



The Impact of Women's Status on Human Development

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Abstract

This paper empirically analyses the effect of women's status on human development. We define "status" in terms of economic opportunities, political empowerment, bodily autonomy and freedom of choice. Our study focuses on developing countries where patriarchal norms and gender discrimination play a major role in undermining women's role in a society. We find that, except political empowerment, all other dimensions have a significant impact on development. After examining the reasons behind the relationship between women's status and human development, our study makes a compelling case for promoting gender-inclusive policy-making in order to attain national and global developmental goals.

Keywords: Development, Women's Status, Child Marriage, Fertility Rate

1. Introduction

For a long time, the most common metric of well-being and development in a society was premised on an income-based approach. It was synonymous with economic performance, namely the per capita gross national product (GNP) or gross domestic

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product (GDP). Even though Simon Kuznets, one of the creators of the concept, believed that a country's GDP is not an appropriate yardstick to measure well-being, the dominant focus was laid on increasing the per capita income of the country. This was due to the belief that higher incomes would lead to better outcomes for individuals. Hence, a country with a higher per capita measure of economic wealth was considered to be more developed than a country with a lower per capita measure.

The proponents of the 'income-based approach' make two very common but wrong assumptions. First, economic growth will automatically "trickle down" and extend its benefits across society. Second, when economic growth fails to trickle down and instead causes income disparities, governments will intervene to resolve the situation. (Hicks and Streeten, 1979) proved that both these routes failed miserably at the time of their writing. Even today, these assumptions do not hold true since we have seen immense economic growth for some countries on one hand and extreme deprivation and lack of development for some.

Over time, it has been well established that income is an insufficient dimension to convey the notion of development. Amartya Sen's acclaimed "Capabilities Approach" and the subsequent creation of the Human Development Index (HDI) by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) brought about a new perspective of looking at development. It focuses on *functionings and capabilities*; in rudimentary terms, the approach refers to the *beings and doings* that individuals value and aspire to achieve with the resources they own. For example, people want to *be healthy, be respected* etc. The approach acknowledges that having resources alone ought not to be the final goal; what matters is the capacity and capabilities of individuals to exercise agency with those resources.

Being a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, it was difficult to express this perspective in quantitative terms (unlike the per capita GDP) that could be used as a tool to guide policy on development. However, the HDI tries to bridge the gap by extending the discussion beyond income. It is a composite index (see Appendix A.1 for the composition) that includes, in addition to income, other dimensions of development namely health and

education. The key takeaway from HDI is the equal focus and weight given to all 3 of its indicators.

Amongst competing indices of development, the HDI is the most frequently cited one. However, it has its fair share of criticism. (Kovacevic, 2010) provides a comprehensive review of criticisms that have been put forth. They range from statistical concerns to the choice of indicators in the index. The latter argues that the HDI is a reductionist measure (Ranis et al., 2006, p. 328) since it fails to acknowledge other essential dimensions that influence development such as political freedom, sustainability etc. In this paper, we would like to focus on the overlooked dimension of gender, and by extension, the social status of women.

Gender norms and relations in a society significantly influence the process of human development (or the lack thereof). This is more true in the context of the developing world where patriarchal institutions and pervasive gender inequality in society are everyday realities. Sociocultural attitudes across nations tend to always be predominantly against women. This has paved the way for the subjugation of women by their male counterparts in all spheres of human life. Investments in human capital formation tend to be skewed against women in the developing world. Women's participation in decision-making roles is heavily constrained which represents their lack of autonomy and freedom to make choices. Their contribution to the economy is often concentrated in unpaid work (such as domestic work). These are some instances that reveal how differently men and women engage in developmental processes.

This is not an attempt to discredit the deprivations that men face with regard to human development. Instead, we highlight that gender relations across developing societies are so perverse that there is a need to focus on women if one aims to understand the idea of development. Women face the aforementioned deprivations regardless of their level of social capital. As Martha Nussbaum poignantly pointed out in her book *Women and Human Development: A Capabilities Approach*, women in much of the world lose out just by being women.

Until the end of the 1970s, the concept of women's status was used more to analyse their impact on a traditional male-led household rather than to study their liberties and freedom. In traditional economic and demographic theories, the status of women was used as a means to study the interests and constraints of family units rather than those of the individuals within them (Karen Mason, 1986). While there are several dimensions and aspects to a woman's status in society, up until recently most papers focused on the status of women as a single dimension rather than focusing on understanding the sub-dimensions that define the status itself.

In this paper, we define the status of women across 4 dimensions of development. These include economic empowerment, freedom of choice, political representation and bodily autonomy. These areas help in approaching the problem of defining women's status in a relevant way. The issues faced by women are very deeply layered and vary across regions. Hence, taking just one aspect of women's life as a proxy for their status in the society is inhibiting since it does not take into account the multitude of matters that impact a woman's freedom. Hence, it becomes essential to study the impact of various factors that define a woman's status on the overall level of development in the society.

The structure of the paper is as follows: Section 2 will provide a discussion on women's empowerment and development. Section 3 presents a review of literature for our work. Section 4 presents the methodology and data used for our analysis. Section 5 offers the results, which is followed by a detailed discussion of our analysis. The last section concludes with scope for further study.

2. Women's Empowerment and Human Development

In order to incorporate gender disparity into development, the Gender Development Index (GDI) was constructed. The difference between HDI and GDI can be thus interpreted as a gender-inequality penalty. However, it is important to note that GDI comes with its own shortcomings. Firstly, in calculating the GDI, HDR 2020 eliminates 22 of the 189 countries due to a lack of gender-specific data and makes a number of assumptions in order to present GDIs for certain countries. Secondly, (Bardhan and Klasen,

1999) point out that GDI fails to show the true gender disparity between the countries due to its gaps in one component, the earned-income component. As a result of this, higher penalties are assigned to countries whose gender inequality stems from income disparities – in the Middle East and North Africa – and lower penalties to countries whose gender inequality stem from disparities in life expectancy or education – Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, and Russia. (Beteta, 2006) formulates the creation of a more complete index for inequality measurement. It provides very detailed criticisms as to why these indexes aren't sufficient means to understand gender empowerment. The paper calls for the inclusion of the following factors to understand gender inequality better: (1) Women's freedom over their bodies (2) Comparison of inequality between men and women (3) Their control and agency over the economic decisions that influence them.

(Kabeer, 1999) associates the notion of empowerment with "disempowerment" or in other words the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. The author defines the ability to exercise choice in terms of three interrelated dimensions: resources (preconditions), agency (process) and achievements (outcomes). The paper explores these three realms in detail and spells out nuanced criticisms; for instance, she points out internalized misogyny has adverse implications but does not find much space in gender and well-being.

One way to view women's status can be in the form of gender inequality*. They can be said to be the two sides of the same coin. Any society that promotes the interests of men over those of women (instead of focusing on both) indirectly confers a lower status on the latter. It can be argued that the more gender-unequal a society becomes, the more degraded the status of women would be in that society. There exists sufficient literature which supports the view that gender inequality acts as a hindrance to human development. For instance, the World Bank Group's *World Development Report* (2012) forged the link between gender inequality and human development. As women gain a stronger foothold in society it not only helps in achieving development

outcomes but it also may lead to higher economic efficiency. One such important aspect in which upliftment of women proves to be very important for human development is the degree of collective and individual agency a woman enjoys in society. Surveys from several developing economies have proved that giving women higher control of a household leads to generational effects that help the country in the long run (Orazem, 1999). Adding to this, better access to necessary facilities for women helps a country in improving child mortality and immunization rates (Thomas et al., 1990). Hence, from the discussion above, we can draw the inference that women's status is pivotal in improving human development.

3. Literature Review

More often than not, most studies emphasize bringing about women's empowerment in order to accelerate economic development. (Duflo, 2012), on the other hand, makes a critical contribution exploring the bi-directional relationship between economic development and women's empowerment. In one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women; in the other direction, continuing discrimination against women can hinder development. The author warns that neither economic development nor women's empowerment is the magic bullet it is sometimes made out to be. Equity between men and women is only likely to be achieved by continuing policy actions that favour women-ergo, trade-offs are unavoidable.

Previous works that analyse the impact of women's status on human development have primarily seen the issue via gender inequality. They aim to study the impact of gender inequality on development. Several studies have found a negative impact (Ferrant, 2015; Klasen, 1999; Klasen, 2002; Klasen and Lamanna, 2009). (Ferrant and Nowacka, 2015) study the role of gender-discriminatory social institutions. These institutions, by determining "acceptable" gender roles, accentuate inequalities that hinder development. One of the major focus areas of their analysis is the institution of child marriage. An often-overlooked factor, child marriage or early marriage is a form of human rights violation that threatens women's autonomy and health. Most

studies on the effects of child marriage have focused on pregnancy and school drop outs. The impact of the same on development is an unexplored domain that deserves equal attention since child marriage combined with early/adolescent motherhood, increases the risk faced by women pertaining to higher mortality rates, marital abuse and diminished decision making authority within households regarding their own well-being. Child marriage is an impediment in social and economic development (Parsons et al., 2015). As a practice, it deprives young girls and women a chance to live a creative, meaningful life. In other words, it inhibits their capabilities to effectively realize their true potential. This has intergenerational effects in terms of human capital formation (Delprato et al., 2017; Sekhri and Debnath, 2014). Therefore, one can argue that child marriage negatively impacts human development.

Various studies have sought to analyse the role of fertility rate in explaining the level of development in a country; however there has been no conclusive affirmation of the type of relationship between development and fertility. (Harttgen and Vollmer, 2013) studied and found that up to very high levels of human development fertility rate falls as society develops more. Even beyond a certain level fertility rate starts increasing as a country gets more developed. However, more developed economies do show lower fertility rates compared to less developed economies. One major reason behind this is the degree of education that is accessible to women which is greater in developed and higher-income countries. (Basu, 2002) rationalised that as countries get more equal and have higher human development, educated women tend to have lower fertility. The fundamental reasoning behind this involve the fact that as more and more women get educated, they invest higher amounts in their children's education to compensate for having fewer children. As women get better educated and start earning higher wages they don't feel the need for children for the purpose of financial security anymore. Cost and the desire of educating children and having more control over their financial decisions causes countries with high female education and development to have lower fertility rates.

Political empowerment is another major factor that is often brushed aside due to its ambiguous relationship with development. It is

only natural that more women in politics will lead to better policy making in regards to development as women leaders do seem to better represent the needs of women (Duflo, 2012). For example, women leaders particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to focus on “women-friendly” laws, redistributive policies, early education and healthcare (Clots-Figueras, 2011; 2012). As a consequence, these policies have a direct effect on development such as better public healthcare, decrease in the gender gap in school attendance and education attainment. Political empowerment, however, does not only include holding office; it also includes participation and inclusion of women in democratic processes such as voting through which they can express their demands, ranging from public safety to equality before the law. This is far more effective when women are running for office themselves. In other words, when women contest for political power, it encourages other women to engage and participate in social and public matters which, in itself, is a sign of development.

However, the electoral system of a nation, the attitude and ideology of the party, the lack of experience of women as political leaders, anti-female voter biasedness and simply the lack of encouragement continue to impede women’s participation in politics (Fox and Lawless 2004); Beaman et al., 2007). Interestingly, (Duflo, 2012) observes that the strongest barrier to low participation of women in politics is not institutional barriers or traditional gender roles but the widespread perception that women are not competent leaders. It is therefore important to address the gender gap in political representation in order to alleviate the gender imbalances in other areas of the society and thus, in turn, accelerate development.

4. Data and Methodology

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of women’s status on human development. This section provides information about the variables used and the methodology undertaken for our analysis.

4.1. Data Source

Our study makes use of secondary data available from varied sources. The Human Development Report (HDR) issued by the UNDP for the year 2020 has been used to obtain the HDI values of developing countries. The *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2020* Report published by the UN has been used to compile this list of 78 developing economies. These countries were chosen after careful considerations keeping in mind the availability of data of indicators taken into account for the study. For political empowerment, data has been extracted from the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 published by the World Economic Forum. The World Bank Database on world development indicators has been used to collect data on wage and salaried women workers for 2019. The World Bank makes a modelled estimate on the statistics retrieved from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) database. Data on fertility rates has also been drawn from the World Bank Database. Furthermore, data on child (early) marriage has been extracted from the latest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) database.

4.2. Econometric Model

Econometric analysis is done using the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) technique. The software used for the analysis is Microsoft Excel. The effect of child marriage, fertility rate, political empowerment and wage and salaried women on human development is estimated.

The following equation is estimated:

$$\text{Human Dev Ind}_i = \beta_1 + \beta_2 \text{child marriage}_i + \beta_3 \text{fertility}_i + \beta_4 \text{polemp}_i + \beta_5 \text{salwom}_i + u_i$$

A brief description of the variables is given below:

Attribute	Variable	Description
Human Development Index (Dependent Variable)	<i>HumandevInd</i>	It is a composite of life expectancy, education (measured by the mean of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age), and per capita income indicators. It is mainly used to rank countries into different tiers of human development.
Child Marriage	<i>childmarriage</i>	This variable indicates the percentage of women married between 15 and 19 years in a country.
Fertility Rate	<i>fertility</i>	It represents the number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her childbearing years and bear children in accordance with age-specific fertility rates of the specified year.
Political Empowerment Index	<i>polemp</i>	This index measures the gap between men and women at the highest level of political decision-making through the ratio of women to men in ministerial positions and the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions. In addition, it also includes the ratio of women to men in terms of years in executive office (prime minister or president) for the last 50 years.
Wage and Salaried Workers (Women)	<i>Salwom</i>	Wage and salaried workers or employees (female) are those workers who hold the type of jobs defined as "paid employment jobs," where the incumbents hold explicit (written or oral) or implicit employment contracts that give them a basic remuneration that is not directly dependent upon the revenue of the unit for which these women work.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Regression Results

Table 1: Regression Results

	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-statistic	P-value
Intercept	0.743341	0.039511	18.81332	0.000
<i>Salwom</i> **	0.002014	0.000329	6.120564	0.000
<i>Fertility</i> **	-0.05049	0.007538	-6.69792	0.000
<i>Childmarriage</i> *	-0.00182	0.000802	-2.27516	0.025833
<i>Polemp</i>	0.045891	0.049612	0.925002	0.358013
<i>F Value</i>	102.013545			
2	0.84825			
2	0.839935			
Observations	78			

Source: Authors’ Calculations.

* denotes significant at 95% level | ** significant at 99% level.

All the coefficients in our model have their expected signs. T-statistic values have been used to check significance. Women’s economic independence, measured using the variable *salwom*, has a positive relationship with development. It is statistically significant at 99 percent. As predicted, the coefficient of child marriage is negative and statistically significant at ninety-five per cent. Fertility rate, measured using *fertility*, has a negative relationship with development and is statistically significant at ninety-nine per cent. Interestingly, political empowerment is not significant as opposed to existing literature which asserts its importance as any other dimension in achieving gender equality.

The F-test of overall significance of the model, which explains how all the explanatory variables taken together explain the variation in the dependent variable, gives a test statistic value of 102.014. Due to its high statistical significance at any level, we can say our model

is highly relevant in explaining the variance in human development.

R^2 or the coefficient of multiple determination is the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable that is predictable from the independent variable. We see a value of 0.848 which means that our model explains 84.8 percent of variation in the dependent variable. It is known that adjusted R^2 is a better and more efficient evaluator to explain the variation in the dependent variable since it takes into account additional regressors that are added to the model. A value of 0.839 implies that the model is able to explain 83.9 percent of variability in our regressor.

Descriptive statistics for the variables chosen in the study are present in Appendix A.2. The study has been conducted following all the assumptions stated in a Classical Linear Regression Model (CLRM). Diagnostic testing for the assumptions can be found in Appendix A.3.

5.2.1. HDI and Political Empowerment

The test results for political empowerment were discouraging. It turned out to be insignificant contrary to existing relevant studies which state that political empowerment is a key pillar to achieving not only women's empowerment but also improving overall development (Kittilson, 2008; Hicks et al., 2016). The reason for an insignificant result might be due to the limitation in data.

Most datasets on political representation tend to concentrate only on national elites with access to education, as well as political and economic networks. They fail to encompass data on political leaders in local governing bodies. As a result, they fail to reveal the ground reality. In other words, socio-economically disadvantaged communities are disregarded and not accounted for despite the fact that gender inequality is far greater here (Cueva Beteta, 2006) which renders these datasets ineffective to draw accurate conclusions from. Statistical information on indicators such as local civic engagement in developing countries, an important indicator in political empowerment, is extremely scarce thus excluding the economically disadvantaged population. We believe our study does not get robust results on political empowerment due to the above-mentioned reasons.

On another spectrum, authors also argue that mere *representation* of women in politics is not enough to encompass the idea of political empowerment (Goetz, 2003). In fact, political empowerment does not necessarily refer to just parliamentary representation; it comprises various other aspects such as the ability to use their voice to politicise women's issues, to use their votes wisely to press demands at the topmost level, etc. But indices on political empowerment solely focus on one dimension i.e. parliamentary participation and overlook the other aspects that are equally significant. However, women's presence in the parliament alone does not always translate into effective policymaking, especially in terms of public spending (Ferreira and Gyourko, 2014; Geys and Sørensen, 2019). It is fair to say that political empowerment will remain a debatable topic for quite some time until more detailed surveys are conducted in the foreseeable future.

5.2.2. HDI and Salaried Women

Table 2: Salaried Women and HDI

Sr. No.	Country	Women in Paid Employment (in %)	HDI Score
1.	Chad	1	0.398
2.	Niger	1.8	0.394
3.	Guinea	2.5	0.477
4.	Central African Republic	3.2	0.397
5.	Sierra Leone	4.0	0.452

Source: World Bank (2019)

Our results show that the number of female wage and salaried workers has a positive and significant impact on human development. Countries where women are not engaged in remunerative work tend to belong to the "low" level of development according to the HDI classification. Table 2 shows the

countries with the lowest proportion of women in paid jobs and their respective HDI scores. These countries rank amongst the lowest in the HDI rankings (2020) which included 189 countries. There are various pathways through which one can understand why having women take up paid employment would lead to better human developmental outcomes. Firstly, one can reason that individuals earning remuneration would be engaged in productive activities. Therefore, this variable can be seen as a proxy for women's involvement in the economy. As more women work, economic growth and development follow (McKinsey and Company, 2015; Klugman and Tyson, 2017) (UN Women). This allows nations to focus on agendas such as healthcare, education etc. which raises the overall level of human development. Secondly, this leads to the economic empowerment of women which allows them to undertake independent consumption and spending decisions. This allows them to evade poverty and other income-based deprivations which otherwise act as a hindrance to development. Women's economic independence also raises their bargaining power to make decisions within and outside the household unit. Lastly, women's economic empowerment also has intergenerational benefits for their children, particularly girls by way of investments in human capital formation (Kabeer, 2005; Doepke and Tertilt, 2019)

5.2.3. HDI and Fertility Rate

Table 3: Fertility Rate and HDI

Sr.No.	Country	Fertility Rate	HDI Score
1.	Congo (Democratic Republic)	5.919	0.48
2.	Mali	5.877	0.434
3.	Chad	5.747	0.398
4.	Burundi	5.41	0.433
5.	Nigeria	5.387	0.539

Source: World Bank (2019)

The test results indicate that the fertility rate has a significant impact on a woman's status in a society. Table 3 shows that the countries with the highest fertility rate have very low HDI scores, thereby indicating a low level of development. These are mainly Central and Western African countries where society as a whole remains highly underdeveloped, even more so due to very high fertility rates. Our results are consistent with previous studies that show high fertility is associated with low development.

Previous research shows that the fertility rate has a major impact on education in a society. (Foster and Roy, 1997) show how a randomized trial providing family planning services in Bangladesh affected both fertility outcomes and children's schooling levels. In countries with high fertility rates, girls are expected to stay at home and look after their siblings and household chores. This in turn leads to low female employment in the country. Sex education, family planning, higher female literacy can act as factors behind low desirable fertility rates which then lowers the actual fertility rate (Bloom and Canning, 2004).

The fertility rate also affects the quality of life a woman enjoys in a society. A lower fertility rate implies lower high-risk births for young women. Her wage earning capacity, her financial independence, her physical health and her decision making freedom all are influenced by the number of kids a woman is expected to have. Thereby fertility rate is an important factor affecting a woman's status in society (Canning and Schultz, 2012).

5.2.4. HDI and Child Marriage

As expected, child marriage is a significant variable in our model. The quantum of the problem is vast in the developing world, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. As per UNICEF, nearly 21% of young women across the world get married off before they turn 18 years of age. The practice is prevalent due to a plethora of reasons that foster and entrench gender inequality in a society. This can be seen via several traditional and cultural norms that promote the idea that girls and young women are inferior to men and boys. Furthermore, the same norms also promote the notion that marriage ought to be the ultimate goal in a woman's life while men should be the sole breadwinners for their families.

Child marriage, in tandem with other manifestations of inequality, does not allow girls to have a fair chance to live dignified lives. It is not just an erosion of women's fundamental human rights but is also an issue with several developmental costs attached to it. Countries like Mali, Chad, Guinea and Gambia have very high percentages of child marriage due to which they end up having stunted HDI scores. Women who get married off in their youth are burdened with domestic responsibilities which negatively impacts various aspects of their everyday life. A joint research project undertaken by The World Bank and International Centre for Research on Women shows that child marriage has significant costs for women in terms of their health, economic empowerment, educational attainments, physical mobility, decision making authority and other socio-economic measures. Young brides who venture into their new marital home also face significantly higher incidences of physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse at the hands of their husbands (who are often older than them) as compared to those who marry late. When these individual-level deprivations are aggregated across a country, they translate into major socio-economic challenges that act as a barrier to development. Furthermore, there are significant intergenerational costs of child marriage. As girls drop out of school and get married, they enter into motherhood earlier than they would have otherwise. Their insufficiencies in health and education are carried forward by their children. Literature suggests that these outcomes in a child are significantly influenced by those found in the mother who, in this case, is likely to be a teenager. (Aizer et al., 2020; Favara and Pérez-Alvarez, 2020)

6. Scope for Further Research

Our work can be extended by incorporating the dimension of violence in the analysis. It is another avenue that is increasingly being seen as a major factor in influencing developmental outcomes. (Nussbaum, 2005, p. 175) argues that violence against women, including the fear of violence, which in itself, is a form of psychological abuse, diminishes every major capability in a woman's life. This has direct consequences for matters related to development since they cannot effectively make use of their

potential. (Sen, 2010, p. 12) makes a claim on similar lines. Unfortunately, the statistics on violence against women across nations is flawed due to underreporting. Furthermore, gender-based violence against women can take up so many forms. Therefore, it is a strenuous task to collect and consolidate all of it into a single dataset. Even then, the dataset would be incomplete due to a lack of data available for some major acts of violence. Although data on domestic violence is available we chose not to include it because of how restricting it is when we talk of violence against women.

Political empowerment as an indicator is still a controversial topic for many authors. There is a severe dearth of statistics on women's representation in local government bodies. In addition, data on whether more women are able to engage in civic discussion and in effect help bring policy change is unavailable and statistically difficult to collect.

A caveat is offered for the purpose of interpreting our results: There is a need for great care in selecting and quantifying the indicators that will serve as pillars of women's empowerment. It is important to mention that the choice of indicators that have been focused upon in the paper are subjective. Due to differing philosophical views on development and human well-being, one cannot provide an exhaustive list of attributes that influence human development. The ones that have been used in our study were chosen after reviewing relevant literature belonging to different schools of thought. Other researchers might criticise our choice variables and choose other indicators. They are, in fact, encouraged to do so. Due to time and data unavailability, we could not effectively focus on political aspects or aspects of violence pertaining to development. Future research can heavily contribute in this regard. Finally, our study sample also had to eliminate a few countries due to the unavailability of data of the indicators we have chosen.

7. Conclusion

The aim of our paper was to analyse the effect of women's status on development in a society. Having defined status in terms of their

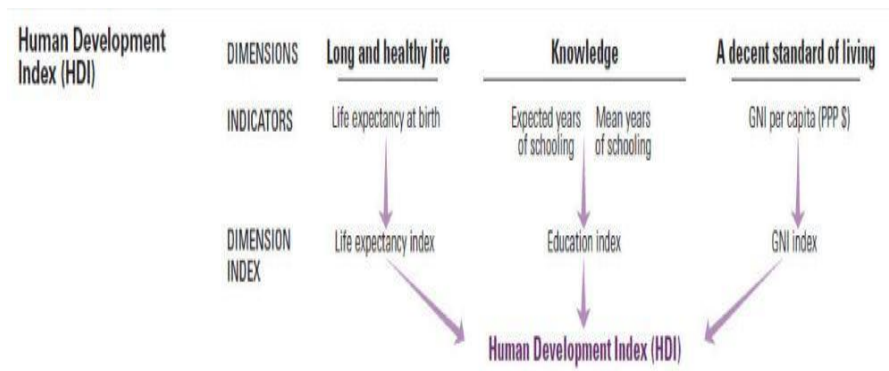
economic power, bodily autonomy, political empowerment and personal freedom, our research shows that the treatment of women in a society plays a significant role in determining the level of development in a society. Although our paper chose to focus on select aspects of women's status in developing nations, the central theme of our work represents the importance of women having equal opportunities in various fields for matters pertaining to development. Empowering women across all domains of society has multiple benefits which extend beyond the current generation. Restrictions imposed on their choices and mobility have detrimental effects for a nation. If a nation wants to achieve its highest potential and ensure its citizens to enjoy a higher standard of life, it must actively engage women. Hence, efforts must be directed towards ensuring their effective participation in all endeavors.

It is imperative that steps must be taken to ensure that child marriage is eradicated and the fertility rate regulated. There is sufficient data and literature to show that child marriage needs to be abolished through stricter enforcement of laws and greater awareness about its pitfalls amongst community members. Family planning initiatives that regulate fertility rates help in solving various fundamental problems related to a woman's freedom and help her make decisions regarding her own self. Similarly, policies that aim to increase the role and participation of women in paid employment should be prioritised. A report by the International Monetary Fund[†] focuses on the significance of gender equality in an economy, based on positive changes brought about by higher women presence in different sectors of the economy. Gender equality helps in reducing income inequality as most women work in the informal sector where the wages are low. Finally, ensuring that women hold political power, both at the grassroot and highest level, would result in legislation favourable for women's status in a society.

Appendix

A - 1

Composition of HDI (Source: UNDP)



A - 2

Table 4: Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum Value	Minimum Value
HDI	0.668	0.142	0.938	0.395
Salaried Women	48.033	30.590	99.47	1.05
Fertility Rate	2.989	1.286	5.919	0.977
Child Marriage	16.333	10.806	45.2	0.2
Political Empowerment	0.196	0.135	0.565	0
Observations	78	78	78	78

Source: Authors' Calculations

A - 3

Table 5: Verification for Assumptions of Classical Linear Regression Model- Diagnostic Tests

Diagnostic	Test	Result	
Multicollinearity	Variance Inflation Factors	Salaried Women	2.416
		Fertility Rate	2.245
		Child Marriage	1.791
		Political Empowerment	1.078
Heteroskedasticity	White's Test for Heteroskedasticity	p-Value	0.3583
Model Specification	Ramsey' RESET	F-Statistic(2,71)	3.96

Source: Authors' Calculation

* This is further discussed in Literature Review.

† International Monetary Fund. (2018, May). *Pursuing Women's Economic Empowerment*. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Policy-Papers/Issues/2018/05/31/pp053118pursuing-womens-economic-empowerment>

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