

Factors Affecting Women's Empowerment in Cambodia

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Background: The status of women has been improving in many countries in tandem with socio-economic development. However, women in some developing countries are still lagging behind men and they have limited rights to participate equally as men in social, economic and political spheres. Cambodia has the second highest gender inequality in Southeast Asia, despite the continuous efforts to enhance women's rights and empowerment. This study attempts to determine factors affecting women's empowerment in Cambodia.

Methods: Data for this study come from the 2010 Cambodia DHS, on 11,536 currently married women aged 15-49 years. A women's empowerment index is constructed to measure respondents' participation in household decision-making and attitude towards wife beating. Women with higher score suggest that they are actively involved in household decision-making and express their objection to domestic violence, and this indicates higher empowerment. The independent variables include women's age, marital duration, place of residence, women's educational level, women's working status, and wealth index. Poisson regression is used to study the determinants of women's empowerment.

Results: Findings show that 86% of the respondents stated that they participated in all aspects of household decision-making and 51.5% reported that they are against wife beating in any circumstances. All selected variables were significantly correlated with women's empowerment at the bivariate level, except for female employment. In the multivariate context, women's empowerment was positively related to urban residence, women's education and wealth index.

Implications: Women's empowerment is fundamental to improve their access to resources and reproductive health services. Women are the care providers of the young and the old, and they deserve equal rights and respect in every aspect. Efforts should be directed to equal access to education and job opportunities for women who are marginalized so that they can play a more active role in national development and family well-being.

Keywords: Women's Empowerment, Women's Status, Women's Rights, Gender Equality, Cambodia, Socio-Economic Development, Household Decision-Making Autonomy, Attitude Towards Wife Beating