



## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND MALE MIGRATION – A STUDY IN BIHAR

Anita Kumari<sup>1</sup>, R.K.P. Singh<sup>2</sup>, Yanendra Kumar Singh<sup>3\*</sup> and Thelma R. Paris<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Sabour, Bhagalpur, Bihar

<sup>2</sup>ICAR-RCER, Patna, Bihar

<sup>3</sup>Department of Soil Science and Agricultural Chemistry, B.A.C., Sabour, Bhagalpur, Bihar

<sup>4</sup>International Rice Research Institute, Phillippines

\*Correspondence authors (Yanendra Kumar Singh) Email : [yanendrakumar@yahoo.com](mailto:yanendrakumar@yahoo.com)

### ABSTRACT

Empowerment may be described as a process which helps people to assert their control over factors which effect their lives. Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent decisions in matters that affect them. Migration of active male family members seems to have some influence on women empowerment since it leads to “feminization of agriculture” Moreover, this often leads to increase in women’s authority in the society due to change in their social role. Thus with migration there is increase in number of female headed household. Absence of male members may bestow women, with more decision-making authority, thereby leading to their empowerment. Keeping in view the above facts, this study was conducted to examine the impact of male migration on empowerment of women with the objective to study the influence of migration on women’s empowerment; their work loads and constraints faced by them in sustaining their livelihoods. The study was conducted in two purposively selected districts namely; Madhubani and west Champaran. Sample of 400 households were interviewed to obtain relevant information. Analysis of data showed that migration has positive influence on women empowerment, particularly on short-term migrant households. Further the role of women changed from unpaid family labour to farm manager, mainly on the weaker section households. They are facing problem in hiring and supervising labour, marketing of inputs and outputs, mainly due to social taboos. Women are also facing problem in management of finance, technology, and inputs, In case of poor liquidity due to delay in receipt of remittances, they prefer to borrow from money lenders due to less formally, better rapport, and timely disbursement of loans. Their credit worthiness increased due to migration and has no problem in obtaining loan. The socio-economic status of wife of the migrant seems to have increased not only in society but in family also.

**Key words :** Women empowerment, male migration.

Women’s empowerment as a concept was introduced at International Women’s Conference in 1985 at Nairobi, which defined it as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women. Mass illiteracy, unemployment, ill health and their limited access to economic assets, mark the situation of women in India. Therefore, women’s empowerment in India principally aims at enhancing their social functioning by quantitative and qualitative changes, particularly in the field of education, health and employment. (Pamecha and Khatik 2005).

Empowerment may be described as a process which helps people to assert their control over factors which effect their lives (Koko U. 1992) Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make

intelligent decisions in matters that affect them (Pamecha and Khatik 2005). Migration of active male family members seems to have some influence on women empowerment since it leads to “feminization of agriculture” Moreover, this often leads to increase in women’s authority in the society due to change in their social role. Thus with migration there is increase in number of female headed household. Absence of male members may bestow women, with more decision-making authority, thereby leading to their empowerment (Singh *et al* 2005).

In Bihar women constitute about 47.95% of the total women population as per the 2001 census and their literacy rate is 33.57% so unless an environment is created in which these women are able to enjoy all their rights and live without fear or restriction, the state cannot progress. When they are empowered, an

emancipated and enlightened society is created. Even today a large number of women are forced to confine their lives within the four walls of their homes. Though there are no legal hurdles to their emancipation, but social and cultural constraints have prevented them from using opportunities for their development.

Keeping in view the above facts, this study was conducted to examine the impact of male migration on empowerment of women with the objective to study the influence of migration on women's empowerment; their work loads and constraints faced by them in sustaining their livelihoods as a collaborative project of RAU (Bihar) Pusa, Samastipur (India) and IRRI (Philippines).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in two purposively selected districts namely; Madhubani and West Champaran where migration was at large scale. The survey was conducted in two blocks in each district, making the sample size of 4 blocks for drawing sample of villages. In each of identified blocks, two villages in each block, making village sample of 8 were selected randomly for household survey. Lists of farming migrant households were prepared for all eight-sample villages separately and 25 migrant households from each of sample villages making sample households of 200 were selected randomly. A matching sample of 200 non-migrant households was also selected for comparative study. The respondents were interviewed to obtain relevant data, which relate to the year 2001-2002. Multivariate model (OLS) was used to identify the factors influencing decision-making authority of women. The following is the specification model.

$$Y = f(a, X_1 b_1 X_2 b_2 X_3 b_3 X_4 b_4 X_5 b_5 X_6 b_6 X_7 b_7 X_8 b_8 e)$$

Y = empowerment index (Score)

a = intercept

Fsize ( $X_1$ ) = Size of land holding (in ha)

W.age ( $X_2$ ) = Age of wife (Completed years)

H.edu( $X_3$ ) = Education of husband (years of schooling)

W.edu ( $X_4$ ) = Education of wife (years of schooling)

Shag ( $X_5$ ) = Share of agriculture in household

dcaste( $X_6$ ) = Dummy caste, 1 = otherwise, forward = 0

dst ( $X_7$ ) = Dummy for household with short term migration

dlt ( $X_8$ ) = Dummy for household with long-term migrant

$b_1$ - $b_8$  = regression coefficients

e = error term

Separate analysis was done for agricultural and non-agricultural decisions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women Empowerment : It has been observed from Table-1 that the women of short-term migrant households are more empowered in taking agricultural and other household decisions than women of long-term migrant and non-migrant households. Women of all the categories of household had, no doubt, a greater stake in decision-making of post-harvest operations but women of short-term migrant households had more stake in taking decision in post harvest operation (2.75) than women of long-term migrant households (2.20) and non-migrant households (2.19).

Decision about choice of the crops varieties was the second important activity related to farming where women of migrant households had stake in decision-making. The main reason for participation of women in decision making for selecting crops/varieties on all categories of households may be due to their monopoly in preparing food, which probably provides authority to them to select crops/varieties. They are more informed about cooking quality, food liking of family members, recovery percentage and storability of grain. But again women empowerment of short-term migrant households was more than the women of long-term migrant and non-migrant households were more than the women of long-term migrant and non-migrant households.

In livestock farming the women empowerment was more on migrant households whereas women of short-term migrant households (2.18) were more empowered in this activity also than women of long-term migrant households (2.03) and non-migrant households (1.71) In absence of active male persons on migrant households, women have to take decision in livestock production. Moreover, livestock are cared/managed by women, particularly on poor/socially backward households. They might be more active in absence of their husbands/sons who migrated to other places. Women of non-migrant households are less empowered in taking decisions of livestock

**Table-1** : Empowerment Indises of income among sample households, Bihar, India.

Decision making topics	Short term	Long term	Non migrant	Rank
Decision regarding agriculture				
Choice of crops	2.59	2.04	2.00	2
Crop management	2.15	1.92	1.60	5
Purchasing inputs	2.14	1.84	1.66	7
Livestock farming	2.18	2.03	1.71	4
Post-harvest operation	2.75	2.20	2.19	1
Decision regarding other aspects				
Cash management	2.09	1.81	1.76	6
Children's education	2.15	2.16	1.86	3
Voting	1.94	1.74	1.52	8

**Table-2** : Factors affecting women's empowerment in agricultural decision-making, Bihar, India.

Variables	Regression coefficients	Standard Error	Estimated 't' Value	Statistical significance
Intercept	2.10486	0.36457	5.77	0.0001
Size of land holding (X <sub>1</sub> )	-0.09329	0.02259	-4.13	0.0001
Age of wife (X <sub>2</sub> )	-0.38667	0.09369	-4.13	0.0001
Education of husband (X <sub>3</sub> )	0.01114	0.06259	0.18	0.8589
Education of wife (X <sub>4</sub> )	-0.09657	0.04913	-1.97	0.0502
Share of agriculture in household incomes (X <sub>5</sub> )	-0.03998	0.03716	-1.08	0.2829
Caste; (X <sub>6</sub> )	-0.04707	0.06891	-0.68	0.4950
Short term migrant (X <sub>7</sub> )	0.19652	0.06105	3.22	0.0014
long term migrant (X <sub>8</sub> )	0.03785	0.05017	0.75	0.4512

N = 313, R<sup>2</sup> = 0.20, F Value = 9.52

farming (1.34), mainly due to presence of males (husband and sons) in the household who are taking decisions and probably not involving their women folk to participate in activities outside home, particularly in decision-making. Moreover, more than 10 percent of households of our respondents belong to forward caste whose women do not generally participate either in livestock production or related decision-making. The similar trend of women empowerment has been observed in crop management and purchasing of inputs. The low level of women empowerment in purchase of input in all categories of households was mainly due to less involvement of women in purchasing inputs from the market. It is a revealing fact that the women of long-term migrant households were more empowered in children education than any of the activities under study. But the women of short-term migrant households are more empowered in children education than non-migrant households. It clearly indicates an increasing level of consciousness among women for children education in rural areas, particularly on migrant households. Women empowerment levels in cash management and voting are still lower in all categories of households however women of migrant households are more empowered than

women of non-migrant households. Hence, it may be inferred that the level of women empowerment increased due to migration, particularly on short-term migrant households.

**Agricultural decision-making** : An efforts has been made to find out the factors influencing decision making authority of women is agricultural and non agricultural decision making. Related data were put to multivariate regression analysis and results are presented in Table-2 and 3. The estimated "F" value is 9.52 which is significant at <1 percent of probability, indicating that the fitted model is quite appropriate for explaining the factors influencing authority of women in agricultural decision making (woman empowerment). The estimated co-efficient of multiple determination is worked out to be 0.1998, indicating that the independent variables included in the model explain only 20 percent variatio<sup>11</sup>n in dependent variable (Y) that is women decision-making authority (Table-2). The remaining 80 per cent of variation in dependent variable is explained by other factors, which have not been included in this model. These variables may be social taboos, women hierarchy in the family, tradition of family, and social relationship, which may not be quantified conveniently, other reason, may be

**Table-3** : Factors affecting women's empowerment in non-agricultural decision-making, Bihar, India.

Variables	Regression coefficients	Standard Error	Estimated t Value	Statistical significance
Intercept	2.0820	0.3186	6.54	0.0001
Size of land holding (X <sub>1</sub> )	-0.0607	0.0197	-3.08	0.0022
Age of wife (X <sub>2</sub> )	-0.4603	0.0848	-5.43	0.0001
Education of husband (X <sub>3</sub> )	0.0864	0.0556	1.55	0.1215
Education of wife (X <sub>4</sub> )	-0.0243	0.0427	-0.57	0.5695
Share of agriculture in household incomes (X <sub>5</sub> )	-0.0333	0.0236	-1.41	0.1583
Caste; (X <sub>6</sub> )	-0.0536	0.0612	-0.88	0.3816
Short term migrant (X <sub>7</sub> )	0.1233	0.0576	2.14	0.0331
Long term migrant (X <sub>8</sub> )	0.0035	0.0459	0.08	0.9391

N = 350; R<sup>2</sup> = 0.18; F value = 9.27.

misreporting by respondents about their authority in decision making.

Regression co-efficient of farm size (-0.0933), wife age (-0.3867), and wife education (-0.0966) are negative but found statistically significant, It clearly indicates that the authority of women declines with increase in farm size, her age, and education level. It appears logical also because larger size land owners are generally belong to high caste households where women authority is lower in the family than that of lower caste households. As age increases, involvement of women in routine type decision declines because younger members of house tasks responsibility of decision-making. It seems surprising that as per our result authority of women declines with increase in their education level. But it holds true due to two reasons (i) levels of education is higher on large size of holding/forward caste and women of these households do not participate either in agricultural production activities nor in related decision-making. (ii) Capability of women educated up to 5 class or 9<sup>th</sup> class is almost similar due to poor standard of education a rural area. The schooling of 4-5 years more may not affect on decision-making capability.

Regression coefficient of short-term migration of husband is +0.1965, which is found significant at <1% level of probability, indicating that the wife of short-term migrant is likely to be more empowered in agricultural decision-making because short-term migrants generally belong to weaker section and their wives participate in operation of agricultural activities and related decision making too. Hence, it may be inferred that the younger, women (wife) of short-term migrant of smaller farm size is likely to have more authority in agricultural decision-making and they are more

empowered with respect to agricultural decision making.

**Non-agricultural** : In analysis of non-agricultural decision making, F value (9.27) is found positive and significant, indicating suitability of model for present analysis. The coefficient of multiple determination is 0.1782, indicating that about 18 percent of variation in dependent variable (y) is explained by independent variables included in the present model (Table-3) . The reasons for low value of 'R<sup>2</sup>' have been explained in the earlier discussion. Regression coefficients of farm size (-0.0607) and wife age (-0.4603) are negative but regressions co-efficient of short term migration is positive (0.1234) .All these three regression coefficient are found statistically significant. Hence, it may be said that the younger woman (Wife) of short-term migrant from smaller farm size is likely to have more authority in non-agricultural decision-making.

**Changes in workload** : The changes in the workload was examined on the basis of empirical evidences derived from the labour use available for rice production however, the information generated through asking multiple questions from female members of respondent households are also utilized to reach at meaningful conclusion. Since labour migration is predominantly male labour oriented hence female labour is likely to compensate the decline in male labour force at native place, consequently the workload of female workforce may increase in villages with high incidence of migration. Moreover, the increase in female workload may be more pronounced on migrant households. It has been observed that per hectare family female labour use in modern rice production was higher on short-term migrant households than long-term and non-migrant households (Singh & Thelma 2005). Family female workers of short-term migrant



households worked more number of days than their family male members in rice production. It clearly indicates that the workload to female workforce are comparatively on long term migrant households, mainly due to their higher economic status because the comparatively large proportion of long-term migrants belong to higher caste and economic categories whose females do not work in outside home, particularly in crop fields. In major part of India, an increase in economic status of households results in withdrawal of female workforce from workplace. It holds more true in rural area, particularly in Bihar. The respondents reported that their workload increased mainly due to migration of male members from the households. The unavailability of cheap labour is also an important reason for increase in work load to women. Moreover, a large proportion of migrants were not engaged in any economic activities before migration hence much increase of workload to women does not arise, particularly on long term migrants' households. Their perception on this particular aspect seems to be in order since the most of them do not participate in economic activities hence they may not have any idea about increasing workload to women due to male migration. However, the majority of these households belong to joint family system where male members are available to carry out work and take more responsibility in absence of male migrants of their family. A small proportion of migrant households reported about the decline in workload to women on migrant households. These people told their own experiences. The majority of these households belong either to forward caste or medium and large farm households who have no practical experience of increase or decrease in workload. However, some of women experienced decline in workload due to sale of animal after migration of male members of the family.

Hence, it may be inferred that the workload to female increased due to male migration, mainly on females of weaker section of society. There is almost no effect of male migration on workload to women in comparatively rich households. The work load to children of the households also increased due to migration of male family members of the households. Children help mainly in transplanting and weeding and raising cattle. However, female child help in household work to adult female of the households since they are generally engaged in field work, due to absence of male of the family.

**Role of women :** Absence of male, especially husband for longer period from home creates a situation which demands the change in role of women from a worker of household to manager of the household. While conducting survey a question (Did your role shift from being a unpaid family labour to manager of the house) was asked to female respondents of migrant households and more than one-third of them reported about the change in their roles. The scores of empowerment indices have been worked out on the basis of their involvement in decision making for agricultural and other household decisions which ranges from 1.29 to 2.64 (Table1). The higher score supports this opinion that women role has changed from family worker to manager. The change of women role is evident in households of nuclear family where husband migrated. In joint family migration does not have any influence on women role because head of joint family generally take their responsibility of decision-making. In case of migration of active male member of households, other male family member such as brother or son takes the rein of households. Caste is also an important contributing factor for changing the role of women in migrant households. In most of the lower caste household, the change of women role from worker to manager has been observed. Moreover, nuclear family system is common on lower caste households.

Hence, it may be inferred that the change in role of women from family worker to manager of the house has been taking place on migrant households but the process is more pronounced on nuclear family; lower caste, and weaker section households.

**Problem of women in migrant household :** Women do face several problems due to absence of their male members of family, which are managerial, economic, social and personal. They have been facing more problems in day to day work. As for example, hiring of labour is routine work but necessary activity for cultivation, particularly in absence of male family member of the household. More than one-fourth of female respondents of both long-term and short-term migrant households felt problem in hiring labour for cultivation. The peak time scarcity of labour is common cause of hiring labour in villages where incidence of migration is at large scale. But some problem in hiring labour is more household specific. Low caste migrant households have problem because labours of the comparatively higher caste hesitate to work on the

farms of lower caste. Whereas females of forward caste have poor rapport with labourers of the village since they do not go out from the home due to social taboos. In case of problem in hiring labour, particularly at peak agricultural season, about three-fourths of households managed their agricultural operations through exchange or sharing of labour. But this arrangement is more common on households of weaker section, that is poor households or backward/scheduled caste families. Besides hiring and supervising problem of labour, about one-third of women also face problem in input, technology and financial management. Women of forward caste do not visit market place for purchase of fertilizers, seeds and agricultural chemicals due to social taboos and they have to depend on their relatives/neighbors. Despite the involvement of women in agricultural activities, they are not being more exposed to related technologies, due to predominance of male in the society. None of females under study are trained for using any of the modern technologies in agriculture. They are solely dependent on either family male members or hired labour for technology management. They also face financial problem in case of irregular flow of remittances, particularly for arranging fund for agricultural operations and consumption need including expenses on medicine and children education. They also reported problem in marketing of agricultural produce. The majority of these migrant households belong to koiri caste that has inherent skill of vegetable cultivation. These women face marketing of vegetables since there is no market of vegetable in the village. More than 80 percent of migrant households reported that the quantum of remittances is inadequate to meet /supplement the household expenses at native place. In case of shortage/unavailability of fund particularly for purchase of inputs, friends, neighbours, relatives and moneylenders were the most important sources of fund. The situation seems to be alarming if remittances are delayed. In this case, more than 75 per cent of migrant households borrowed money from relatives/friend/neighbors for short period (without interest), since the money is to be returned as soon as the remittances are received. However some of migrant households reported the delay in agricultural operation including sowing/transplanting of crops was mainly due to delay in receipt of remittances. More than two-thirds of respondents reported that the borrowing from institutional source is still difficult since the bankers are still granting loan against security and do not like to

grant loans to poor households. Despite the enormous propaganda for disbursement of loan to poor households by organizing even "loan mela" the institutional source of finance is still out of reach to the poorest among poor in Bihar where C-D ratio is still around 26. There is a common complaint that the banks are not granting loans on time. About one-third of migrant households also reported about delay in loan disbursement from institutional sources. Two-third of migrant households reported that the borrowing from moneylenders is most easy. They are local people and know the credit worthiness of migrant household since their liquidity increased due to inflow of remittances. However, the high interest rate is charged by money lenders. Despite the high interest rate (60%/year) of money lenders, they are being preferred/liked by poor households, due to prompt service, easy access, no formalities, and their good rapport to clients.

## CONCLUSIONS

It may be concluded that migration has positive influence on women empowerment, particularly on short-term migrant households. It may further be concluded that role of women changed from unpaid family labour to farm manager, mainly on the weaker section households. They are facing problem in hiring and supervising labour, marketing of inputs and outputs, mainly due to social taboos. Women are also facing problem in management of finance, technology, and inputs. In case of poor liquidity due to delay in receipt of remittances, they prefer to borrow from money lenders due to less formally, better rapport, and timely disbursement of loans. Their credit worthiness increased due to migration and has no problem in obtaining loan. The socio-economic status of wife of the migrant seems to have increased not only in society but in family also.

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