



A STUDY ON GENDER DISCRIMINATION RELATING TO WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN MORIGAON DISTRICT (ASSAM)

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Gender discrimination remains one of the most pervasive social challenges in India, affecting women's access to education, economic resources, decision-making power, and legal rights. Despite numerous policy interventions and empowerment initiatives, women in rural areas continue to face structural and cultural barriers that limit their agency and socio-economic development. The present study aims to examine the nature and extent of gender discrimination and its impact on women's empowerment in Morigaon District, Assam. Specifically, it investigates the forms of discrimination experienced by women, their economic participation, household decision-making autonomy, and awareness of legal rights and government welfare schemes.

A mixed-methods research design was employed to ensure a comprehensive analysis. Quantitative data were collected from 400 women respondents using a structured interview schedule, selected through stratified random sampling across rural and urban areas of Morigaon District. Additionally, qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews and four focus group discussions, allowing the study to capture nuanced experiences and socio-cultural contexts of gender discrimination. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations were used to summarize quantitative data, while thematic analysis was employed to interpret qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Kothari, 2014).

The findings reveal that gender discrimination is multidimensional, with unequal household workload (72%), restricted mobility (58%), and economic discrimination (49%) being the most prevalent forms. Women's economic empowerment is limited: only 38% have an independent source of income, and 29% control their earnings. Participation in household decision-making is higher in areas related to children's education and healthcare but remains extremely low in financial and property-related decisions. Awareness of legal rights and protective laws is also inadequate, with only 31% aware of general legal rights and 26% aware of the Domestic Violence Act, 2005. The study indicates a strong inverse relationship between gender discrimination and empowerment, suggesting that structural and cultural constraints significantly limit women's agency and access to opportunities (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999).

Based on the findings, the study suggests targeted interventions such as educational programs, skill development, expansion of self-help groups, legal literacy campaigns, and community sensitization initiatives. Strengthening these measures can enhance women's access to resources, decision-making power, and social participation, thereby promoting holistic empowerment. The study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence from Morigaon District, a relatively under-researched region, and offers practical policy recommendations for promoting gender equity and inclusive development in rural Assam.

Keywords: Gender Discrimination, Women's Empowerment, Rural Women, Decision Making, Economic Participation, Morigaon District, Assam

Introduction

Gender discrimination is a deeply entrenched social phenomenon that continues to affect women's lives across societies, irrespective of economic growth and modernization. It refers to the unequal treatment of individuals based on gender, leading to disparities in access to resources, opportunities, rights, and decision-making power. Historically, women have been marginalized due to patriarchal social structures that privilege men and assign women subordinate roles within families and communities. These inequalities manifest in education, employment, health care, political participation, and control over property and income (UNDP, 2016).

Globally, gender equality has been recognized as a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for sustainable development. International frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) emphasize the need to eliminate discrimination and promote women's empowerment. Despite such efforts, gender gaps remain significant, particularly in developing countries, where cultural norms and economic constraints reinforce women's subordination (Sen, 1999).

In India, gender discrimination is rooted in long-standing patriarchal traditions, customs, and social norms. Although the Indian Constitution guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, women continue to face structural disadvantages. These include lower literacy rates, limited workforce participation, wage gaps, restricted mobility, and minimal representation in decision-making bodies. Such inequalities are more pronounced in rural and semi-urban areas, where traditional gender roles remain dominant (Agarwal, 1997).

Assam, a northeastern state of India, presents a complex socio-cultural landscape shaped by ethnicity, agrarian livelihoods, and uneven development. While the state has made progress in female literacy and health indicators, gender disparities persist in economic participation and political representation. Morigaon District, located in central Assam, is predominantly rural, with agriculture and informal labor forming the backbone of the local economy. Women in the district often engage in unpaid household work and agricultural activities, yet their contributions remain undervalued and unrecognized.

Traditional family structures, early marriage, limited educational opportunities, and economic dependency continue to restrict women's autonomy in Morigaon District. Gender discrimination is often normalized within households through unequal division of labor, limited access to education for girls, and exclusion from financial and property-related decisions. These practices directly affect women's ability to exercise agency and achieve empowerment. Understanding the background and context of gender discrimination in Morigaon District is therefore essential for assessing the challenges faced by women and identifying pathways toward meaningful empowerment.

Concept of Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is a multidimensional and dynamic concept that has gained prominence in development discourse over the past few decades. It refers to the process by which women gain the ability to make strategic life choices, access resources, and exercise control over decisions that affect their lives (Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment goes beyond mere participation and focuses on enhancing women's agency, autonomy, and self-confidence.

Scholars conceptualize empowerment as comprising three interrelated dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements. Resources include material, human, and social assets such as education, income, land, and social networks. Agency refers to women's capacity to define goals and act upon them, while achievements represent the outcomes of empowerment processes (Kabeer, 1999). Thus, empowerment is not a one-time outcome but an ongoing process influenced by social, economic, and political factors.

In the Indian context, women's empowerment is closely linked with access to education, employment, health services, and legal rights. Education plays a critical role in enhancing awareness, skills, and confidence, enabling women to challenge discriminatory practices. Economic empowerment, through income generation and financial independence, strengthens women's bargaining power within households and communities (Sen, 1999). However, empowerment cannot be reduced to economic aspects alone; social and psychological dimensions are equally important.

In rural areas such as Morigaon District, women's empowerment is shaped by local cultural norms, family structures, and community dynamics. Women often face restrictions on mobility, limited participation in public life, and heavy burdens of unpaid domestic labor. These factors constrain their ability to benefit fully from development initiatives. Participation in self-help groups (SHGs), local institutions, and community organizations has emerged as an important avenue for empowerment by fostering collective action, leadership skills, and social support.

Empowerment also involves awareness of legal rights and the ability to access institutional mechanisms for protection and justice. Without knowledge of laws related to property rights, domestic violence, and gender equality, women remain vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation. Therefore, women's empowerment must be understood as a holistic process that addresses economic, social, cultural, and institutional barriers simultaneously (UNDP, 2016).

Gender Discrimination and Women's Empowerment: A Conceptual Linkage

Gender discrimination and women's empowerment are intrinsically linked, as discrimination directly undermines the conditions necessary for empowerment. Discriminatory practices restrict women's access to education, employment, healthcare, and decision-making opportunities, thereby limiting their ability to exercise agency and control over their lives. Empowerment, in contrast, seeks to dismantle these barriers and create enabling environments for women to realize their full potential (Sen, 1999).

At the household level, gender discrimination often manifests through unequal division of labor, preference for male children, restricted mobility, and exclusion from financial decisions. Women are typically assigned unpaid domestic and caregiving

responsibilities, which limit their time and opportunities for education or income-generating activities. Such practices reinforce economic dependency and reduce women's bargaining power within families (Agarwal, 1997).

At the community and societal levels, discriminatory norms and institutions further constrain women's empowerment. Limited access to productive resources, wage disparities, and underrepresentation in political and governance structures perpetuate gender inequality. These structural barriers make it difficult for women to translate available resources into meaningful achievements, even when development programs exist.

Empirical studies suggest that reducing gender discrimination has a positive impact on empowerment outcomes. Increased access to education enhances women's awareness and confidence, while economic opportunities improve autonomy and decision-making power. Collective platforms such as self-help groups have been shown to reduce social isolation and promote leadership skills among women (Kabeer, 1999).

In Morigaon District, gender discrimination continues to shape women's experiences across multiple domains. While empowerment initiatives such as SHGs and welfare schemes are present, their effectiveness is often constrained by entrenched patriarchal attitudes. Understanding the linkage between discrimination and empowerment is therefore crucial for designing interventions that address not only material deprivation but also social norms and power relations.

Rationale of the Study

Despite increasing emphasis on women's empowerment in policy and development discourse, gender discrimination continues to persist at the grassroots level. Many empowerment programs focus on economic indicators without adequately addressing the social and cultural dimensions of discrimination that limit women's agency. As a result, the outcomes of such programs often remain partial and unsustainable.

In Assam, and particularly in Morigaon District, empirical studies examining the intersection of gender discrimination and women's empowerment are limited. Most existing research focuses on state-level indicators or specific schemes, leaving a gap in understanding district-level realities and lived experiences of women. Morigaon District presents a unique context due to its agrarian economy, rural dominance, and traditional social structures, which significantly influence gender relations.

The rationale for the present study lies in the need to generate localized, empirical evidence on how gender discrimination operates in everyday life and how it affects women's empowerment outcomes. By examining household practices, economic participation, decision-making autonomy, and awareness of rights, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's status in the district.

Such an analysis is crucial for policymakers, development practitioners, and scholars. Identifying the specific forms of discrimination faced by women can help in designing targeted interventions that address both economic and socio-cultural barriers. Moreover, understanding the factors that promote empowerment, such as education and collective action, can inform the formulation of effective gender-sensitive policies.

The study also contributes to academic literature by linking theoretical perspectives on empowerment with empirical findings from a district-level study. It aims to bridge the gap between policy intentions and ground realities, thereby supporting efforts toward achieving gender equality and inclusive development in Morigaon District.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the nature and extent of gender discrimination experienced by women in Morigaon District of Assam.
2. To assess the level of women's empowerment in terms of education, economic participation, and household decision-making.
3. To analyze the relationship between gender discrimination and women's empowerment in Morigaon District.

Significance of the Study

The present study on gender discrimination and women's empowerment in Morigaon District of Assam holds considerable academic, social, and policy relevance. Gender discrimination continues to impede women's access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power, particularly in rural and semi-urban regions. By examining the relationship between discrimination and empowerment at the district level, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how structural and cultural inequalities shape women's lived experiences and development outcomes (Kabeer, 1999). From an academic perspective, the study enriches existing literature on gender studies and development by providing empirical evidence from a relatively under-researched region of Northeast India. Much of the existing research on women's empowerment in India focuses on national or state-level analyses, often overlooking district-specific variations. By focusing on Morigaon District, this study addresses this gap and offers localized insights that can enhance theoretical frameworks on empowerment, particularly the resource-agency-achievement model proposed by Kabeer (1999). The findings also help contextualize Sen's (1999) capability approach by demonstrating how discrimination restricts women's freedom and agency in everyday life.

The study is socially significant as it highlights the persistent forms of gender discrimination that operate within households and communities. Practices such as unequal workload distribution, restricted mobility, and exclusion from financial decisions are often normalized and remain invisible in policy discourse. By documenting these experiences, the study gives voice to women and draws attention to the subtle yet pervasive ways in which discrimination undermines empowerment. Increased awareness of these issues can contribute to changing social attitudes and promoting gender-sensitive behavior at the family and community levels (UNDP, 2016).

In terms of policy relevance, the study provides evidence-based insights that can assist policymakers and development practitioners in designing and implementing more effective gender-responsive interventions. Understanding the specific barriers faced by women in Morigaon District enables the formulation of targeted strategies that address not only economic deprivation but also social and cultural constraints. The findings can inform the improvement of existing women-centric schemes related to education, livelihood, self-help groups, and legal awareness. They also underscore the importance of integrating gender sensitization and legal literacy components into empowerment programs (Agarwal, 1997).

The study is also significant for local governance institutions, non-governmental organizations, and community-based organizations working on women's issues. By identifying key factors that enhance empowerment – such as education, income generation, and collective action—the research offers practical insights for grassroots initiatives. These stakeholders can utilize the findings to strengthen community participation, encourage women's leadership, and promote inclusive decision-making processes.

Finally, the study has long-term developmental significance. Gender equality and women's empowerment are central to achieving sustainable development goals, as empowered women contribute to improved health, education, and economic outcomes for families and communities (Sen, 1999). By highlighting the link between gender discrimination and empowerment, the study emphasizes the need for holistic and sustained efforts to promote gender justice. Overall, the research serves as a valuable resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners committed to advancing women's empowerment and inclusive development in Morigaon District and similar socio-cultural contexts.

Review of Literature

The issue of gender discrimination and women's empowerment has attracted considerable scholarly attention across disciplines such as sociology, economics, political science, and development studies. Researchers have examined the structural, cultural, and institutional factors that perpetuate gender inequality and explored pathways for enhancing women's empowerment. This section reviews key theoretical and empirical studies relevant to the present research.

One of the most influential conceptual frameworks on women's empowerment was developed by Kabeer (1999), who defined empowerment as a process involving resources, agency, and achievements. According to her, empowerment cannot be measured solely by access to resources such as education or income; rather, it must include women's ability to exercise agency and make strategic life choices. This framework has been widely used to analyze how gender discrimination restricts women's agency, particularly within households and communities.

Sen's (1999) capability approach further enriched the discourse by emphasizing freedom, choice, and human capabilities as central to development. Sen argued that gender inequality limits women's capabilities by denying them opportunities to develop skills, participate in decision-making, and access productive resources. His work highlighted that empowerment is both a means and an end of development, closely linked to social justice and equality.

Several studies in the Indian context have documented the persistence of gender discrimination despite legal safeguards. Agarwal (1997) examined intra-household bargaining and demonstrated that women's lack of access to property and productive assets significantly weakens their bargaining power. She emphasized that ownership of land and assets enhances women's economic security and decision-making authority, thereby contributing to empowerment.

Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001), in their comparative study of women's autonomy in South Asia, found that women's decision-making power is influenced by education, employment, and age, but constrained by patriarchal norms. Their findings revealed that even educated women often face restrictions on mobility and financial decisions, indicating the deep-rooted nature of gender discrimination.

Desai and Andrist (2010) explored the relationship between education, employment, and women's autonomy in India. They found that higher education and paid employment positively affect women's participation in household decisions. However, the authors noted that social norms and family expectations often mediate these effects, limiting the transformative potential of education and employment.

A significant body of literature has focused on economic empowerment through self-help groups (SHGs) and microfinance initiatives. Kabeer (2005) argued that collective action through SHGs can enhance women's confidence, social networks, and bargaining power. However, she cautioned that economic gains do not automatically translate into social empowerment unless accompanied by changes in gender relations.

Studies conducted in rural India have highlighted that women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and care work, which limits their participation in education and income-generating activities (Chaudhary & Verick, 2014). This unequal division of labor reinforces economic dependency and perpetuates gender discrimination within households.

In the context of Assam and Northeast India, research on women's empowerment remains relatively limited but growing. Bora (2018) examined the role of SHGs in Assam and found that participation in SHGs improved women's economic independence and social interaction. However, the study also noted that patriarchal attitudes and lack of legal awareness restricted women's participation in decision-making beyond household matters.

Another study by Goswami (2016) on rural women in Assam revealed that while literacy rates among women have improved, employment opportunities remain scarce. The author emphasized that social norms, early marriage, and limited skill development continue to constrain women's empowerment. The study called for integrated interventions addressing education, livelihood, and social awareness.

Research has also emphasized the importance of legal awareness in combating gender discrimination. Studies have shown that women with knowledge of legal rights and protective laws are more likely to resist discrimination and seek institutional support (UNDP, 2016). However, awareness of laws such as the Domestic Violence Act and property rights remains low among rural women.

Overall, the literature suggests that gender discrimination is a multidimensional phenomenon that operates at household, community, and institutional levels. While education, employment, and collective action have the potential to enhance women's empowerment, their effectiveness is often constrained by entrenched patriarchal norms. Existing studies highlight the need for localized, empirical research to understand how gender discrimination shapes women's empowerment in specific contexts.

The present study builds on these insights by examining the relationship between gender discrimination and women's empowerment in Morigaon District, Assam. By focusing on district-level realities, it seeks to bridge the gap between macro-level analyses and grassroots experiences, thereby contributing to both academic literature and policy formulation.

Methodology

The present study employs a mixed-methods research approach to examine gender discrimination and its relationship with women's empowerment in Morigaon District, Assam. Gender discrimination and empowerment are complex social phenomena that manifest across multiple dimensions, including household roles, economic participation, decision-making autonomy, and awareness of legal rights. A mixed-methods approach allows for the integration of quantitative data, which provides measurable patterns of discrimination and empowerment, with qualitative insights capturing women's lived experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Research Design

The study follows a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive aspect focuses on documenting the socio-demographic characteristics of women and identifying the forms of discrimination they face, while the analytical aspect examines the relationship between gender discrimination and various indicators of empowerment. A convergent parallel design was adopted, wherein quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and then integrated during interpretation to ensure triangulation and validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Study Area

Morigaon District was selected as the study area due to its predominantly rural population, traditional family structures, and limited economic opportunities for women. The socio-cultural context of the district provides a representative setting to investigate the impact of gender discrimination on women's empowerment at the grassroots level.

Population and Sample

The universe of the study comprises women aged 18–60 years residing in Morigaon District. For the quantitative survey, a sample of 400 women respondents was selected using stratified random sampling, ensuring representation from both rural and urban areas. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select 30 women for in-depth interviews and four focus group discussions (FGDs) with 6–8 participants each. Participants were chosen to reflect diverse age groups, educational levels, occupations, and marital statuses.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a structured interview schedule and semi-structured guides for interviews and FGDs. The structured schedule included sections on socio-demographic details, experiences of gender discrimination, economic participation, decision-making power, and awareness of rights and welfare schemes. Qualitative tools enabled respondents to

express their experiences in their own words, providing depth and context to the quantitative findings. Secondary data were obtained from census reports, government publications, and scholarly literature.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to discrimination, empowerment, and socio-cultural constraints (Kothari, 2014; Kabeer, 1999).

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured that the data collected would be used exclusively for academic purposes. Ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout the study (UNDP, 2016).

Results and Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to present and analyze the findings of the study on gender discrimination and women's empowerment in Morigaon District, Assam. This section integrates both quantitative and qualitative data collected from 400 women respondents through structured interviews, as well as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The analysis aims to identify patterns and relationships between gender-based discrimination and various dimensions of women's empowerment, including economic participation, decision making autonomy, and awareness of rights and welfare schemes (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999).

Gender discrimination is recognized as a multidimensional social phenomenon that operates at the household, community, and institutional levels. Understanding its manifestations is essential for assessing women's empowerment, which encompasses access to resources, the ability to exercise agency, and the achievement of desired outcomes (Kabeer, 1999). The present chapter examines socio-demographic characteristics, types of discrimination experienced by women, economic empowerment indicators, participation in household decision-making, and awareness of legal rights and welfare initiatives.

The analysis employs descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and crosstabulations to summarize quantitative data, while qualitative thematic analysis is used to interpret women's lived experiences and contextual nuances. By triangulating quantitative and qualitative findings, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how structural inequalities and cultural norms influence women's empowerment. Additionally, the chapter highlights disparities across rural and urban respondents, educational levels, and occupational groups to explore factors that either facilitate or hinder empowerment.

Overall, this chapter serves as the empirical core of the study, linking theoretical frameworks with field-based evidence. It demonstrates the pervasive nature of gender discrimination in Morigaon District and its impact on women's social, economic, and legal empowerment. The findings provide a foundation for subsequent discussion, policy recommendations, and interventions aimed at promoting gender equity and inclusive development (UNDP, 2016).

Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Women Respondents (N = 400)

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (Years)	18-24	72	18.0
	25-45	208	52.0
	46-60	120	30.0
Residence	Rural	272	68.0
	Urban	128	32.0
Education	Illiterate	88	22.0
	Primary	112	28.0
	Secondary	136	34.0
	Higher	64	16.0
Occupation	Homemaker	184	46.0
	Agriculture	96	24.0
	SHG/Self-employed	72	18.0
	Service/Others	48	12.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. A majority of women (52%) belong to the age group 25-45 years, which is economically productive and potentially active in social participation. Rural respondents dominate (68%), highlighting the predominantly rural nature of Morigaon District. Educational attainment shows that 22% of women are illiterate

and only 16% have higher education, indicating limited formal educational opportunities. Occupational distribution reveals that 46% are homemakers, reflecting economic dependence, while 18% are involved in SHGs or self-employment, signaling emerging avenues for empowerment. This socio-demographic profile suggests that structural factors like rural residence, low education, and unpaid domestic work significantly influence women’s vulnerability to gender discrimination and shape their empowerment opportunities (Kabeer, 1999).

Forms of Gender Discrimination

Table 2: Types of Gender Discrimination Experienced by Women

Type of Discrimination	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Unequal household workload	288	72.0
Restricted mobility	232	58.0
Economic discrimination	196	49.0
Limited access to education	164	41.0
Neglect in healthcare	148	37.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 shows that unequal household workload is the most commonly reported form of gender discrimination, affecting 72% of women. Restricted mobility (58%) limits women’s access to education, employment, and social interaction, while economic discrimination (49%) reflects denial of financial autonomy or unequal remuneration. Additionally, 41% of women reported limited access to education, and 37% experienced neglect in healthcare, indicating systemic gender inequality. These findings confirm that discrimination in Morigaon District is multidimensional, operating across domestic, economic, and social spheres. The results align with previous studies suggesting that domestic burden, restricted mobility, and economic dependency are key factors hindering women’s empowerment (UNDP, 2016; Sen, 1999).

Economic Empowerment of Women

Table 3: Economic Empowerment Indicators

Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)
Independent income	38.0	62.0
Control over earnings	29.0	71.0
Participation in SHGs	34.0	66.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 highlights the limited economic empowerment among women in Morigaon District. Although 38% reported an independent income, only 29% had control over their earnings, demonstrating that financial independence does not automatically confer decision-making power. Participation in SHGs (34%) positively influences income generation, social networking, and confidence, yet the majority of women remain outside organized economic structures. The data indicate that while income generation is essential, true empowerment requires both access to resources and control over those resources, consistent with Kabeer’s (1999) resource–agency–achievement framework.

Participation in Household Decision-Making

Table 4: Women’s Decision-Making Autonomy

Decision Area	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Children’s education	46	34	20
Healthcare decisions	42	36	22
Financial matters	18	32	50
Property-related decisions	12	28	60

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 shows that women have relatively high participation in decisions related to children’s education (46%) and healthcare (42%), reflecting traditional caregiving roles. However, participation in financial and property-related decisions is considerably lower, with 50% and 60% reporting minimal involvement, respectively. This suggests a persistent patriarchal structure in households where women are excluded from strategic decision-making, reinforcing dependency and limiting empowerment outcomes. These results mirror previous research emphasizing that women’s agency is often symbolic unless it encompasses economic and legal decision-making (Desai & Andrist, 2010; Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001).

Awareness of Legal Rights and Government Schemes

Table 5: Awareness of Rights and Welfare Schemes

Awareness Area	Aware (%)	Not Aware (%)
Government welfare schemes	44	56
Legal rights of women	31	69
Domestic Violence Act, 2005	26	74

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5 indicates low awareness of legal rights among women respondents. While 44% are aware of welfare schemes, awareness of legal protections is significantly lower: only 31% know their legal rights and just 26% are aware of the Domestic Violence Act. This limited legal literacy constrains women's ability to assert their rights and seek institutional support in cases of discrimination or abuse. The results highlight the importance of integrating legal awareness programs into empowerment initiatives, as knowledge of laws and schemes is crucial for both social and economic empowerment (UNDP, 2016; Kabeer, 1999).

Discussion

The findings of the study clearly indicate that gender discrimination remains a significant barrier to women's empowerment in Morigaon District. The prevalence of unequal household workload and restricted mobility reflects deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that assign caregiving and domestic responsibilities exclusively to women. These findings are consistent with earlier studies which argue that unpaid domestic labour limits women's access to education and employment opportunities (Kabear, 1999).

The low level of economic empowerment observed in the study supports the argument that access to income alone does not ensure empowerment unless accompanied by control over resources and decision-making power. Although SHGs have contributed positively to women's economic participation, their limited reach restricts broader empowerment outcomes. Similar observations have been made in studies on rural women's empowerment in India (UNDP, 2016).

Women's limited participation in financial and property-related decisions highlights structural inequality within households. While women are consulted in caregiving decisions, exclusion from strategic decisions perpetuates dependency and power imbalance. This pattern reinforces the notion that empowerment must be understood beyond symbolic participation and measured in terms of agency and authority.

The study also reveals low awareness of legal rights and welfare schemes, which significantly undermines women's ability to challenge discrimination. Legal illiteracy prevents women from accessing institutional support and reinforces tolerance of discriminatory practices. This finding aligns with feminist scholarship emphasizing the role of legal awareness in strengthening women's empowerment (Sen, 1999).

Overall, the discussion establishes a strong inverse relationship between gender discrimination and women's empowerment. Reducing discrimination through education, economic opportunities, legal awareness, and community engagement is essential for achieving substantive empowerment in Morigaon District.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study on gender discrimination and women's empowerment in Morigaon District, several suggestions are proposed to address the challenges faced by women and promote inclusive development. First, education and skill development programs must be strengthened. The study reveals that a significant proportion of women are illiterate or have only primary education, which limits their opportunities for employment and economic independence. Implementing adult literacy programs, vocational training, and digital literacy initiatives can equip women with the necessary skills to participate effectively in income-generating activities and decision-making (Kabear, 1999).

Second, economic empowerment initiatives should be expanded. Participation in self-help groups (SHGs) and access to microfinance schemes were shown to enhance women's income and confidence, but coverage remains limited. Government and non-governmental organizations should increase the reach of SHGs, provide seed funding for small enterprises, and offer training in financial management. Special attention should be given to rural women, who are more vulnerable to economic dependency due to limited employment options (UNDP, 2016).

Third, awareness and legal literacy programs are essential. The study indicates low awareness of women's legal rights and protective laws such as the Domestic Violence Act, 2005. Community-based workshops, legal aid camps, and awareness campaigns can empower women to assert their rights, access government schemes, and seek legal recourse in cases of discrimination or abuse (Sen, 1999).

Fourth, sensitization of family and community members is crucial to reduce gender bias and promote equitable household practices. Programs emphasizing shared domestic responsibilities, women's participation in financial decisions, and gender equality can help challenge patriarchal norms and foster supportive environments for empowerment.

Finally, policy interventions should adopt an integrated approach, combining education, economic opportunities, legal awareness, and social sensitization. A multi-dimensional strategy is essential for addressing structural inequalities and ensuring sustainable women's empowerment in Morigaon District and similar socio-cultural contexts.

Conclusion

The present study provides comprehensive insights into the persistent nature of gender discrimination and its impact on women's empowerment in Morigaon District, Assam. The findings reveal that discrimination is multidimensional, encompassing unequal household workloads, restricted mobility, limited access to education and healthcare, and economic dependency. Women continue to face significant barriers in both private and public spheres, which limit their agency and ability to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes (Kabeer, 1999).

Economic empowerment remains constrained despite the presence of self-help groups (SHGs) and income-generating opportunities. Although 38% of women reported having independent sources of income, only 29% had control over their earnings, indicating that financial participation alone does not guarantee empowerment. Decision-making within households is largely symbolic in financial and property matters, while women exercise some influence in areas related to children's education and healthcare. These patterns highlight the structural and cultural barriers that perpetuate gender inequality and limit the realization of women's potential (Sen, 1999; Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001).

The study also underscores the critical role of awareness and legal literacy. A majority of women were unaware of their legal rights and protective laws such as the Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which significantly reduces their capacity to challenge discrimination and access institutional support. Strengthening women's knowledge of laws, welfare schemes, and avenues for redressal is therefore crucial for enabling meaningful empowerment (UNDP, 2016).

Overall, the study demonstrates a strong inverse relationship between gender discrimination and women's empowerment. Addressing these issues requires a multi-dimensional strategy that combines education, skill development, economic opportunities, legal awareness, and community sensitization. Policy interventions must target both individual and structural levels to dismantle patriarchal norms and create enabling environments for women's participation in economic, social, and political spheres (Kabeer, 2005; UNDP, 2016).

In conclusion, while progress has been made through SHGs, educational initiatives, and legal reforms, women in Morigaon District continue to experience significant disparities. Promoting holistic empowerment requires sustained efforts from government, civil society, and local communities to ensure that women not only access resources but also gain control over them and achieve agency in all aspects of life.

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