

Women empowerment and perception on gender equality at work in Myanmar (Case study: Candidates of EMPA & EMDevS at YIE during the 2011-2012 Academic Year)

Khin Soe Kyi¹, Thin Thin Oo²

¹(Military Institute of Nursing and Paramedical Sciences, Myanmar)

²(Department of Economics, Yangon Institute of Economics, Myanmar)

Abstract: An Institutional-based, cross-sectional, descriptive study was conducted to determine gender equality and empowerment of women in Myanmar. Data were collected from 160 candidates who studying in Executive Master of Public Administration and Executive Master of Development Studies programs during the 2011-2012 Academic year at Yangon Institute of Economics. Self-administered, structured questionnaire was used focusing on socio-demographic, working condition, participation in decision making, and perception on gender equality at work. Independent *t* test was used to find out the mean difference of study variables between the men and women. According to the results, mean score of women participation in household and economic decisions were significantly higher than that of men at *p* value of 0.000 and 0.038 respectively. Similarly, women participation in social decision making was significantly higher than the men (*p*=0.003). However, mean perception score on gender equality at work among the men was significantly higher than the women (*p*= 0.024). In summary, women's empowerment in making decision was significantly higher than men; however, their perception on gender equality was significantly lower than that of male counterparts. It is hoped that the results of this study would provide supportive information in shaping policies and programs to promote women perception on gender equality at work so as to enhance their productivity in their workplaces.

Keywords: women's empowerment, decision making, gender equality

I. Introduction

Women are central to the development process since they have three roles in their society: reproduction, production, and community management. The role of women also correlates with children's survival and education levels which are indicators for country development [1]. Previously, their control was only on the non-money economy through bearing and raising children, and providing household chores, and taking part in agricultural works. However, changing societal norm and patterns forced them to contribute in money economy through working in both formal and informal sectors. Consequently, women workforce has been a substantial component of the domestic and global labor force. According to World Bank estimates, the number of women in the global labor force has increased by 126% from 1960 to 1997 [2]. In 2008, they occupied about 40.5% of the estimated global workforce which rose from 39.9 per cent in 1998, making them central to the development process [3]. In Myanmar, women are traditionally taking responsibilities in bringing up the children, managing household chores and giving affection and kindness to family members. However, today business world bring the Myanmar women out of their homes to workplaces, subsequently the number of women's workforce in 2008-2009 was 11.44 million which out of 29.95 million total labour force in Myanmar [4]. Although women's participation in the workforce has grown steadily worldwide, existing gender inequalities continues to be a problem drawing the global attention to promote women empowerment and gender equality. The promotion of equality means that men and women are treated equally and without discrimination in all situations including their workplaces. Job segregation, unequal pay, lack of training opportunities, lack of promotion, and exclusion from certain fields which considered as masculine are some forms of discriminations encountered by the working women [5]. Even they take part in management and executive levels, men still continue to influence in economic and political seats and hold in most of administrative roles. Although the number of women representatives in parliament has increased, women in worldwide can hold only 16 per cent of parliament seats in 2005 [6]. In Myanmar, less than five per cent of political seats within Hluttaws were occupied by women representatives after the Multiparty Democracy General Elections in 2010 [7]. It is apparent that labour market is one of the common areas of gender disparity for women in Myanmar.

In this regard, numerous research attempts have been made in order to understand the empowerment of women and gender equality from different perspectives. However, little is known about the situation of women in Myanmar regarding their empowerment and perception on equality at work. Hence, the present study aimed to determine women empowerment and perception on gender equality among the employed women in relation to male counterparts in the selected area. At this point, empowerment will be considered as having participation

in decision making in terms of their household, economics and social matters. Furthermore, their working conditions and perception on equality will be explored based on gender perceptiveness. It is hoped that the result of this study would be informative for developers who would like to promote women empowerment and equality in working conditions for women in their nations.

II. Literature Review

Today focus of development strategy is alleviating poverty and inclusiveness where women empowerment and gender equality has become a global concern [1]. The term gender equality means equality between men and women where both of them are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices [8]. Especially in the developing countries, gender inequality remains a problem since the lives of women in those countries are usually influenced by cultural, economic, and institutional factors. One of the UNESCO's approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment is to promote the participation of women at all levels and fields of activity [8]. Concerning this, women's participation in household decision making is a widely accepted measure to indicate women's household level empowerment, particularly in demographic and health related studies [9]. A study in India indicated that employed women were more likely to have higher control over finances, high decision making power and a tendency toward better freedom of movement [10]. However, there are still exit of gender inequality in labour market in terms of occupational segregation, gender-based wage gaps, and disproportionate representation in informal employment [6]. Although developing policy and implementing actions are directed towards gender equality and women empowerment, changing attitude is still essential for developing social relations where gender disparity could be eliminated [6]. Therefore it is noteworthy to conduct a study regarding women empowerment in decision making and their perception on gender equality at work. By comparing with male counterparts, understanding on them could be explored more fully.

III. Objectives

The general objective of the study is to determine the women empowerment and perception on gender equality in Myanmar. Specific objectives are:

- To determine the participation of women in making decisions in their household, economics and social affairs in compared with men in the selected area
- To compare the perception on gender equality at work between the women and men in the study area

IV. Methodology

Institutional-based, cross-sectional, descriptive study design was applied in this study. Data collection period took from September 2011 to November 2011. Self-administered structured questionnaire was used to collect the survey data at the Yangon Institute of Economics (YIE) where a total of 271 candidates were attending in the Executive Master of Public Administration (EMPA) and Executive Master of Development Studies (EMDevS) programs during the 2011-2012 academic year. The candidates attending in both programs were working for various organizations and disciplines encompassing public and private sectors as well as non-governmental organizations. Questionnaires were distributed to all candidates; however, 160 respondents were included in analysis after checking the completeness of obtained data.

Self-administered, structured questionnaire was developed based on related literature and theoretical background. The developed questionnaire was pretested with five men and five women who are employed at executive level and not from the study area. After that, the questionnaire was revised and modified in order to make simple and understandable. The questionnaire was framed to include questions on demographics, working condition, household decision making, and perception on gender equality at work. The first part consists of socio-demographic characteristics including age, sex, race, religion, education, employment status, marital status, and family income, and working condition of the respondents. The second portion comprises the questions regarding household decision making in order to reflect the empowerment of women. In which, 15 questions were asked to measure women's decision making power on household, economics, and social activities. The respondents were asked to choose one answer regarding decision making from (1) by themselves (2) by their spouse (3) with spouse (4) by their family or relatives (5) with family or relatives. Those responded as own decision making is categorized into "at all" group; those responded as with spouse or with family/relatives are entered into "some participation"; those responded as by their spouse or family/relatives are entered into "none" participation group. Scoring system was used to analyse for inferential statistics. The responses included in "at all" group were scored as "3", those in "some participation" were regarded as score "2"; and those in "none" participation group were scored as score "1". The last part comprises the five questions concerning perception on gender equality at work. These questions addressed on how they generally think about gender discrimination, gender equality in terms of promotion, salary, training chances, and working

hours. Based on three point Likert scale, the scoring system was used –score ‘3’ for disagree; ‘2’ for undecided; ‘1’ for agree responses.

Before collecting the data, ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Yangon Institute of Economics. And then, the respondents were explained about the purpose and nature of the study and they were explained that they have right to privacy by protecting their anonymity and confidentiality. After taking informed consent form, questionnaires were delivered to the respondents and collected after completion. Obtained data were analysed by SPSS version (16.0) and then descriptive and inferential statistics were presented with appropriate tables and figures. Statistical decision making for significance of the test was set at p value of 0.05.

All the respondents attending at this institute are educated and employed and thus the conclusion about working conditions and empowerment of women could only represent for those with employed and educated in the similar conditions.

V. Finding And Discussion

5.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of the study population

Among 160 respondents, female respondents were 102 (64%) whereas 58 (36%) were male. More than half of the respondents were aged between 30 to 40 years. Nearly 50% of respondents were married and single while only a few were divorced or widow/widower. In both groups, the highest proportion of respondents had bachelor degree, which was followed by master degree holders and only a few were master degree and diploma holders. Regarding organization, 30.6% respondents worked for NGOs or INGOs whereas 14.4% respondents were serving in military. Of 160 respondents, 80% were manager and above level while 13.5% was decision making level. Concerned with family income, 70.6% of respondents had less than 500,000 kyat/month and the remaining 29.4% had considerable amount of family income.

Table (1) Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents by sex

Characteristics	Male	Female	Total
	Frequency (%)		
Age (completed year)			
30-40	33(56.9)	75 (73.5)	108 (67.5)
41-50	17 (29.3)	20 (19.6)	37 (23.1)
>50	8 (13.8)	7 (6.9)	15 (9.4)
Marital status			
Single	16 (27.6)	63 (61.8)	79 (49.4)
Married	40 (69.0)	37 (36.3)	77 (48.1)
Divorced/Separated	2 (3.4)	0 (0)	2 (1.2)
Widow/Widower	0 (0)	2 (2.0)	2 (1.2)
Education (completed)			
Bachelor degree	42 (72.4)	65 (63.7)	107 (66.9)
Master degree	13 (22.4)	26 (25.5)	39 (24.4)
Master and other diploma	3 (5.2)	11 (10.8)	14 (8.8)
Organization			
Military organization	6 (10.3)	17 (16.7)	23 (14.4)
Private organization	14 (24.1)	24 (23.5)	38 (23.8)
Civil ministries	12 (20.7)	26 (25.5)	38 (23.8)
NGO or INGO	21 (36.2)	28 (27.5)	49 (30.6)
Own business	5 (8.6)	7 (6.9)	12 (7.5)
Position at work			
Below manger level	4 (6.9)	7 (6.9)	11 (6.9)
Manger and above	42 (72.4)	86 (84.3)	128 (80)
Decision making level	12 (20.7)	9 (8.8)	21 (13.5)
Family income (kyat per month)			
< 500000	39 (67.2)	74 (72.5)	113 (70.6)
500001 to 1000000	14 (24.1)	19 (18.6)	33 (20.6)
1000001 to 2000000	4 (6.9)	7 (6.9)	11 (6.9)
> 2000000	1 (1.7)	2 (2.0)	3 (1.9)
Total	58 (100)	102 (100)	160 (100)

Source: Sample Survey data

Other* (Kayin, Shan, Rakhine, Chin, PaO)

5.2 Participation in household decision making

Regarding own healthcare, 71.6% of women reported they involved in the final decision and only 27.5% jointly performed decision on own healthcare. The per cent was also similar in the male group. In the present study, all respondents were educated and employed and thus they were matured and confident regarding their own health decision. However, contrast finding was stated in a survey conducted in Nepal where only 25%

of women involved in the final decision regarding their own health although 84% of them were employed [11]. This might be due to the fact that variation in cultural background and social context across the nations.

In developing countries, decision making power of women was frequently low at household level. A study from India concluded that about 50% of the women did not feel free to take a sick child to a doctor without the approval of their husband, and 70% of the women do not make decisions regarding the purchase of their own or their children's clothing [10]. In the present study, about half of women were joint decision makers in seeking healthcare for their children and education of children. Besides, per cent of women who did not participate in decision in health of children was only 4.7% in the present study and it was also consistent with a study done by Jan and Akhtar which stated that who holds masculine decision making was only 6% [12]. More men were in the non-participation group regarding decisions for daily cooking, hiring home mate, and home activities than female. It can be assumed that the concept of "Men are breadwinners and responsibility is only to earn money" is still influencing on the men involved in the study. Regarding important decision, however, over half of respondents from both male and female group made joint decisions either with spouse or relatives. Besides, over 90% from both male and female group involved in decision on own job and earning. All respondents included in this study were educated and employed, and thus they had confident enough to make decisions for important family affairs and job related issues.

Table (2) Participation in household decision making among men and women

Decisions	Percent of women			Percent of men		
	N	S	A	N	S	A
Seeking own health care	1.0	27.5	71.6	3.4	27.6	69.0
Seeking health care of children	4.7	48.8	46.5	15.8	57.9	26.3
Education of children	11.6	51.2	37.2	15.8	57.9	26.3
Daily cooking	24.5	36.3	39.2	72.4	17.2	10.3
Hiring home mate	26.5	35.3	38.2	67.2	24.1	8.6
Home activities	21.6	48.0	30.4	51.7	34.5	13.8
Important decision in family	24.5	60.8	14.7	13.8	53.4	32.8
Whether to do own job and earning	6.9	23.5	69.6	1.7	25.9	72.4

Source: Sample Survey data (N= none participation, S= some participation, A= at all participation)

5.3 Participation in economic decision making

Regarding economic decisions, more women were solely involved in decisions to spend money and to make small investment like purchasing in household goods than men. Concerned with large investment decision, majority of men and women were jointly performed decision. However, men were less likely to involve in buying presents. Regard with this, Department of Health Services (DHS) data of Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi analyzed by Hindin (2005) stated that men are more likely to have the sole final say over women's own health care, large household purchases in Zambia and Malawi. This discrepancy may be due to the variation in background and socio-economic matters [13]. Nearly all men included in the present study were positioned at manager and above level and thus they might consider that they should not participate in unimportant economic affairs. Generally, it was evident that the women in this study were more empower in economic decisions in relation to the men.

Table (3) Participation in economic decision making among men and women

Decisions	Percent of women			Percent of men		
	N	S	A	N	S	A
Spending money	12.7	37.3	50.0	34.5	50.0	15.5
Small investment decision	12.7	32.4	54.9	32.8	48.3	19.0
Large investment decision	21.6	52.9	25.5	13.8	53.4	32.7
Buying presents for social activity	5.9	31.4	62.7	27.6	46.6	25.9

Source: Sample Survey data (N= none participation, S= some participation, A= at all participation)

5.4 Participation in social decisions

Among the respondents, higher percent of women were found in sole participation group than in the men group. Even in decision to go health clinic alone, less men were solely made decision than women. Over 90% of respondents from both male and women were totally or partially involved in making decision regarding final say to visit city/town. Both male and female, less than 10% of respondents were in none

participation in decision to go to health clinic alone. Overall social decision making power among the women is generally higher than that of opponents.

Table (4) Participation in social decision making among men and women

Decisions	Percent of women			Percent of men		
	N	S	A	N	S	A
To visit relatives/friends	11.8	44.1	44.1	22.4	58.6	19.0
To visit city/town	4.9	52.0	43.1	6.9	65.5	27.6
Go to health clinic alone	7.8	38.2	52.0	8.6	56.9	34.5

Source: Sample Survey data (N= none participation, S= some participation, A= at all participation)

5.5 Comparison of household decision making between male and female respondents

A comparison of mean score for decision making of male and female respondents was made by using independent t test. The mean score for household decision making among female respondents was significantly higher than that of male respondents at $p=0.000$ ($t= 4.097$). Similarly, there was a statistically significant difference between the means for economic decision making of male and female respondents ($t=-2.087$, $p=0.038$). Mean score for social decision making among the female respondents was 7.13 while that of male respondents was 6.43. The mean for social decision making of male respondents was significantly lower than that of female ($t=-2.987$, $p=0.003$). It can be concluded that women were more likely to empower and have autonomy in making decisions in relation to men.

Table (5) Comparison of mean score for participation in decision making between men and women

Decision making	Male	Female	p
Household decision making			
Mean ± SD	11.97 ± 2.31	13.59 ± 2.57	($t = 4.097$, $p = 0.000$)
Median	12.00	14.00	
Economic decision making			
Mean ± SD	8.36 ± 4.26	9.40 ± 2.03	($t = -2.087$, $p = 0.038$)
Median	8	10	
Social decision making			
Mean ± SD	6.43 ± 1.33	7.13 ± 1.47	($t = -2.987$, $p = 0.003$)
Median	6	7	

Source: Sample Survey data

5.6 Comparison of working conditions among the women and men

In this study, working conditions such as whether they get promotion and training opportunities were asked to compare between men and women. Nearly all of respondents answered that they had chances to promote and training opportunities in their workplaces. In fact, the percent of men and women in getting these chance and opportunities were similar. In a highly competitive labor market in today society, employers have to find out the ways to be supportive and positive working environment in order to make productivity effectively and efficiently. In this regard, the respondents were also asked about overtime and being happy and satisfy in workplaces. It was found that majority was working overtime, but the occurrences were not much different between men and women. On the other hand, more men in this study were enjoyed and satisfied in their workplace than the women. This might well be explained by the nature of gender differences reflecting that men are usually in higher self-esteem and confidence than women.

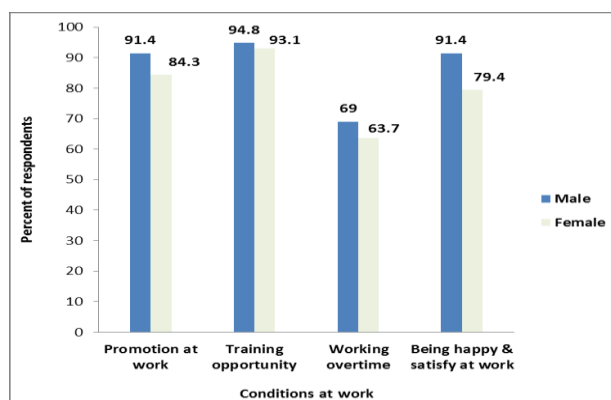


Figure (1) Comparison of working conditions among the respondents

5.7 Comparison of perception on gender equality at work between male and female respondents

Regarding perception, respondents were asked about gender equality at work. In compared to men, mean perception score of women for each statement was lower than the mean except in the statements regarding equality in salaries and working hours. Mean perception score for gender equality at work among the female respondents was 12.5 while that of male was 13.4. According to independent t test result, statistically significant difference was found to have between the mean perception score of male and female respondents at $t= 2.283$, $p=0.024$.

Table (6) Mean score for perception on gender equality between men and women

Perception on gender equality	Male	Female
Gender discrimination at work	2.8 ±.50	2.5±.84
Gender inequality		
- In getting promotion at work	2.5 ±.82	2.1±.97
- In having the same salaries	2.6 ±.78	2.7±.71
- In working hours	2.7 ±.68	2.8 ±.50
- In having chances to attend the courses	2.8 ±.45	2.4±.85
Total mean score and SD	13.4 ± 2.33	12.5 ± 2.87

Source: Sample Survey data

VI. Conclusion And Recommendations

According to the results of this study, women were more empower than men particularly in household, economic, and social decision making. However, men's participation was higher than women in making decisions regarding important family affairs, job and earning, and large investment. Generally, women participation in decisions making was higher than that of male counterparts. Although working conditions were not much different between male and female respondents, men were more likely to enjoy and satisfy at work than women. Furthermore, men had more positive perception on gender equality at work than women. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that women in this study were more empower in decision making, however, men were more positive attitude towards gender equality. Since the study was conducted among the candidates attending in EMPA and EMDevS programs, it was difficult to generalize in every institutions and any conclusion drawn about the population as a whole would be tentative. This study was being conducted within the feasibility of the researcher, and thus further research such as nationwide survey with more rigorous research method and more specific tool would like to recommend in order to uncover empowerment of women and gender equality in Myanmar. By doing so, appropriate policies and development programs could be formulated so as to enhance women empowerment and gender equality in Myanmar.

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