



THE EMPOWERMENT PUZZLE:

Unmasking the role of women's empowerment for addressing undernutrition in India

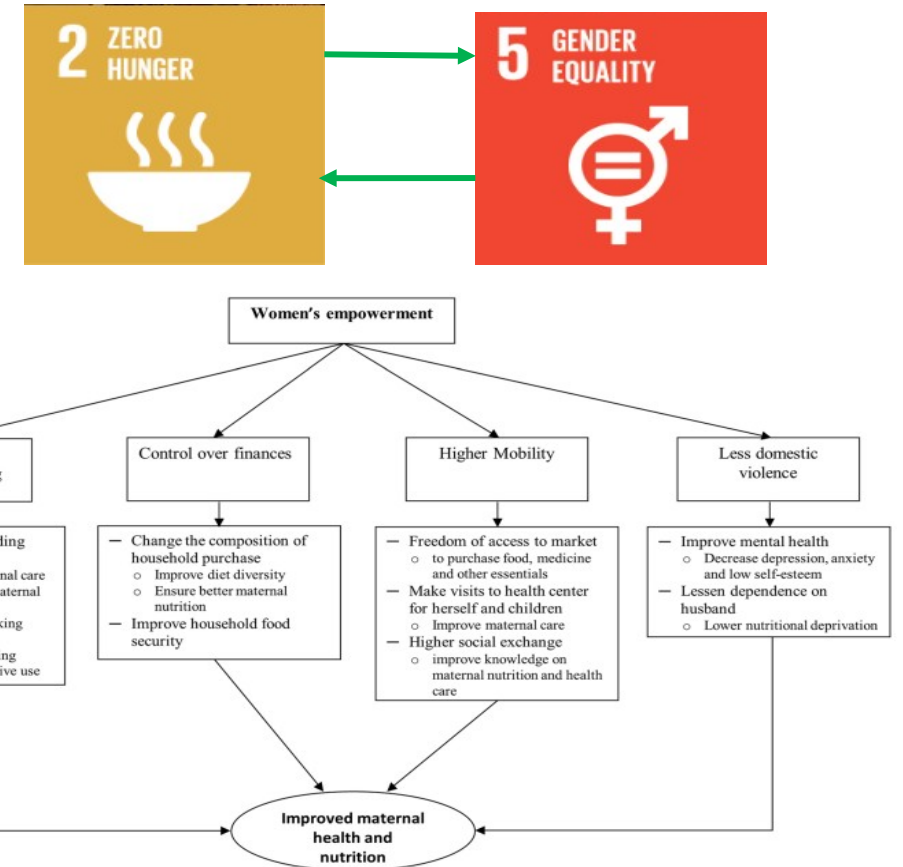
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Context

- Global efforts for reduction of malnutrition and achieving gender equality aligned with SDG-2030
- Low levels of women's empowerment are associated with maternal undernutrition as well as with delivering low birth weight babies and malnourishment among children.
- Vicious cycle of neglect of girl child, lower empowerment, lower access to decision making, translating into lower nutritional status of children.



Source: Kabir, A., Rashid, M., Hossain, K. & et.al, 2020. Women's empowerment is associated with maternal nutrition and low birth weight: evidence from Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey. *BMC Women's Health*, 20(93).

Research Problem

Majority of studies conceptualised women empowerment from three aspects - autonomy in decision making, mobility and finances.

Need of incorporating the socio-economic changes in defining women empowerment and redevelop the definition of women empowerment without restricting to just autonomy indicators.

With advent of technology and digitalisation in India, there is major need to understand the level of digital empowerment and its linkages with maternal and child nutrition.

Most of studies have linked health with women empowerment from a holistic approach but there is need of disaggregated approach, where the role of each broad indicator of women empowerment is assessed separately.

Methodology

Data Source

Most recent round of Demographic Health Survey (DHS) for India



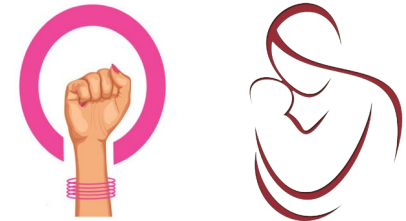
NATIONAL FAMILY HEALTH SURVEY
(NFHS - 5), 2019–21

Variables

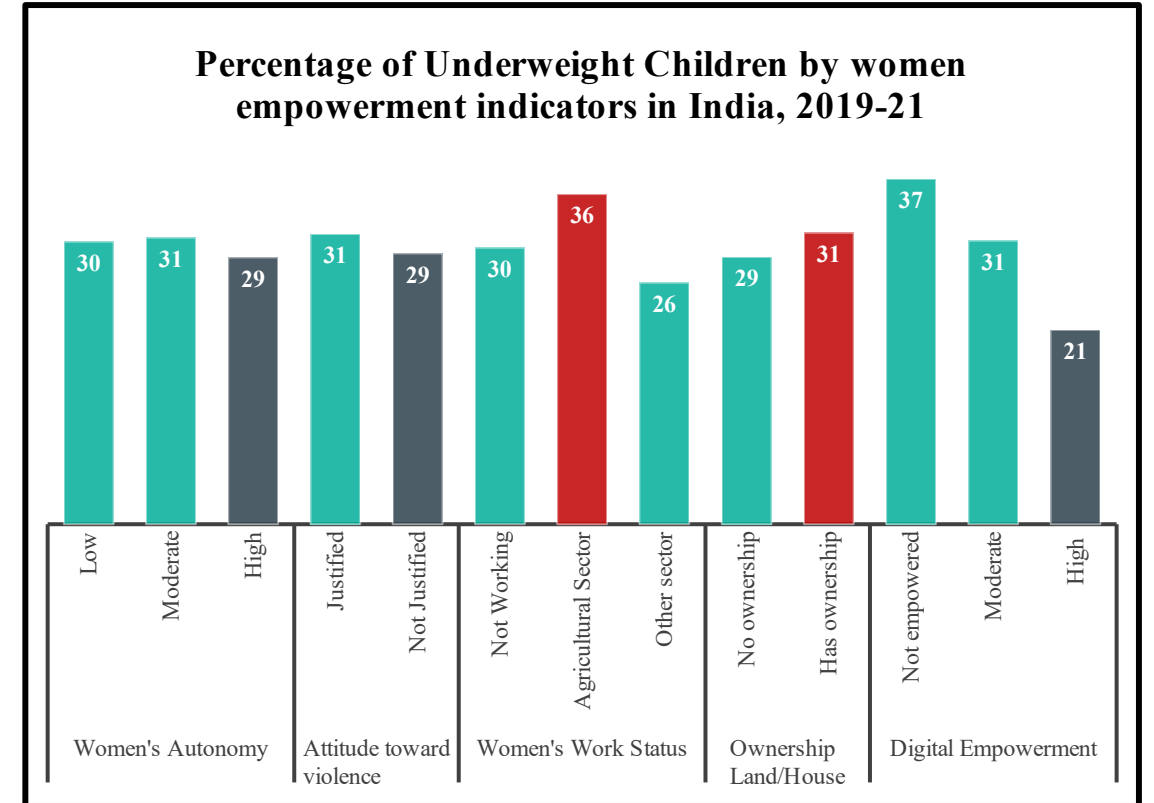
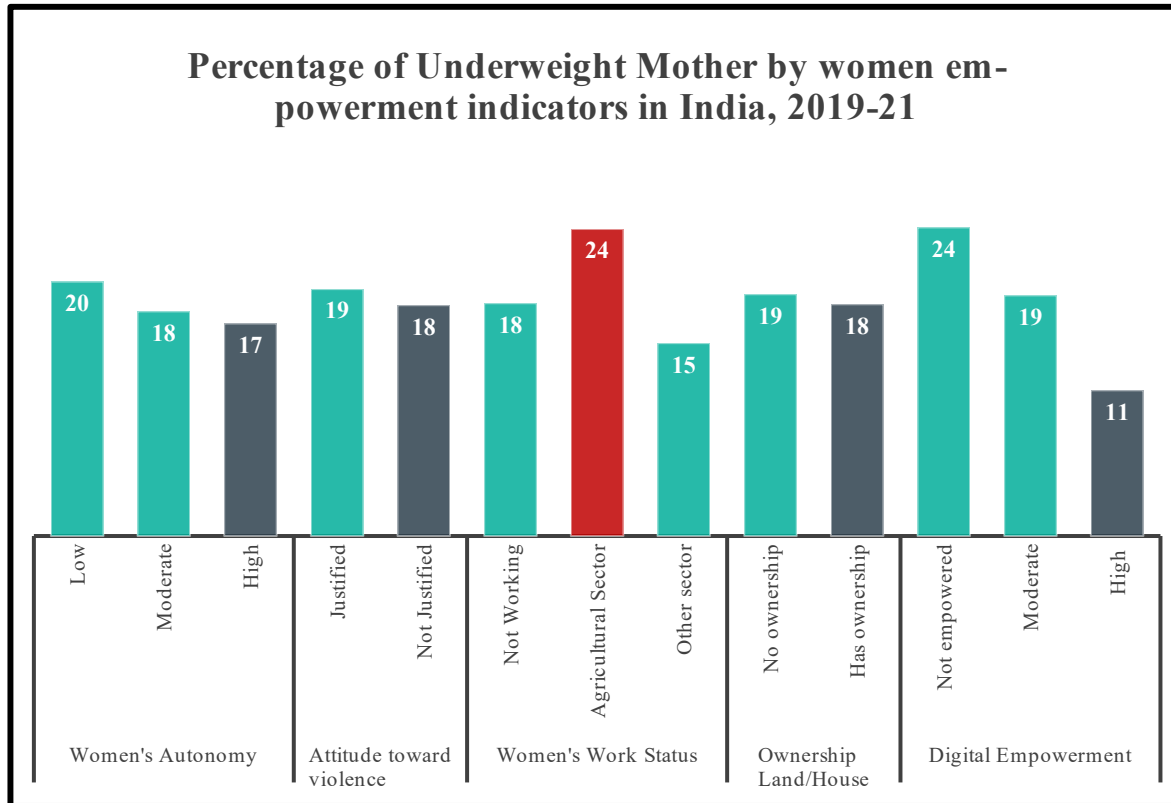
- **Outcome Variable:** underweight mothers and underweight children
- **Key predictors:** Women Empowerment Indicators
 - ✓ autonomy in decision making and mobility
 - ✓ workforce participation,
 - ✓ ownership of assets
 - ✓ attitude towards violence
 - ✓ digital empowerment

Methods

- **Unit of Analysis:** Mothers given birth in five years preceding survey
- **Statistical Analysis:** Univariate, Bivariate and Multivariate Analysis (Binary Logistic Regression)



Findings



Prevalence of underweight mother having birth in last five years preceding the survey is 18%
 Nearly every third child out of 10 children are underweight in India.

Findings

Unadjusted Regression Analysis for underweight mother and underweight children by women empowerment indicators in India, 2019-21

	Underweight mother		Underweight child	
	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Odds Ratio	95% CI
Women's Autonomy				
Low	Ref		Ref	
Moderate	0.86**	(0.78, 0.95)	1.02	(0.93, 1.12)
High	0.80***	(0.75, 0.86)	0.92*	(0.86, 0.98)
Attitude toward violence				
Justified	Ref		Ref	
Not Justified	0.92*	(0.86, 0.98)	0.91**	(0.85, 0.96)
Women's Work Status				
Not Working	Ref		Ref	
Agricultural Sector	1.42***	(1.31, 1.55)	1.30***	(1.2, 1.41)
Other sector	0.80***	(0.71, 0.89)	0.83***	(0.75, 0.91)
Ownership Land/House				
No ownership	Ref		Ref	
Has ownership	0.95	(0.89, 1.01)	1.13***	(1.07, 1.2)
Digital Empowerment				
Not empowered	Ref		Ref	
Moderate	0.73***	(0.68, 0.78)	0.74***	(0.7, 0.79)
High	0.40***	(0.37, 0.44)	0.45***	(0.41, 0.48)

*<0.05, **<0.01, ***<0.001

Adjusted Regression Analysis for underweight mother and underweight children by women empowerment indicators in India, 2019-21

	Underweight mother		Underweight child	
	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Odds Ratio	95% CI
Women's Autonomy				
Low				
Moderate	0.91	(0.82, 1.01)	1.08	(0.98, 1.19)
High	0.91*	(0.84, 0.98)	1.01	(0.94, 1.08)
Attitude toward violence				
Justified				
Not Justified	0.95	(0.89, 1.02)	0.97	(0.91, 1.03)
Women's Work Status				
Not Working				
Agricultural Sector	1.09	(0.99, 1.19)	1.04	(0.96, 1.14)
Other sector	0.91	(0.81, 1.03)	0.87	(0.78, 0.96)
Ownership Land/House				
No ownership				
Has ownership	0.94	(0.87, 1)	1.12***	(1.05, 1.19)
Digital Empowerment				
Not empowered				
Moderate	0.83***	(0.77, 0.9)	0.80 ***	(0.74, 0.85)
High	0.62 ***	(0.56, 0.68)	0.59 ***	(0.54, 0.65)

Discussions

- Digital empowerment plays a crucial role in maternal and child undernutrition.
 - ✓ women equipped with knowledge about habits as well as economic opportunities, which helps in improving their own nutrition as well as of child (Alam, 2021).
- Two surprising findings:
 - ✓ prevalence of **undernutrition is higher** among both mothers and children **if the mother is working in the agricultural sector**. This is probably due to increased work burden on women and no land ownership (Harris-Fry, et.al, 2020).
 - ✓ undernutrition among children is significantly higher **if the mother has ownership of assets**. This requires further investigations.

Implications



- Women empowerment as an arm to bring gender equity in health and nutrition
 - Targeted interventions- particularly digital empowerment



Additional dimensions to conceptualize women empowerment in changing socio-economic context



Future researches to establish pathways through which the individual dimensions of women's empowerment play a role for determining undernutrition.

Thank You!!