



The Role of Education in Women Empowerment: A Survey Study in Kalikot District of Karnali Province

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Abstract

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between level of education and women empowerment conducted in Mahawai Rural Municipality of Kalikot District and Birendra Nagar Municipality of Surkhet Districts belonging to the quantitative research design. Totally 700 educated married women between 20-45 years of age group from rural (N=350) and urban areas (N=350) were randomly selected. Structured questionnaire was used as a data collection tools. The study findings revealed that the urban women demonstrated higher representation across all levels of formal education compared to rural women. The mean educational level scores were 3.29 (SD=0.95) for rural, and 3.76 (SD=0.77) for urban women, respectively, with T-value of -2.65 ($p < 0.05$) confirmed a statistically significant difference in educational attainment favoring urban women. Mean participation scores were 3.11 (SD=0.98) and 3.31 (SD = 0.83) for rural and urban areas respectively, with a T-value of -2.31 ($p < 0.05$) concluded the urban women's have significantly greater role in decision-making. Moreover, decisions dominated by husbands were more frequent in rural (34.2%) than urban (25.2%) areas. Mean scores for decision-making autonomy were 3.11 (SD=0.98) rural and 3.31 (SD=0.83) urban, with a statistically significant T-value of -2.31 ($p < 0.05$). Education and urban exposure thus contribute positively to women's mobility autonomy. From the results and discussion, it has been observed that the women's education determines the acquisition of women's empowerment.

Keywords: Women empowerment, gender equality, women's education, educational attainment



Introduction

Education is the key factor for women empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. Discrimination of women from womb to tomb is well known. There is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors and women oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walk of life. In order to fight against the socially constructed gender biases, women have to swim against the system that requires more strength. Such strength comes from the process of empowerment and empowerment will come from the education. And rural development will come from women empowerment (Shunmuga ,Sekar and Subburaj ,2015) .

Women empowerment includes women awareness of their rights, self-confidence, to have a control over personal and professional lives and their ability to bring a change in the society Khatri, R. (2016). The conception of empowerment is based on the notion of power; empowerment by definition means “enabling”, “giving, receiving or obtaining power” or “giving the official or legal authority or the freedom to do something” (Barman, B., C, 2018). Empowerment has considered having a multi-dimensional orientation, and in a given society, its effectiveness depends on the environmental forces (Nadia, J 2020). Khan, S., Haider, S. I., &Saadia. (2020) stated the five major dimensions of the women’s empowerment in conjunction with education i.e. (1) freedom of movement, (2) economic activism, familial and social affairs (3) freedom from domination and support by the family, (4) decision-making in daily life, and (5) political participation and community engagement

In general, education is an indispensable tool to empower women which helps them to understand the real world, to provide the opportunity of getting prosperous life and family welfare by eliminating the inequalities and discriminations based on gender and to select the method and means of honorable life they desire to lead, to reduce the family burden of her husband's life, to teach and guide their children the lesson associated with civil rights and ethical social values as well as to distinguish between best and worst objects at present and in future and to get great self-confidence and ability to take right decisions in every specific aspect of life.

The world declaration on Education for All in 1990 was given priority to ensure access to, and improve that quality of education of girls and women and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. According to the Nepal’s national reports of the census 2021, the overall literacy rate of Nepal is 76.2 percent in 2021 of which male literacy rate is 83.6 percent and female literacy rate is 69.4 percent. In the 2011 census, overall literacy rate was 65.9 percent; while male literacy rate was 75.1 percent compared to female literacy rate of 57.4 percent. Even if Nepal has achieved significant improvement in increasing literacy rates than preceding the years, there is still huge gap between male and female literacy rate. It has indicated that as education levels climb, girls’ enrolment in school declines which may negative impact to promote women empowerment. Even though, women have a great contribution in society but without an adequate education, girls are often forced into early marriage and may become victims of abuse and trafficking. If this scenario does not change, there will be little or



no progress in society. So, every woman must be educated to contribute the development of the society in the same way as men do. But, the women's education is not given much emphasis even today in many parts of Nepal. Some of the socio-cultural customs, religious believe and parent's negative attitude towards daughter prevalent in our society are responsible for the deprivation of women's education (Singh 2020).

Rational of the Study

Nepal is a patriarchal country. The idea that women need empowerment more than men generally is based on the perception that women have less power than men and have been oppressed by men. Women, therefore, have had a harder time achieving their goals compared to men since men have been keeping them under control. After being suppressed in a patriarchal world for so long, women just need to raise their voices against oppression, female feticide, raps, dowry, gender equality and more. Moreover, discrimination and vulnerability of women still exist in many parts of the world and Nepal as well because women's education however is not given much emphasis even today in many parts of Nepal.

It is well known that the gender equality and equity, provision of equal rights to son and daughter in parental property, equal opportunities of education and employment to the males and females and freedom in decision making authority are the major social indicators for qualitative development of the society. But the current situation of gender discrimination, domestic violence against women and deprivation of women from decision making authority has depicted points out that still the Nepalese women are forced to live in miserable condition. This condition exists in almost parts and each class of the country. The Karnali Province of Nepal can't be its exception. Indeed, the study has tried to analyze the appropriate role of education to overcome from the hindrances and obstacles in the process of women empowerment. So, the conclusions obtained from this study would as valuable suggestions to build a peaceful and progressive society.

Review of Literature

Women's education is the key factor for women empowerments, development and welfare (Sardar,L. 2021) and it plays a crucial role in achieving gender parity and women empowerment (Nashid, K., &Haider, S., 2007; Zafar, 2016). Educated women ensure better health care, decrease in the population growth, increment in food production, promote financial solvency and assist poverty reduction (Kuenning, M. & Amin, 2001; Coleman, 2010).

Bhat (2015) revealed in his study entitled "Role of Education in Women Empowerment" that the education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. Education also brings reduction inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family and develops the concept of participation. So that we can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment.

Khatri (2016) said that the education is the most important requirement and the fundamental right for any citizen which helps the individual to reduce inequality and play a central role in human development that impacts the overall social economic development.



Higher level of literacy and education leads to better attainment of health, nutritional status, economic growth, population control, empowerment of the weaker sections and community as a whole.

Chaudhary et al (2017) in his study on 'Need of Women Education for Women Empowerment', revealed that the women education is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices which is essentially a step of uplift of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the most needed arm for guarding them against all forms of fears.

UNICEF (2018) Nepal has seen significant improvements in access to education across the country over the last few decades. However, this progress is not equally shared among different groups and regions in the country. A large number of children are still unable to access schools and learn due to barriers related to their gender, socio-economic status, and geographical location, physical and intellectual ability."

. Batool, S., S. and Batool, S.A. (2018) concluded that education is a prerequisite to enhance women's empowerment, but it appears to boost up women's empowerment through increasing their income and elevated self-esteem. Habib et al. (2019) declared that education and employment have high significant positive relationship with women empowerment in decision making, control over the resources and voice.

Education is widely recognized as a key catalyst for women's empowerment across multiple dimensions, including economic autonomy, health outcomes, and political participation. Recent empirical studies reinforce this connection. Sharma et al. (2024), in their evaluation of the Mahila Samakhya program in India, demonstrated that community-based educational interventions contributed to increased years of schooling, delayed age at marriage, and improved self-efficacy among women. This aligns with Anuradha et al. (2025), who identified significant improvements in reproductive health, family planning, and maternal outcomes among educated women, particularly in underserved communities. These findings suggest that beyond literacy, contextualized, gender-sensitive education programs significantly contribute to long-term empowerment outcomes. However, the role of community mobilization and awareness-building was found to be equally crucial in translating education into meaningful life changes.

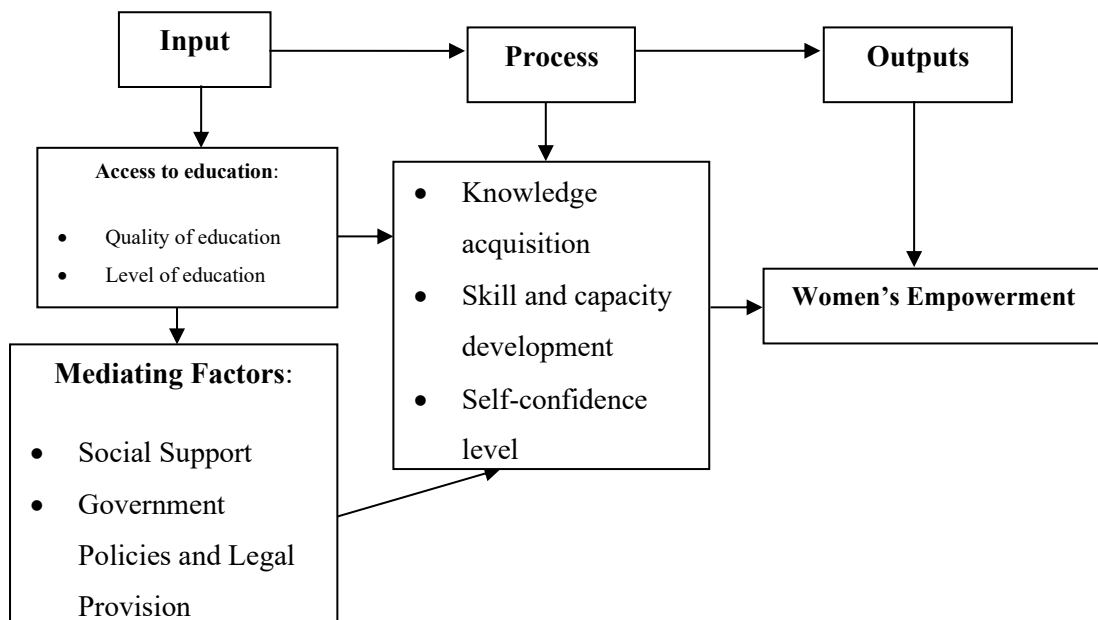
As discussed above mentioned literatures, there is a positive relationship between education and women's empowerment that has a tremendous positive effect in such patriarchal and traditional society where still women are secondary and their higher education is not prioritized in most of the families. Well educated women better utilize resources for a sustainable positive change in the society. A woman with education has more voice against the discrimination. As a result, the access of female education can breakdown every obstacles of gender equality. Hence, the education is a key factor for women empowerment and women empowerment is required for community and national sustainable development, that's why lets must empower our females. Therefore, women constitute an important segment of the society

and perform multiple roles. Education is essential for them to prepare themselves for participation in development process from which they are well as the society will benefit.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented underscores the critical role of education in facilitating women's empowerment across multiple dimensions—economic, social, political, and personal. Education acts not only as a foundational input but also as a transformative mechanism that enables women to acquire knowledge, build relevant skills, and develop self-confidence. These outcomes are further influenced by mediating factors such as access to social support networks, inclusive government policies, and available economic opportunities. When these elements interact effectively, they create an enabling environment in which women are better equipped to challenge systemic barriers, assert their rights, and make autonomous decisions. Ultimately, the framework highlights that investing in women's education is not merely a human rights imperative but also a strategic driver of sustainable development, societal progress, and intergenerational change and family welfare. Therefore, prioritizing inclusive, quality education for women and girls should remain a central objective for policymakers, educators, and development practitioners worldwide.

Conceptual Framework: Education and Women's Empowerment



Research Methodology

The present study was conducted in Mahabai Rural Municipality of Kalikot District and Birendranagar Municipality of Surkhet District belonging to the mixed research design. The study is based primary data. Cluster sampling under the probability sampling technique was implied comprising 700 married women of 20 to 44 years age group. Among these 350 educated women in urban and 350 uneducated women from rural areas were randomly selected

from the list. Primary data have been collected from structured and unstructured questionnaire, interview schedule, observation form, focus group discussion. The collected raw data were edited, coded, classified and tabulated under different headings and sub-headings by mathematical and numerical procedure. So, the data collected from the primary and secondary sources were represented in the tables, figures, pie charts, bar-graphs and various statistical tools such as mean, median, standard deviation, t-value and chi-square test to analyze and compare the results.

Level of Education

Table 1 presents the titled *comparative distribution of educational level of women in rural and urban areas* and provides a clear comparison of women's educational attainment across rural and urban areas. The data reveals notable differences in educational status between the two areas. In rural areas, 4% of women are classified as only literate, while this figure is significantly lower in urban areas at just 0.3%. This indicates a disparity in foundational literacy, with rural women more likely to lack formal education beyond basic reading and writing skills. Moreover, when it comes to basic education, 23.1% of rural women fall into this category, compared to 16.6% of urban women. This suggests that a larger proportion of rural women receive only minimal formal schooling. Conversely, secondary education is more prevalent among urban women, with 19.8% having completed this level, as opposed to 12.9% in rural areas. Higher education is the most common educational attainment in both settings. In rural areas, 60% of women have attained higher education, while in urban areas; this figure rises slightly to 63.4%. This shows a positive trend in both settings, although urban women continue to have a slight advantage.

Table 1. *Comparative distribution of educational level of women by residence*

Educational Status	Rural frequency (%)		Urban frequency (%)	
Only literate	14	4	1	0.3
Basic	81	23.1	58	16.6
Secondary	45	12.9	69	19.8
Higher education	210	60	222	63.4
Total	350	100	350	100

Mean (\bar{x}) = 3.29, Standard Deviation (σ) = 0.95 for rural.

Mean (\bar{x}) = 3.76 Standard Deviation (σ) = 0.77 for urban.

T-value = -2.65 at 0.05 level of Significance.

Observation of the table shows that mean and S.D. of education of women in rural and urban area are 0.61, 0.86 and 1.48, 0.92 respectively. The calculated t-value is greater than the table value of 1.96 at 0.05 levels. The results indicate a clear gap in education between women in rural and urban areas. More women in urban areas have received formal education at all levels compared to those in rural areas. It means there is better education in urban women. Probable reason for this result may be due to literacy awareness is more prevalent in urban areas. This difference shows the need to improve access to education for women in rural areas and reduce inequality of access in education.

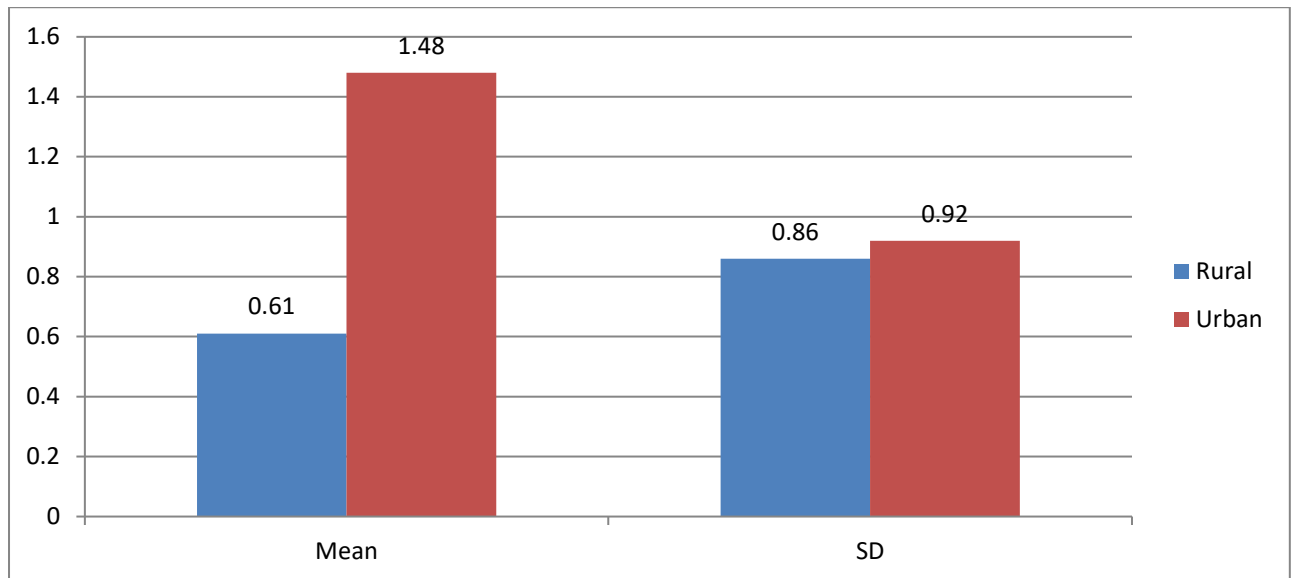


Figure 1. Mean and SD of women by educational level by residence.

In conclusion, the level of education significantly influences the degree of empowerment a woman experiences. Promoting universal access to quality education for girls and women is essential for achieving gender equality and sustainable development.

Participation in Decision-Making

The table 2 presents the comparative distribution of women's participation in household decision-making across different education levels in rural and urban areas, each based on a sample of 350 women. In rural areas, the highest proportion of participating women (51.2%) had attained higher education, followed by 34.2% with basic education. Only 2.8% were only literate. In urban areas, participation was also highest among women with higher education (53.7%), but a greater proportion had secondary education (23.6%) compared to the rural group (11.8%). Only 0.4% of urban women participants were only literate. The total number of women involved in household decision-making was 213 in rural areas and 233 in urban areas.

Table 2. Comparative distribution of women's participation in decision-making by residence

Educational Level	Rural frequency	(%)	Urban frequency	(%)
Only Literate	6	2.8	1	0.4
Basic	73	34.2	52	22.3
Secondary	25	11.8	55	23.6
Higher education	109	51.2	125	53.7
Total	213	100	233	100

Mean (\bar{x}) = 3.11, SD (σ) = 0.98 for Rural.

Mean (\bar{x}) = 3.31, SD (σ) = 0.83 for Urban.

T-value = -231 at 0.05 level of Significance

The mean education level of women participating in household decision-making is higher in urban areas (3.31) than in rural areas (3.11). The t-value of -2.31, calculated at a 0.05 level of significance, indicates that this difference is statistically significant. Thus, educational

attainment has a stronger influence on women's participation in household decision-making in urban areas compared to rural settings.

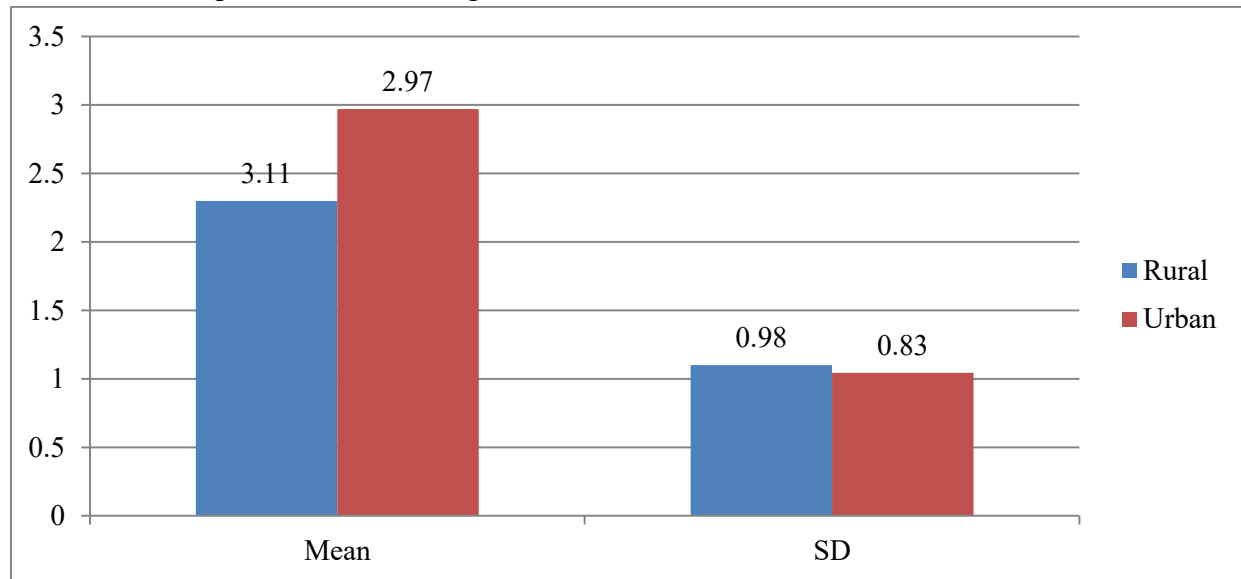


Figure 2. Mean and SD of Women's participation in household decision-making by residence.

Above mentioned findings suggest that education is a significant factor influencing women's empowerment within household's decision-making roles. The contrast between rural and urban areas reflects the unequal distribution of educational opportunities. Urban women are generally more educated, they can demonstrate higher engagement in household decisions due to greater access to education and exposure to gender equality norms. This indicates that urban women are generally more educated and tend to participate more in household decision-making compared to rural women.

Freedom of Social Mobility

The table 3 presents a comparison of decision-making authority over self-visiting between rural and urban educated women. Among rural respondents, 28.0% (98 out of 350) decide independently, while 34.2% of decisions are made by their husbands, 29.1% jointly, and 8.7% by others. In contrast, urban-educated women show greater autonomy: 37.2% (130 of 350) decide for themselves, with 25.2% deferring to husbands, 29.4% sharing decisions jointly, and 8.2% attributing decision-making to others.

Table 3. Decision makers regarding the freedom of social mobility

Decisions	Rural frequency	(%)	Urban frequency	(%)
Self	98	28.0	130	37.2
Husband	120	34.2	88	25.2
Jointly	102	29.1	103	29.4
Others	30	8.7	29	8.2
Total	350	100	350	100

Mean (\bar{x}) = 3.11, SD (σ) = 0.98 for Rural.

Mean (\bar{x}) = 3.31, SD (σ) = 0.83 for Urban.

T-value = -231 at 0.05 level of Significance

The mean decision-making score is higher for urban women (3.31, SD = 0.83) than for rural women (3.11, SD = 0.98), and the difference is statistically significant ($t = -2.31$, $p < 0.05$).

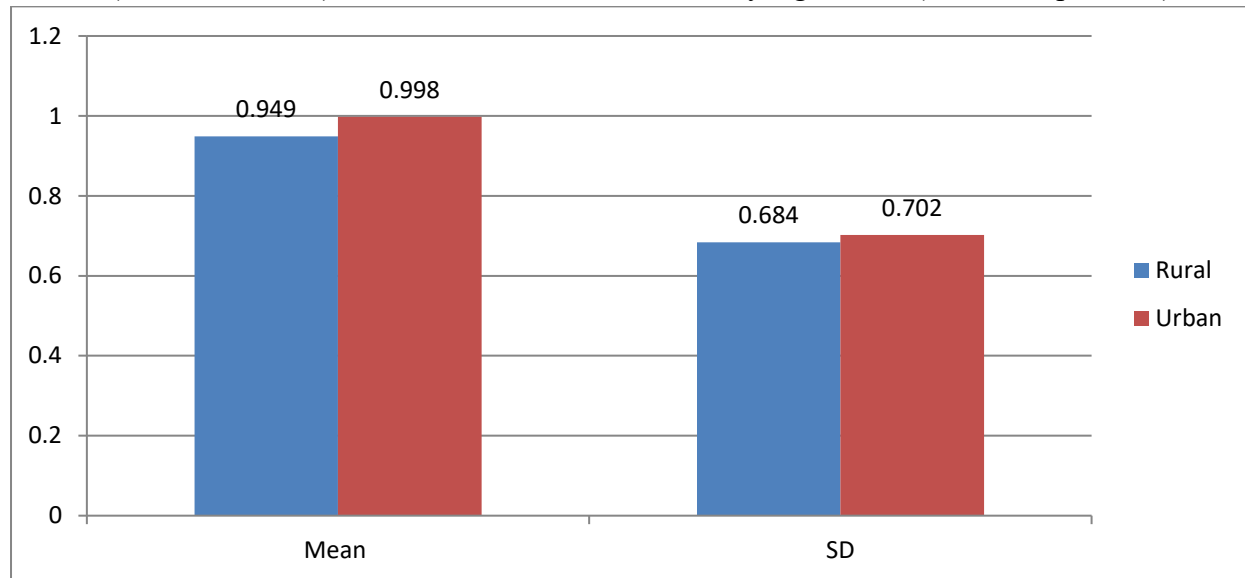


Figure 3. Mean and SD of women regarding the freedom of social mobility by residence

The results indicates that urban-educated women enjoy significantly more autonomy in visitation decisions compared to their rural-educated counterparts, although a substantial proportion of both groups still involve husbands, kin, or others in the decision-making process.

Findings

- Urban women demonstrated higher representation across all levels of formal education compared to rural women. Specifically, only literate women comprised 4% in rural areas versus 0.3% in urban; basic education was 23.1% rural against 16.6% urban; secondary education was 12.9% rural compared to 19.8% urban; and higher education was 60% rural versus 63.4% urban. The mean and standard deviation (SD) of educational level were 3.29 and 0.95 for rural, and 3.76 and 0.77 for urban women, respectively. The T-value of -2.65 ($p < 0.05$) confirmed a statistically significant difference in educational attainment favoring urban women, likely due to better literacy awareness and access to education facilities.
- Participation in household decisions reflects women's agency and autonomy. Women with higher education exhibited the highest participation rates: 51.2% in rural and 53.7% in urban areas. Mean participation scores were 3.11 (SD = 0.98) rural and 3.31 (SD = 0.83) urban, with a T-value of -2.31 ($p < 0.05$) confirming urban women's significantly greater role in decision-making. Education thus substantially influences women's ability to affect family matters.
- Freedom of social mobility, defined as women's autonomous movement, was higher among urban women (37.2%) compared to rural women (28%). Decisions dominated

by husbands were more frequent in rural (34.2%) than urban (25.2%) areas. Mean scores for decision-making autonomy were 3.11 (SD = 0.98) rural and 3.31 (SD = 0.83) urban, with a statistically significant T-value of -2.31 ($p < 0.05$). Education and urban exposure thus contribute positively to women's mobility autonomy.

Discussions

- A significant urban-rural educational gap was observed (T-value = -2.65, $p < 0.05$). Urban women exhibited higher levels of education at all stages, with notably fewer women categorized as “only literate” or receiving basic education compared to their rural counterparts. Higher education prevalence was slightly greater in urban areas (63.4% versus 60%). These results likely reflect better educational infrastructure, literacy awareness, and accessibility in urban centers.
- Women’s participation in household decisions correlated strongly with educational attainment and urban residency. Urban women with higher education had the highest involvement (53.7%), surpassing rural counterparts (51.2%). The difference in mean participation scores (urban: 3.31, rural: 3.11) was statistically significant (T-value = -2.31, $p < 0.05$). This suggests education enhances women's agency in domestic spheres, with urban exposure amplifying this effect.
- Autonomy in mobility decisions was greater among urban educated women (37.2%) compared to rural women (28%), while rural women’s mobility decisions were more often dominated by husbands (34.2%). The significant difference in mean decision-making scores (urban: 3.31, rural: 3.11; T-value = -2.31, $p < 0.05$) highlights how education and urban living contribute to increased social freedom.

Conclusion

This study revealed that urban educated women in Nepal possess significantly higher levels of empowerment across education, employment, household decision-making, and social mobility dimensions compared to their rural counterparts. Education emerged as the paramount factor driving empowerment, enabling women to attain economic resources, participate in family and community decisions, and challenge restrictive gender norms. This study concludes that mostly gender barriers still continue particularly in rural areas. Research area covers more number of rural areas. Due to current socio economic constrains in rural area, the potential of women have not been fully utilized and further pushed back into the social hierarchy. Most of the educated women feel that, they can able to achieve more than men. But inbuilt idea that women are capable of doing less work than men and less efficient than men. The lack of education becomes the obstacles in getting empowerment. Taking an overview of all the above aspects, we come to know that the transformation is very much needed, accepting at the same time that its pace may be less than the desired pace. Forgiving this process a momentum, education is indispensable. Hence, if women's empowerment is to be affected, it can be carried out only through the medium of education. Hence, it is of foremost importance to raise the level of education amongst women.



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