal Pradesh. The findings emphasize awareness approach for married and unmarried men to reinforce existing knowledge and address specific gaps. It emphasizes the importance of promoting women's empowerment, considering the diverse socio-cultural and economic backgrounds in rural areas. The findings can inform targeted interventions aimed at advancing gender equality and women's agency in this region.

## AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All authors have contributed equally.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest.

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