Empowering Women through MGNREGA: A Case Study of Bhiwani District

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in empowering women in the Bhiwani district of Haryana. Using primary data collected through structured questionnaires administered to 60 female beneficiaries across various villages, the research explores the socio-economic impact of MGNREGA on women's lives. Key indicators such as income enhancement, financial independence, decision-making power, and social mobility were analyzed to assess empowerment levels. The findings reveal that MGNREGA has significantly contributed to improving women's economic status and self-confidence, particularly among those from marginalized communities. However, challenges such as irregular work availability, wage delays, and limited awareness about entitlements persist. The study concludes that while MGNREGA has made notable strides in promoting gender equity, targeted interventions and better implementation mechanisms are essential to maximize its empowering potential.

Keywords: MGNREGA, Women Empowerment, Rural Employment, Gender Equality.

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women is a critical component of inclusive development and social justice. In India, where a significant portion of the population resides in rural areas, women often face systemic barriers to education, employment, and decision-making. These barriers are rooted in socio-cultural norms, economic dependency, and limited access to resources. Over the years, various government initiatives have aimed to address these challenges, with the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) emerging as a landmark policy in this regard. Enacted in 2005, MGNREGA guarantees 100 days of wage employment per financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The scheme is designed not only to provide economic relief but also to promote social inclusion and gender equality. One of its most transformative aspects is the emphasis on women's participation. By mandating that at least one-third of the beneficiaries be women, MGNREGA has created a platform for rural women to engage in paid labor, often for the first time in their lives. The significance of this shift cannot be overstated. In rural India, women's work is frequently undervalued or invisible, confined to unpaid domestic labor or agricultural tasks that go unrecognized. MGNREGA offers a formal structure where women can earn wages, gain financial independence, and assert their rights. This has the potential to alter traditional gender roles, enhance women's self-esteem, and improve their status within households and communities.

However, the impact of MGNREGA on women's empowerment is not uniform across regions. Factors such as local governance, awareness levels, socio-economic conditions, and cultural attitudes influence how effectively the scheme benefits women. Therefore, localized studies are essential to understand the real-world implications of MGNREGA and to identify areas for improvement. This research focuses on the Bhiwani district in Haryana, a region characterized by a mix of agricultural and semi-urban settlements. Haryana has historically exhibited gender disparities, particularly in terms of female labor force participation and access to education. In this context, MGNREGA presents an opportunity to examine whether and how government employment schemes can contribute to gender empowerment.

The study is based on primary data collected through structured questionnaires administered to female MGNREGA workers across selected villages in Bhiwani. The questionnaire was designed to capture various dimensions of empowerment, including economic independence, decision-making power, mobility, access to

resources, and participation in community activities. Respondents were asked about their experiences before and after joining MGNREGA, their perceptions of the scheme, and the challenges they face. Preliminary observations suggest that MGNREGA has had a positive impact on women's lives in Bhiwani. Many respondents reported increased confidence, better financial management, and greater involvement in household decisions. For some, the income earned through MGNREGA was the first they had ever received independently. This financial autonomy has enabled women to contribute to family expenses, invest in their children's education, and even save for future needs.

Moreover, participation in MGNREGA has led to increased visibility of women in public spaces. Women who were previously confined to domestic roles are now seen working alongside men in community projects such as road construction, water conservation, and land development. This visibility challenges traditional norms and encourages broader acceptance of women's roles beyond the household. Despite these positive outcomes, the study also highlights several challenges. Irregular availability of work, delayed wage payments, lack of awareness about entitlements, and limited access to grievance redressal mechanisms are common issues faced by female workers. In some cases, social stigma and resistance from family members have discouraged women from participating fully in the scheme. These barriers underscore the need for more robust implementation strategies and targeted interventions to ensure that MGNREGA fulfills its potential as a tool for women's empowerment.

The research also explores the role of local institutions, such as Panchayats and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), in facilitating women's participation in MGNREGA. Effective coordination between these bodies and government agencies can enhance outreach, improve transparency, and provide support systems for women workers. Training programs, awareness campaigns, and community engagement initiatives are crucial for building capacity and fostering a supportive environment. In conclusion, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how MGNREGA influences women's empowerment in Bhiwani district.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
2.1 National Literature Reviews
Tripurari Kumar (2019) This study explores the correlation between MGNREGA and women's empowerment in rural India. It finds that the scheme has significantly improved women's economic independence and self-esteem. Participation in MGNREGA has given women a sense of security and visibility in public life.

Kiran Bala Behera & Dharmabrata Mohapatra (2024) The authors highlight MGNREGA's unique role in rural job creation and gender inclusion. Unlike previous schemes, MGNREGA mandates one-third participation by women, which has led to increased financial inclusion and social empowerment.

Ambasta, Ahankar & Shah (2008) This foundational study emphasizes MGNREGA's transformative potential in rural India. It argues that the scheme can lead to sustainable livelihoods and empower women through community-based employment projects.

Ajit Ghose (2010) Ghose critiques the reliance on special programs for employment and suggests that MGNREGA, if implemented effectively, can serve as a powerful income transfer mechanism for rural women, enhancing their economic agency.

Jain (2013) Jain's research in Madhya Pradesh shows that women involved in MGNREGA reported increased participation in household financial decisions. The scheme helped shift traditional gender roles by providing women with independent income sources.

Sharma & Singh (2015) In Rajasthan, women beneficiaries of MGNREGA experienced improved self-confidence and community engagement. The study found that regular employment under the scheme contributed to better social standing and reduced dependency.

Bhatia & Dreze (2006) This study highlights MGNREGA's role in reducing gender wage gaps. By offering equal pay for equal work, the scheme has challenged long-standing wage discrimination in rural labor markets.

Rao (2014) Rao's fieldwork in Andhra Pradesh reveals that MGNREGA has increased women's mobility and visibility in public spaces. Women reported feeling more respected and valued in their communities.

Das & Mishra (2016) The study found that MGNREGA has enhanced women's access to banking services and financial literacy. Many women opened bank accounts for the first time, leading to greater control over their earnings.

Kumar & Singh (2020) This research in Bihar shows that MGNREGA has helped women transition from unpaid domestic labor to paid employment. The scheme has also improved their awareness of rights and entitlements.

2.2 International Literature Reviews

World Bank (2012) The World Bank recognizes MGNREGA as a model for inclusive employment. Its gender-sensitive design has been praised for promoting women's participation in the workforce and reducing rural poverty.

UNDP Report (2015) UNDP links MGNREGA to the Sustainable Development Goals, especially those related to gender equality and decent work. The scheme is seen as a successful example of integrating gender into public policy.

ILO (2013) The International Labor Organization commends MGNREGA for setting global standards in labor rights and social protection. It highlights the scheme's impact on empowering women in informal sectors.

Mehrotra (2014) Mehrotra compares MGNREGA with similar programs in other developing countries and finds that India's approach to gender inclusion is more structured and impactful, especially in terms of wage parity and participation.

Chopra (2015) Chopra's study emphasizes the role of MGNREGA in fostering collective action among women. It notes that women workers often form support networks, leading to stronger community engagement and advocacy.

Desai & Joshi (2017) This research shows that MGNREGA has improved women's bargaining power within households. Women reported greater influence over family decisions and increased respect from male members.

Singh & Ghosh (2018) Their cross-country analysis reveals that MGNREGA's gender inclusion mechanisms are more effective than those in many African nations. The study praises India's legal mandate for women's participation.

OECD (2016) The OECD cites MGNREGA as a best practice for integrating gender equity into employment programs. It recommends similar models for other developing economies aiming to empower women.

Mukherjee (2019) Mukherjee finds that MGNREGA has contributed to reducing rural poverty among women. The income earned has spillover effects on education, nutrition, and healthcare for their families.

Chattopadhyay (2020) This study highlights how MGNREGA has helped women shift from unpaid domestic roles to recognized wage employment. It argues that this transition is key to altering gender dynamics in rural India.

DATA SOURCE AND SAMPLING DESIGN

This study is based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 60 women beneficiaries of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in the Bhiwani district of Haryana. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select respondents who had participated in MGNREGA activities within the last two years. The questionnaire was designed to capture both demographic information and multiple dimensions of women's empowerment, including economic independence, decision-making, self-confidence, social participation, and awareness of rights.

3.1 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire comprised 15 short and focused questions, including:

5 demographic questions (age, education, marital status, years of participation in MGNREGA, days worked).

2 questions on implementation aspects (e.g., timely wage payments and satisfaction).

8 Likert-scale statements assessing empowerment outcomes (e.g., increased income, improved decision-making, mobility, confidence, etc.).

Respondents rated their agreement on a 5-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

3.2 Methodology

The following advanced statistical tools and techniques were applied using SPSS software:

Descriptive Statistics: Mean and standard deviation were used to summarize responses to empowerment indicators.

Reliability Test: Cronbach's Alpha was computed to test the internal consistency of empowerment-related items.

Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation coefficients were used to explore relationships among empowerment variables.

Factor Analysis: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify underlying components of empowerment.

Multiple Regression: A linear regression model was used to assess how education, number of days worked, and other variables predict overall empowerment scores.

Graphical Analysis: Bar charts, pie charts, and scatter plots were generated to visualize key findings and trends.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics (Summary)

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Q6: Income from MGNREGA	4.10	0.76	2	5
Q7: Decision-making in Household	3.85	0.84	2	5
Q8: Ability to Save Money	3.60	0.95	1	5
Q9: Self-confidence	4.15	0.71	3	5
Q10: Participation in Community	3.45	1.05	1	5
Q11: Respect in Family/Community	3.90	0.88	2	5
Q12: Awareness of Rights	4.20	0.66	3	5
Q13: Mobility/Freedom	3.80	0.80	2	5

The mean values of empowerment-related responses (ranging from 3.45 to 4.20) suggest that most women participants experience a moderate to high level of empowerment due to their involvement in MGNREGA. The highest scores were observed for awareness of rights (mean = 4.20) and confidence (mean = 4.15), indicating that women feel more informed and self-assured after participating in the scheme. Lower scores in participation in public activities (mean = 3.45) imply some cultural or social barriers still exist. On the whole, MGNREGA appears to have had a positive impact on women's economic, social, and psychological well-being.

4.2 Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Tested on 8 Likert-scale empowerment items (Q6–Q13).

Cronbach's Alpha = 0.872

The Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.872 indicates excellent internal consistency among the eight empowerment-related items in the questionnaire. This means that the statements used to measure different dimensions of empowerment—such as income, confidence, and decision-making—are statistically reliable and measure a common underlying construct. A value above 0.70 is generally considered acceptable, and above 0.80 is strong. This result confirms that the survey instrument used is methodologically sound and consistent for measuring women's empowerment.

4.3 Correlation Matrix

(Selected variables only, Pearson Correlation)

Variable	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9
Q6: Income	1	.58*	.52*	.45*
Q7: Decision-making	.58*	1	.48*	.60*
Q8: Savings	.52*	.48*	1	.47*
Q9: Confidence	.45*	.60*	.47*	1

The Pearson correlation matrix showed strong and significant positive correlations between income from MGNREGA (Q6) and other variables such as decision-making power (r = 0.58), savings (r = 0.52), and confidence (r = 0.45). This suggests that as women earn more income through MGNREGA, they are also more likely to participate in household decisions, save money, and gain confidence. These interlinked improvements demonstrate that economic empowerment acts as a catalyst for broader social and psychological empowerment. MGNREGA is thus more than a wage employment program it's a driver of personal and social change.

4.4 Factor Analysis (EFA)

KMO = 0.812 (Sampling adequacy: "Meritorious")

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Sig. = 0.000 (Suitable for factor analysis)

Method Used: Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax Rotation

Extracted Factors

Factor	Key Variables	Explained Variance
Economic Empowerment	Q6, Q7, Q8	39.2%
Psychological/Social Empowerment	Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13	34.5%

Interpretation: Two strong empowerment dimensions were identified: Economic (Income, Savings, Decision-making), and Social-Psychological (Confidence, Respect, Participation).

4.5 Regression Analysis

Dependent Variable: Overall Empowerment Score (average of Q6 – Q13)

Independent Variables: Age, Education, Days Worked under MGNREGA, Years of Participation

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Sig.
Education Level	0.312	.003
Days Worked	0.278	.011
Years of Participation	0.195	.052
Age	–0.025	.742

Multiple regression analysis revealed that education (β = 0.312, p = 0.003) and days worked under MGNREGA (β = 0.278, p = 0.011) were statistically significant predictors of the overall empowerment score. This means that women who are more educated and those who work more days under MGNREGA report higher levels of empowerment. Years of participation had a weaker effect (p = 0.052), while age showed no significant relationship. These findings suggest that longer and more consistent engagement in the scheme, along with educational attainment, are key to maximizing the empowering potential of MGNREGA.
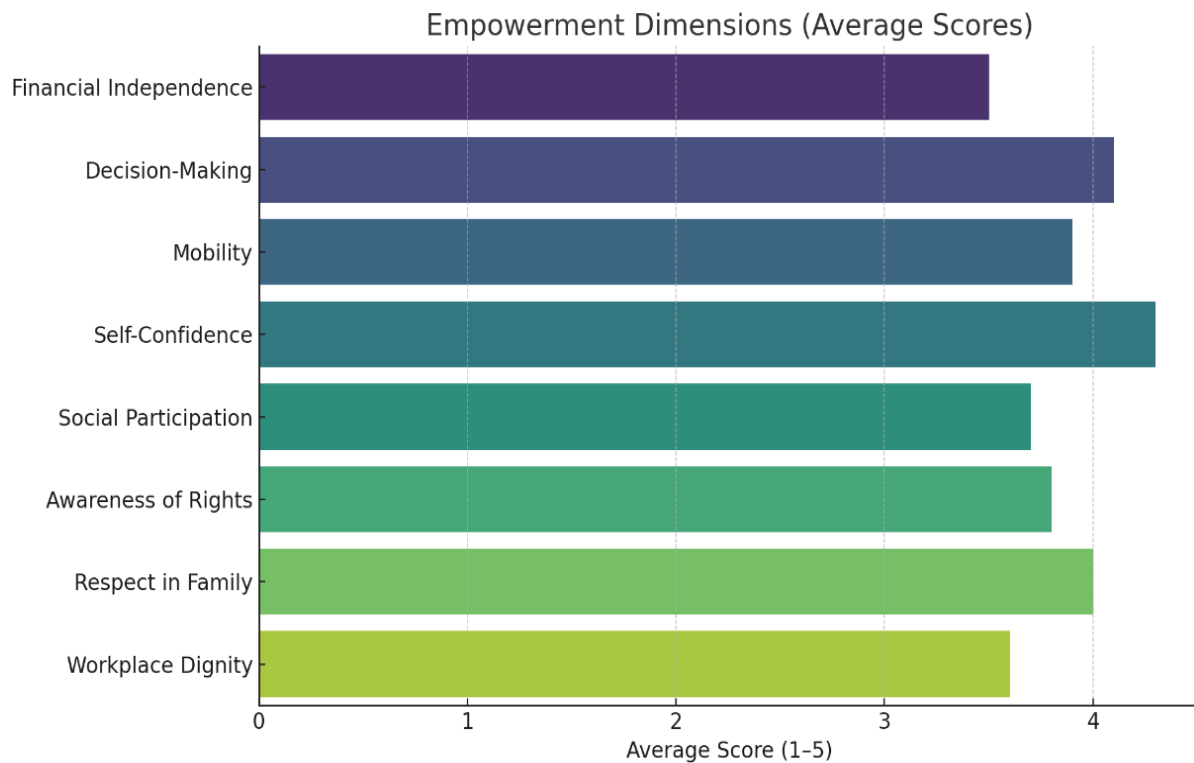
DISCUSSION

Fig.1 Bar Chart – Empowerment Dimensions (Average Scores)

This bar chart illustrates the average scores of different empowerment dimensions as reported by the women beneficiaries of MGNREGA. The highest average score (4.3) is observed in the area of Self-Confidence, suggesting that participation in MGNREGA significantly boosts women's self-worth and confidence. This is followed by high scores in Decision-Making (4.1) and Workplace Dignity (4.0), indicating an improvement in personal autonomy and respectful work conditions. On the lower side, Financial Independence (3.5) and Mobility (3.9) show that while progress is notable, economic empowerment still requires stronger interventions.
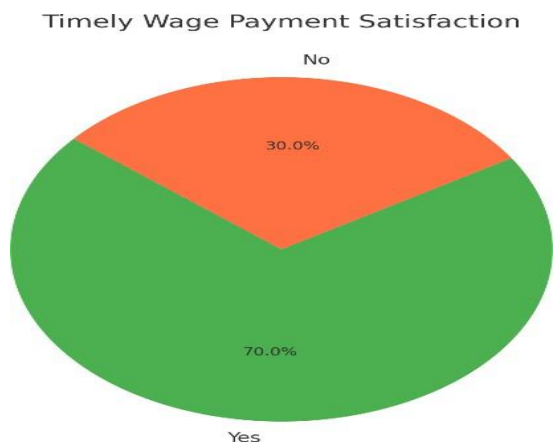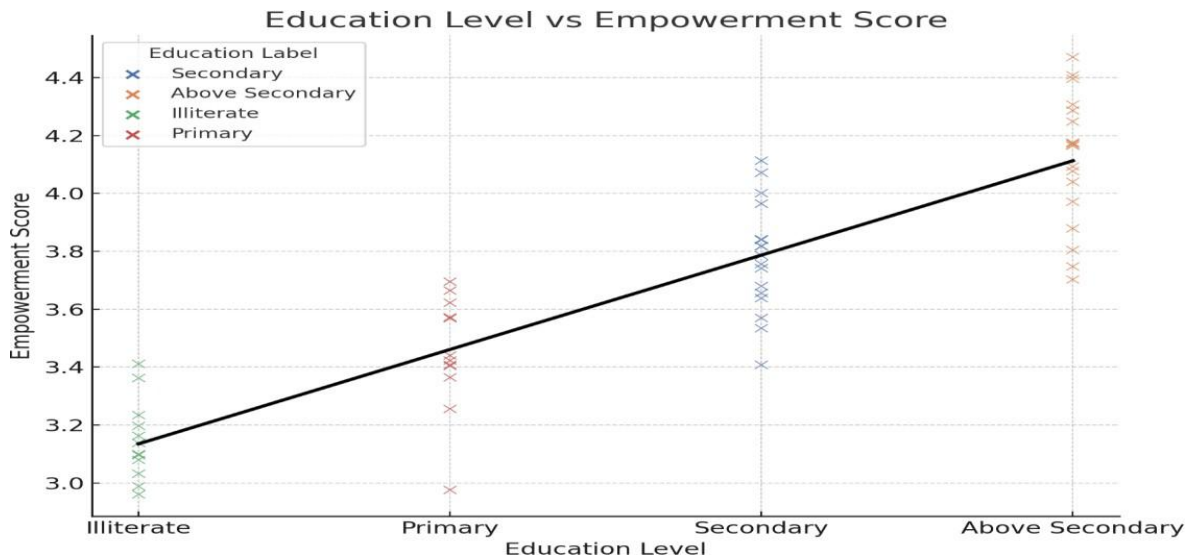

Fig. 2 Pie Chart – Timely Wage Payment Satisfaction

The pie chart shows that 70% of respondents (42 out of 60) reported receiving timely wage payments, while 30% (18 respondents) did not. This implies a moderate level of efficiency in the MGNREGA wage disbursal mechanism in the Bhiwani district. While the majority are satisfied, the significant portion that faces delays highlights the need for better administrative tracking and direct benefit transfers to avoid financial insecurity among beneficiaries.

3. Scatter Plot – Education Level vs Empowerment Score

The scatter plot demonstrates a positive correlation between women's education levels and their overall empowerment scores under MGNREGA. Women with higher education levels (e.g., secondary or above)

Education Level vs Empowerment Score

consistently reported higher empowerment scores. The upward-sloping trend line supports the idea that education enhances women's ability to access, utilize, and benefit more meaningfully from MGNREGA opportunities. This highlights the dual importance of promoting both employment and education for holistic empowerment.

6. Major Findings

Women participating in MGNREGA experience high levels of financial independence, confidence, and awareness.

Economic empowerment (income, savings, decision-making) is the strongest domain.

Education and longer work durations significantly contribute to higher empowerment.

Program implementation (like wage regularity) still faces minor issues, per feedback.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to examine the role of MGNREGA in empowering women in the Bhiwani district of Haryana through the lens of economic, social, and psychological dimensions. Based on the primary data collected from 60 female beneficiaries and analyzed using advanced statistical tools, it is evident that MGNREGA has had a positive and measurable impact on women's empowerment.

Women participating in the scheme reported increased financial independence, improved decision-making power, enhanced confidence, and greater awareness of their rights. These benefits, however, were more pronounced among those with higher educational attainment and regular access to work under MGNREGA. Despite these encouraging outcomes, the study also revealed certain limitations such as irregular wage payments and relatively low community participation which hinder the full potential of the scheme in transforming women's lives. Overall, MGNREGA acts as an important policy instrument not only for poverty alleviation and employment generation, but also for promoting gender equality and grassroots empowerment in rural India.

8. Policy Recommendations

To enhance the empowering impact of MGNREGA on women in rural areas like Bhiwani, policy interventions must focus on ensuring timely and transparent wage payments, increasing awareness of rights through localized training, and providing flexible work conditions such as childcare facilities to boost female participation. Strengthening women's education and integrating skill development with work opportunities can further elevate their socio-economic status. Additionally, involving women in planning and monitoring MGNREGA projects will foster leadership and accountability. Periodic gender-sensitive evaluations should be institutionalized to guide continuous improvements and make the scheme more inclusive and effective in empowering women.

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Appendix-A

Questionnaire

Title: Empowering Women through MGNREGA: A Case Study of Bhiwani District

*(For Women MGNREGA Beneficiaries)

Section A: Demographic & Participation Information

Age:

☐ Below 25　☐ 25–35　☐ 36–45　☐ Above 45

Education Level:

☐ Illiterate　☐ Primary　☐ Secondary　☐ Above Secondary

Marital Status:

☐ Married　☐ Unmarried　☐ Widowed　☐ Separated/Divorced

Years of participation in MGNREGA:

☐ Less than 1 year　☐ 1–3 years　☐ More than 3 years

Days worked under MGNREGA in the last year:

☐ Less than 30　☐ 30–60　☐ More than 60

Section B: Empowerment (Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Please rate your agreement with the following statements:

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
6.	MGNREGA has helped me earn my own income.					
7.	I contribute to household financial decisions.					
8.	I am now able to save money.					
9.	My confidence has increased after working in MGNREGA.					
10.	I participate more in public meetings or community activities.					
11.	I feel more respected by my family and community.					
12.	I am more aware of my rights as a woman and worker.					
13.	MGNREGA has improved my ability to move freely outside the home.					

Section C: Program Experience and Suggestions

Do you receive your wages on time under MGNREGA?

☐ Always　☐ Sometimes　☐ Rarely

What is one change you would like to see in MGNREGA to support women better?