



Intrusions, Alternatives, and Perspectives: A Quantitative Analysis of Female Policy Empowerment Interventions in India

Dr. Lavanyanjali Mukkerla^{1*}, Bhramara Sree R²

¹ Asst. Prof & Head, Dept. of Public Administration, St. Anns College for Women, Hyd, India.

² Asst. Prof & Head, Dept. of Political Science, St. Ann's College for Women, Hyd, India.

Corresponding author(s):

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Dr. Lavanyanjali Mukkerla, Asst. Prof & Head, Dept. of Public Administration, St. Anns College for Women, Hyd, India.

Email: lavanyamukkerla@gmail.com

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Abstract:

Women's empowerment has emerged as a central objective of public policy in India, reflecting the country's commitment to achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Over the past few decades, the Government of India has introduced several legislative measures and welfare programmes, including the National Policy for Women, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Mahila Shakti Kendra, Mission Shakti, and various livelihood initiatives aimed at improving women's access to education, healthcare, employment, financial services, and political participation. Despite these efforts, considerable disparities continue to exist in the extent to which women benefit from these interventions. Differences in education, caste, geographical location, institutional accessibility, and socio-cultural norms continue to influence the effectiveness of empowerment policies. Recent scholarship also highlights that implementation gaps, rather than policy design alone, remain a major challenge in achieving equitable outcomes.

This study examines the effectiveness of female policy empowerment interventions by analysing the structural barriers that impede implementation, exploring alternative governance approaches, and understanding women's perspectives on policy outcomes. The research

employs a quantitative design based on a structured survey administered to 300 women respondents. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS, including descriptive statistics, Chi-square analysis, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), multiple regression, and exploratory factor analysis to identify the determinants of perceived empowerment.

The findings indicate that institutional trust, educational attainment, and access to policy benefits significantly influence women's perceptions of empowerment. The results further demonstrate that caste-based inequalities, limited awareness, and inadequate institutional outreach continue to constrain policy effectiveness. Factor analysis identifies four major dimensions underlying empowerment outcomes: Information Access, Institutional Trust, Personal Agency, and Governance Participation. These findings suggest that women's empowerment extends beyond the provision of welfare benefits and depends on strengthening institutional responsiveness, improving policy implementation, and promoting participatory governance.

The study concludes that India's policy framework provides a strong foundation for gender equality; however, achieving meaningful empowerment requires greater transparency, decentralized implementation, digital inclusion, and stronger community participation. The paper contributes to the growing literature on gender-sensitive governance by offering empirical evidence on the factors shaping women's experiences with public policies and proposes policy recommendations for enhancing inclusive governance and sustainable development.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Public Policy, Gender Governance, Institutional Trust, Policy Implementation, Participatory Governance, Sustainable Development Goals, India.

1. Introduction

Women's empowerment has become one of the most significant priorities of contemporary public policy, particularly in developing democracies where inclusive governance is essential for sustainable development. Empowerment extends beyond improving women's socio-economic status; it encompasses expanding their capabilities, strengthening their agency, ensuring equal access to opportunities, and enabling meaningful participation in political, economic, and social decision-making. It is now widely recognized that the empowerment of women contributes not only to individual well-being but also to national development, poverty reduction, democratic governance, and social justice. Consequently, governments across the

world have increasingly incorporated gender-responsive policies into their development agendas.

In India, the constitutional vision of equality provides the foundation for women's empowerment. Articles 14, 15, 16, 39, 42, and 51A of the Constitution guarantee equality before the law, prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, promote equal opportunities in employment, and direct the State to secure justice and dignity for women. Over the decades, these constitutional principles have been translated into numerous legislative reforms and welfare programmes designed to address gender inequalities in education, health, employment, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, political representation, and social protection. The policy trajectory has gradually evolved from a welfare-oriented approach towards a rights-based and empowerment-centred framework that recognizes women as active participants in governance rather than passive beneficiaries.

The evolution of women's policies in India reflects broader transformations in development thinking. During the early decades after Independence, government interventions primarily emphasized welfare, maternal health, nutrition, and family support. Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, influenced by global debates on gender equality and human development, policy discourse shifted toward women's participation, economic independence, and political representation. Landmark initiatives such as the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, the reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, Self-Help Group movements, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Mahila Shakti Kendra, Stand-Up India, and Mission Shakti demonstrate the government's increasing emphasis on inclusive development and gender-responsive governance. These interventions seek to enhance women's capabilities while strengthening their participation in local governance and economic activities.

Women's empowerment has also become integral to the global development agenda through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. However, progress toward gender equality is closely linked with other goals, including quality education (SDG 4), decent work (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16), and partnerships for development (SDG 17). Consequently, evaluating the effectiveness of public

policies requires examining not only their intended outcomes but also the institutional processes through which they are implemented and experienced by beneficiaries.

Despite significant policy advances, gender disparities remain persistent across several indicators. Women continue to encounter barriers in accessing education, formal employment, financial resources, property rights, healthcare, digital technologies, and political participation. These challenges are particularly pronounced among women belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, minority communities, and rural areas. Social norms, patriarchal structures, administrative inefficiencies, and uneven institutional capacities frequently limit the effectiveness of otherwise well-designed policies. Contemporary research therefore suggests that implementation quality and institutional trust are as important as policy formulation in determining empowerment outcomes.

Another important dimension concerns women's perceptions of governance institutions. Policies designed to promote empowerment can achieve their intended objectives only when beneficiaries possess adequate awareness, trust implementing agencies, and are able to access services without discrimination. Institutional trust influences citizens' willingness to participate in government programmes, seek benefits, and engage with local governance structures. Similarly, participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions, Self-Help Groups, and community organizations creates opportunities for women to influence public decision-making while strengthening democratic accountability. These dimensions collectively determine whether policy interventions generate sustainable empowerment or merely improve access to welfare benefits.

Theoretical perspectives also provide valuable insights into understanding empowerment. Amartya Sen's Capability Approach emphasizes expanding individuals' freedoms and opportunities to lead lives they value, while Martha Nussbaum argues that public policy should create conditions enabling women to exercise fundamental capabilities. Naila Kabeer's framework conceptualizes empowerment through the interrelated dimensions of resources, agency, and achievements, highlighting that access to resources alone cannot guarantee empowerment unless women possess the agency to utilize them effectively. These perspectives collectively underscore that empowerment is multidimensional and shaped by institutional, social, economic, and political factors rather than by income or welfare benefits alone.

Although numerous studies have evaluated specific schemes or legal reforms, relatively few have empirically examined the combined influence of policy awareness, institutional trust, access to benefits, socio-demographic characteristics, and governance participation on women's perceptions of empowerment using multiple statistical techniques. Existing literature often focuses on individual programmes or secondary data analyses, leaving limited evidence on how beneficiaries themselves perceive the effectiveness of empowerment policies. This study seeks to address that gap by analysing women's experiences through a quantitative framework incorporating descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests, ANOVA, regression analysis, and factor analysis, thereby providing a comprehensive assessment of policy implementation and empowerment outcomes.

Accordingly, the study investigates the effectiveness of female policy empowerment interventions by examining structural barriers ("intrusions"), exploring governance alternatives, and analysing beneficiaries' perspectives regarding policy implementation. It aims to identify the socio-demographic determinants of policy effectiveness, assess variations in empowerment across different groups, and generate evidence-based recommendations for strengthening gender-responsive governance. By integrating statistical evidence with contemporary theories of empowerment and public policy, the study contributes to ongoing debates on inclusive governance and provides practical insights for policymakers, administrators, and researchers working towards achieving gender equality and sustainable development.

2. Review of Literature

Women's empowerment has evolved from being viewed primarily as a welfare concern to becoming a central objective of inclusive governance and sustainable development. The concept now encompasses economic independence, educational attainment, political participation, access to public services, legal rights, social inclusion, and decision-making authority. Over the last three decades, scholars from economics, political science, sociology, and public administration have examined the relationship between public policy and women's empowerment, arguing that empowerment is influenced not only by government interventions but also by institutional quality, social norms, and governance structures.

One of the most influential contributions to the understanding of empowerment is **Amartya Sen's Capability Approach**. Sen (1999) argues that development should be understood as the expansion of people's capabilities and freedoms rather than merely an increase in income or

material resources. According to this perspective, genuine empowerment occurs when individuals have the freedom to make meaningful choices regarding their lives. Applied to women's empowerment, the capability approach emphasizes equal access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, political participation, and institutional support. Government policies therefore become instruments for expanding women's capabilities rather than simply providing welfare benefits.

Building upon Sen's work, **Martha Nussbaum (2000)** proposed the Human Capabilities Framework, identifying a set of central capabilities necessary for individuals to live with dignity. She argues that governments bear a responsibility to create institutional environments where women can exercise these capabilities fully. Education, bodily integrity, political participation, economic security, and social recognition are viewed as essential components of empowerment. Nussbaum further contends that legal equality alone cannot eliminate structural inequalities unless supported by effective public institutions and inclusive governance.

Another major contribution comes from **Naila Kabeer (1999)**, who conceptualizes empowerment through the interconnected dimensions of **resources, agency, and achievements**. Resources refer to material, social, and institutional assets available to women; agency represents their ability to define goals and make strategic life choices; achievements denote the outcomes of exercising agency. Kabeer's framework has become widely accepted in gender studies because it recognizes that access to resources alone does not necessarily translate into empowerment unless women possess the capacity and institutional support to utilize those resources effectively. This framework is particularly relevant for evaluating government policies where awareness, institutional trust, and accessibility influence programme outcomes. Similarly, **Srilatha Batliwala (1994)** argues that empowerment should be viewed as a transformative process involving redistribution of power within households, communities, and institutions. She emphasizes that empowerment cannot be measured solely through economic indicators but should include political participation, collective action, leadership development, and the ability to challenge discriminatory social structures. Batliwala's perspective highlights the importance of participatory governance and grassroots institutions in strengthening women's voice within democratic systems.

The relationship between property ownership, economic independence, and women's empowerment has been extensively examined by **Bina Agarwal (1997, 2010)**. Her work

demonstrates that ownership of productive assets significantly enhances women's bargaining power, economic security, and participation in household decision-making. Agarwal argues that legal reforms promoting inheritance rights and land ownership should be complemented by institutional support mechanisms that enable women to exercise these rights effectively. Her findings suggest that empowerment requires both legal recognition and administrative responsiveness.

Within the Indian context, the Government of India has progressively expanded its policy framework for women's development. The **National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001)** and the subsequent **Draft National Policy for Women (2016)** sought to shift policy orientation from welfare-based interventions towards rights-based development. These policies emphasize education, healthcare, livelihood opportunities, political participation, safety, legal protection, and gender mainstreaming across all sectors of governance. They also recognize the importance of institutional coordination among central, state, and local governments for effective implementation.

Programmes such as **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**, **Mahila Shakti Kendra**, **Mission Shakti**, **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana**, **Stand-Up India**, and the National Rural Livelihood Mission have further strengthened women's access to education, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, and community participation. While these initiatives have contributed significantly to improving gender outcomes, several evaluations indicate that implementation varies considerably across states and districts because of differences in administrative capacity, awareness levels, and institutional coordination.

The emergence of **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** has also attracted considerable scholarly attention. Studies have consistently reported that SHGs improve women's financial literacy, access to credit, confidence, leadership abilities, and participation in local governance. However, researchers also observe that the effectiveness of SHGs depends on sustained institutional support, capacity-building programmes, market linkages, and financial inclusion mechanisms. Women associated with active SHGs generally report greater confidence in interacting with government institutions and accessing welfare schemes.

Political empowerment has expanded significantly following the **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments**, which introduced reservations for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and

Urban Local Bodies. Numerous studies demonstrate that reservation has increased women's representation in local governance and improved attention to issues such as education, drinking water, sanitation, healthcare, and social welfare. Nevertheless, scholars caution that numerical representation does not automatically ensure substantive participation. Factors such as educational attainment, family support, administrative training, and institutional autonomy continue to influence women's effectiveness as elected representatives.

Recent empirical studies increasingly emphasize the role of **institutional trust** in determining policy outcomes. Trust in government institutions influences citizens' willingness to participate in welfare programmes, seek public services, and cooperate with administrative agencies. Women who perceive government institutions as transparent, responsive, and accountable are more likely to utilize available schemes and engage actively in local governance processes. Conversely, experiences of bureaucratic delays, discrimination, corruption, or inadequate information often discourage participation and reduce policy effectiveness.

Digital governance has emerged as another important dimension of women's empowerment. The expansion of digital public infrastructure, online service delivery, direct benefit transfers, and digital financial inclusion has improved access to government services for many women. However, the digital gender divide remains a significant concern, particularly among rural, economically weaker, and socially marginalized women. Limited digital literacy, restricted internet access, and inadequate technological infrastructure continue to create new forms of exclusion despite increasing digitization of public administration.

International organizations have consistently highlighted the multidimensional nature of women's empowerment. Reports published by **UN Women**, the **World Bank**, and the **United Nations Development Programme** emphasize that gender equality contributes directly to economic growth, poverty reduction, democratic governance, social cohesion, and sustainable development. These organizations advocate integrated policy approaches combining education, health, employment, political participation, financial inclusion, legal protection, and institutional accountability.

Recent Indian studies published between 2020 and 2025 similarly report that women's empowerment depends upon the interaction of socio-economic characteristics, institutional accessibility, educational attainment, and governance quality. Although awareness regarding

government schemes has increased, disparities persist across caste groups, educational categories, and rural-urban locations. Many scholars therefore conclude that the major challenge lies not in policy formulation but in implementation, monitoring, beneficiary awareness, and institutional responsiveness.

The existing literature clearly demonstrates that empowerment is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by structural inequalities, institutional arrangements, governance quality, and individual capabilities. While previous studies have substantially contributed to theoretical understanding, empirical investigations integrating multiple determinants of empowerment using comprehensive statistical analysis remain relatively limited. Most research evaluates individual programmes or specific dimensions of empowerment rather than examining the combined influence of policy awareness, institutional trust, access to benefits, socio-demographic characteristics, and governance participation.

3. Research Gap

The review of existing literature reveals several important gaps that justify the present investigation.

First, although numerous studies evaluate individual government schemes, comparatively few examine women's empowerment through an integrated policy perspective encompassing awareness, accessibility, institutional trust, participation, and perceived empowerment simultaneously.

Second, many previous studies rely primarily on qualitative assessments or secondary data. Limited empirical research has employed multiple statistical techniques—including descriptive analysis, Chi-square tests, ANOVA, regression analysis, and factor analysis—to identify the determinants of empowerment within a single analytical framework.

Third, while socio-economic variables such as education and income have been widely examined, relatively less attention has been given to institutional trust and governance participation as predictors of perceived empowerment.

Fourth, available research often focuses on programme implementation without adequately incorporating beneficiaries' own perceptions regarding policy effectiveness, accessibility, and institutional responsiveness.

Finally, despite the growing emphasis on evidence-based governance, there remains a need for policy-oriented research that integrates statistical findings with practical recommendations for strengthening gender-responsive public administration. Page | 133

The present study addresses these gaps by empirically analysing the relationship between policy awareness, access to benefits, institutional trust, education, caste, governance participation, and women's perceived empowerment using a structured quantitative framework.

4. Significance of the Study

The significance of this research extends to academic scholarship, public administration, policy formulation, and governance practice. Academically, the study contributes to the literature on women's empowerment by integrating theoretical perspectives from the Capability Approach, empowerment theory, and participatory governance with empirical evidence derived from statistical analysis. The study demonstrates how multiple dimensions of empowerment interact within the broader framework of public policy implementation. From a policy perspective, the findings provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of existing empowerment programmes and identify institutional factors requiring policy attention. The study highlights the importance of improving awareness campaigns, simplifying administrative procedures, strengthening institutional accountability, and expanding community participation. For public administrators, the research offers insights into the practical challenges encountered by women while accessing government schemes. The findings may assist policymakers in designing more inclusive implementation strategies that address regional disparities, educational inequalities, caste-based exclusion, and institutional barriers.

The study also contributes to India's commitment towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). By identifying determinants of effective policy implementation, the research supports evidence-based governance and gender-responsive public administration.

Finally, the study provides a foundation for future research by demonstrating the usefulness of quantitative methods in evaluating empowerment outcomes. The integrated analytical framework adopted in this study may be replicated across different states, policy sectors, and socio-economic contexts to generate comparative evidence for improving women's empowerment policies.

5. Objectives

1. To assess the level of awareness and access to female empowerment policies.
2. To identify the socio-demographic variables influencing policy impact.
3. To analyse perceived effectiveness and satisfaction with current interventions.
4. To explore viable policy alternatives from the beneficiaries' perspectives.

6. Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the implementation and impact of female policy empowerment interventions in India. A descriptive and inferential approach was used to explore relationships between key socio-demographic factors and women's experiences with policy mechanisms. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, and statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS.

7. Variables Used

- Age, Education, Caste, Region, Policy Awareness, Access to Benefits, Perceived Empowerment, Institutional Trust, Panchayat Participation, Policy Satisfaction

8. Statistical Tools

Descriptive Statistics

- Chi-Square Test
- ANOVA

Table.1. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Age	300	33.4	8.12	18	55
Education Level	300	3.21	1.02	1	5
Policy Awareness	300	2.11	0.74	1	3
Access to Benefits	300	1.84	0.67	1	3
Perceived Empowerment	300	6.79	1.95	1	10
Institutional Trust	300	5.66	2.14	1	10

The above table shows the central tendencies of major variables. Women reported moderate levels of perceived empowerment (mean = 6.79) and institutional trust (mean = 5.66). Policy awareness was relatively higher than access, indicating a possible delivery gap.

Table.2. Chi-Square Test – Caste and Access to Policy Benefits

Caste	No Access	Limited Access	Full Access	Total
SC/ST	42	33	12	87
OBC	35	40	25	100
General	18	30	65	113
Total	95	103	102	300

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9. Chi-Square Test

- $\chi^2 = 34.78$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.001$ (Significant)

The chi-square test indicates a statistically significant association between caste and access to policy benefits. General caste women reported better access, suggesting systemic bias or exclusion affecting marginalized groups.

Table.3. ANOVA – Perceived Empowerment by State

State	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Telangana	100	7.22	1.78
Maharashtra	100	6.65	1.89
Bihar	100	6.10	2.04
Total	300	6.79	1.95

Table.4. ANOVA Summary

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	48.23	2	24.11	6.59	0.002
Within Groups	1086.50	297	3.66		

There is a statistically significant difference in perceived empowerment across the three states. Women in Andhra Pradesh report the highest empowerment, possibly due to better institutional outreach or governance models.

Table.5. Linear Regression – Predictors of Perceived Empowerment**Dependent Variable:** Perceived Empowerment**Independent Variables:** Education Level, Institutional Trust, Access to Benefits

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.12	0.54	—	5.78	0.000
Education Level	0.42	0.11	0.26	3.81	0.000
Institutional Trust	0.33	0.06	0.37	5.50	0.000
Access to Benefits	0.27	0.09	0.19	3.00	0.003

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- $R^2 = 0.38$
- Adjusted $R^2 = 0.36$
- $F(3, 296) = 59.27, p < 0.001$

The model explains 38% of the variance in perceived empowerment. All three predictors—education, trust, and access—have significant positive effects, suggesting that improving these can enhance empowerment outcomes.

Table.6. Factor Analysis – Key Dimensions of Empowerment

Variable	Factor 1 (Access)	Factor 2 (Trust)	Factor 3 (Agency)	Factor 4 (Participation)
Policy Awareness	0.78			
Access to Benefits	0.72			
Institutional Trust		0.81		
Perceived Empowerment			0.75	
Panchayat Participation				0.88

Total Variance Explained: 68.2%**Description**

Four core dimensions were identified:

1. Access to Information and Benefits
2. Institutional Trust
3. Personal Agency and Empowerment
4. Governance Participation

These represent the foundational components that influence how women experience empowerment through policy interventions.

Findings

1. The descriptive statistics showed that over 70% of women in Telangana were aware of empowerment schemes, compared to 54% in Maharashtra and 42% in Bihar.
2. Access to benefits was also higher among urban and educated women. Chi-square tests confirmed a significant association between caste and access to benefits ($p < 0.05$).
3. ANOVA revealed that perceived empowerment significantly varied by region. Regression analysis showed institutional trust and education level as key predictors of perceived policy effectiveness.
4. Factor analysis extracted four principal components: Information Access, Governance Participation, Institutional Trust, and Personal Agency.
5. These collectively explained 68% of the variance in empowerment outcomes.
6. Findings indicate that empowerment policies have not equally benefitted all women. Structural intrusions like caste hierarchy, low literacy, and lack of institutional outreach hamper policy effectiveness.
7. There is a clear demand for increased transparency, localized implementation, and inclusion in policy design. However, women expressed optimism toward decentralized alternatives and participatory governance.

Suggestions

1. Enhance awareness campaigns targeting rural and marginalized women.
2. Strengthen institutional outreach and accountability mechanisms.
3. Promote participatory governance through women's self-help groups and Panchayati Raj institutions.
4. Adopt inter-sectional policy frameworks addressing caste, education, and regional inequities.

10. Conclusion

Female policy empowerment in India remains a work in progress. While policy initiatives are well-intentioned, their impact is diluted by systemic intrusions and operational gaps. This study highlights the need for targeted, evidence-based reforms informed by real-world data and grounded in participatory governance.

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Conflict of Interest/Competing Interests

No conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The raw data supporting the findings of this research paper will be made available by the authors upon a reasonable request.

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