

Difficulties and Problems Experienced by Rural Women due to Illiteracy in Contemporary World

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Abstract

Literacy is one of the foremost indicators of development in a society. Women literacy is very important and plays an essential role for the progress of the society. Illiteracy is a stumbling block to women's development and empowerment in all spheres of life. In the daily living situations, they experience several problems. The main objectives of the study to identify the difficulties/problems faced due to illiteracy among rural women in Dindigul District. A qualitative study was adopted and interview schedule was used to elicit the information from the respondents. Majority of the rural women were in age group of 36-40 years. The observation implies that illiteracy among women in the age range of 36 to 55 years is rampant among the socially backward classes. Difficulty in reading the name board of a bus and allied difficulties while travelling alone outside the village were mentioned by most of the rural women. Nearly 81 per cent of the rural women stated these two problems. Two thirds of the respondents mentioned their difficulties in putting their signature. 58.8 per cent of the respondents expressed difficulties in operating television and mobile phones. The results indicate that the major problems cited by the respondents were those affecting their mobility. The researcher, educationist and policy makers initiate the efforts in the area of women literacy is the need of the hour and also in this modern world.

Keywords: Literacy, Rural Women, Illiteracy, Difficulties

Introduction

Illiteracy is one of the biggest issues of the modern world; it is found in every corner of the world (Chausasia, Priya and Agrawa, 2019). Literacy is one of the foremost indicators of development in a society. Women literacy is very important and plays an essential role for the progress of the society. Through literacy, women can improve and enhance their personalities and contribute towards the progress of the society. Literacy is the basic need and condition for improving the capabilities and empowering an individual to be efficient in various fields. It is a potential instrument of individual well-being as well as social development and women empowerment is the pivotal part in any society, state or country (Thingbaijam, 2021).

Review of Literature

Literacy Status of Women in Contemporary World

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2015) has reported that about 757 million adults around the world cannot read or write a simple sentence and women are the first to be denied these basic skills. UIS data confirm the need for renewed and more targeted initiatives to increase adult and youth literacy rates and to achieve the goals that were missed by 2015. For this reason, the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 contain a new literacy target: "By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy."

In India, out of the 1210.6 million population, consisting 623.1 million male and 587.5 million female, only 763.5 million (434.6 million male and 328.9 million female) are literate (Keshewani, 2014). The literacy trends of the States/ UTs present quite a diversified pattern. The literates constitute 74.04 per cent for all persons, 82.14 per cent for males and 65.46 per cent for females (Census of India, 2011). Thus, only three-fourths of the population aged 7 years and above is literate in the country. In other words, four out of every five males and two out of every three females in the country are literate. The females in the country lag behind their male counterparts in literacy attainment.

The literacy rate reported for the rural areas of India for males was 78.5 per cent and 58.7 per cent for females. In the urban areas, the literacy scenario was better with 89.6 per cent reported for males and 79.9 per cent for females (Census of India, 2011). The low literacy rate for the females and further among the rural population call for immediate action for promoting literacy status of rural women.

Significance of Literacy to Women's Development

As stated in 2nd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (2013), young people and adults who struggle with reading, writing and operating with numbers are more vulnerable to poverty, social exclusion, unemployment, poor health, demographic changes, displacement and migration, and to the impacts of man-made and natural disasters.

Literacy gives women a voice in their families, in political life and on the world stage. It is the first step towards personal freedom and broader prosperity (Bokova, 2010 cited in Oyitso and Olomukoro, 2012).

Women who participated in the Literacy programme said they have started to source and understand information by themselves through newspapers and television news. They observed that they had understood the gravity of COVID-19 early on because they now consume news routinely. Further, women spoke of their newly acquired literacy and numeracy skills enabling them to negotiate their way in the outside world, including health centres and hospitals. Women said being able to read signages and ward numbers had given them

confidence and capability and freed them from being reliant on others to do so. In the survey, about 62% of the participants said they are now able to visit hospitals independently and have done so within six months before taking the survey (Das et al, 2021).

In India, evidence from empirical research studies indicates that female literacy leads to improved health indicators in families. These include delayed age of marriage, fewer and healthier children, better antenatal care, improved vaccination and nutritional status of children, reduced infant and child mortality, and corresponding reduction in poverty (Alexander 2018 cited in Das et al 2021).

Objectives of the study

1. To understand the demographic background of Rural women in Dindigul District.
2. To identify the difficulties/ problems faced due to illiteracy among rural women in Dindigul District.

Methodology

In India, the National Literacy Mission concentrates on literacy enhancement of those in the age group of 15-35 years (National Report for CONFINTEA VI, 2008). The literacy and continuing education of all those below 15 years of age is taken care of by the formal and non formal schemes of school education while for the illiterate women in the age group of 35 years plus, no such schemes could be traced. This was the reason why the investigator selected those above 35 years of age as the target group of the study.

Without investment in human capital, skills will not be acquired and there cannot be self-development and improved socio-economic status (Olomukoro, 2012). There is therefore a need to deliberately empower women with skills and knowledge through literacy education programmes. Arguably, it is through formal knowledge or literacy skills that women are able to take control of their lives and participate effectively in the developmental process.

The study was qualitative in nature. An Interview schedule was used to collect the data from the women illiterates between the age group of 36-55 years. The demographic background of the participants, information regarding the age, caste, religion, marital

status, type of family , income and difficulties / problems faced by the women due to illiteracy in Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu, India.

Results and Discussion

Background of the Rural Women

Since the programme was conceived as a mission to make all women in the age range of 36 to 55years in a village literate and capable to read Tamil on their own, efforts were made to include all women in the experimental villages under the literacy training programme. The 180 non literate women volunteered for the literacy training belonged to Thoppampatti, Kalikampatti, Ambathurai, Kollapatti and MGR Colony. Their back ground details are briefed in following.

Table 1 Personal Background of the Rural Women

Variables	Rural Women (N=180)	
	No.	%
Age (in years)		
36 – 40	100	55.6
41 – 45	51	28.3
46 – 50	24	13.3
51 – 55	5	2.8
Marital Status		
Single	35	19.4
Married	145	80.6

As given in Table 1, the age of the rural women ranged from 36 to 55 with a mean of 41 years and the age of the modal class ranged between 36 and 40 years. 55.6 per cent of the rural women were in the age group of 36-40 years. The rural women in the age group of 41-45 years, 46-50 years and 51-55 years constituted 28.3 per cent, 13.3 per cent and 2.8 per cent respectively. It is apparent from the Table that a majority of the rural women were in age group of 36-40 years. With advancement in age, the proportion of women who volunteered for the literacy training programme reduced.

A majority of the rural women (81 per cent) were married. The single women comprising unmarried, divorced and widowed women constituted 19 per cent.

Table 2 Religion and Community-Wise Distribution of the Rural Women

Variables	Learners (N=180)	
	No.	%
Religion		
Hindu	161	89.4
Christian	19	10.6
Community		
Backward	55	30.6
Scheduled	125	69.4

As shown in Table 2, 89 per cent of the rural women belonged to Hindu religion and the remaining 11 per cent to Christian religion. Sixty nine per cent of them belonged to Scheduled community and the remaining 31 per cent to Backward Community. The observation implies that illiteracy among women in the age range of 36 to 55 years is rampant among the socially backward classes.

Table 3 Economic Status of the Rural Women

Variables	Rural Women (N=180)	
	No.	%
Occupation		
Full-Time Home Makers	24	13.3
Causal workers	148	82.2
Petty Shop Keepers	8	4.5
Economic Status		
Below Poverty line	171	95.0
Above Poverty line	9	5.0

As shown in Table 3, eighty two per cent of the rural women were casual labourers. Five per cent of them were doing petty business and the remaining 13 per cent learners were full time home makers. Accordingly, 95 per cent of the families were below the poverty line and the remaining five per cent families were above the poverty line.

Difficulties and Problems Reported by the Women due to Illiteracy

Illiteracy is a stumbling block to women’s development and empowerment in all spheres of life.

In the daily living situations, they experience several problems. The pertinent ones expressed by them are reported in Table 4 and Figure 1.

Table 4 Difficulties and Problems Reported by the Women due to Illiteracy

Difficulties /Problems reported	Learners* (N=180)	
	No.	%
Reading the name board of a bus	147	81.6
Travelling alone outside the village	146	81.1
Putting signature	119	66.1
Operating Television and Mobile phone	106	58.8
Getting good income earning employment	94	52.2
Disrespect from family members	82	45.5
Criticism from others	80	44.4
Reading the time on the clock	80	44.4
Making bank transactions	74	41.1
Reading notices and communication materials	72	40.0
Dependency on others to read letters	71	39.4
Feeling of Inferiority and helplessness	59	32.7
Maintenance of records of financial transactions	59	32.7
Cheating	43	23.8
Victimisation in legal issues	28	15.5

*Multiple Responses

Difficulty in reading the name board of a bus and allied difficulties while travelling alone outside the village were mentioned by most of the rural women. Nearly 81 per cent of the rural women stated these two problems. Two thirds of the respondents mentioned their difficulties in putting their signature. 58.8 per cent of the respondents expressed difficulties in operating television and mobile phones. Being illiterate, getting high income earning employment was reported to be very difficult by 52.2 per cent of the women. The Other problems revealed by the rural women were disrespect shown

by the family members, especially while discussing serious issues (45.5%), criticism by others (44.4%) and inability to read time on the clock (44.4 %), difficulty in bank transactions (41.1%), difficulty in reading communications and notices received from the government and various departments for their development (40%) and undue dependency (39.4%) on others to read letters and communications received. A feeling of inferiority and helplessness especially when others read books and magazines and enjoy or laugh was stated by 32.7 per cent women. Difficulty in noting down financial transactions (32.7%), cheating(23.8%) and getting trapped into legal issues (15.5 %) without one’s knowledge were the other problems reported. The problems experienced by women due to their illiteracy are non-exhaustive. Only those problems that have hurt them severely, they could recollect and report.

Shawl and Mehraj (2017) concluded that illiteracy is the grass root level problem for every community. It is a hindrance for the development of any society. Illiterate respondents regret of being illiterate and feel lack of being self-reliant, self-confident, etc. Respondents liked to spent time with illiterates only.

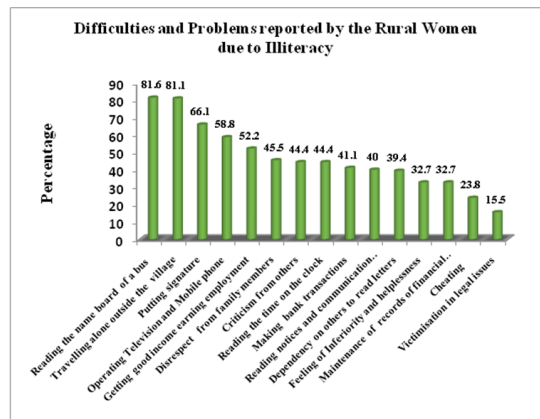


Figure 1

Conclusion

The results indicate that the major problems cited by the respondents were those affecting their mobility. The difficulties expressed by the women in operating Television and Mobile phone indicates that even for using entertainment and communication devices people need to be literate. Also, illiteracy makes them powerless and away from the world of

letters and often may invite problems at personal and family level. We should give more priority in the area of Literacy in policy of the country. The researcher, educationist and policy makers initiate the efforts in the area of women literacy is the need of the hour and also in this modern world. Literacy is must for each and every woman in the world to lead their independent life.

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