

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Women's economic empowerment is a crucial driver of sustainable social development, particularly in developing countries like Bangladesh. This study explores the relationship between women's financial independence, employment opportunities, and their role in household and societal decision-making. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected from 278 respondents through a structured questionnaire. The findings indicate that economically empowered women have greater control over their finances, improved decision-making power, and enhanced participation in the labor market. However, challenges such as limited access to financial resources, gender-based wage gaps, and societal norms continue to hinder their full economic participation. The study emphasizes the need for policy interventions, vocational training programs, and financial inclusion strategies to support women's empowerment. The recommendations call for stronger institutional support, workplace reforms, and enhanced access to microfinance and entrepreneurial opportunities. These measures can contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable economic environment, fostering gender equality and long-term social progress.

Keywords: Women's Economic Empowerment, Sustainable Development, Financial Inclusion, Gender Equality, Vocational Training, Employment Opportunities.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Economic empowerment of women is a crucial driver of sustainable social development, particularly in developing nations like Bangladesh (Ghosh et al., 2021). As the country progresses toward economic growth and social transformation, ensuring women's active participation in economic activities is no longer just a matter of gender equality but a necessity for overall national development (M. S. Rahman et al., 2023). Women make up nearly half of the population in Bangladesh, and their economic contributions, whether in formal employment, entrepreneurship, or the informal sector, play a significant role in poverty reduction, improved family welfare, and community resilience (A. Sarker et al., 2021). Over the years, Bangladesh has made remarkable strides in promoting women's economic empowerment through policy interventions, financial inclusion initiatives, and grassroots

movements (Muneeb MEHTA et al., 2022). Programs such as microfinance, vocational training, and government-led schemes have provided women with opportunities to enhance their economic independence (Polas et al., 2022). The success of women-led enterprises, particularly in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector and small-scale businesses, has demonstrated the potential of women's financial empowerment in driving inclusive growth (Honey & Hossain, 2024). However, despite these advancements, challenges such as gender-based discrimination, wage gaps, lack of access to resources, and socio-cultural barriers continue to hinder women's full economic participation (Sultana et al., 2020). This article explores the impact of economic empowerment on women's lives and its broader implications for sustainable social development in Bangladesh. By analyzing key initiatives, identifying persisting challenges, and recommending policy measures, the study aims to highlight the significance of creating an enabling environment where women can thrive as equal contributors to the nation's progress.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The economic empowerment of women has been widely recognized as a critical factor for sustainable social development. Scholars and policymakers argue that when women gain financial independence, they contribute not only to household well-being but also to broader economic growth and social progress (M. M. Rahman & Huq, 2023). The literature on women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh highlights the intersection of gender, economy, and social development, with a focus on employment opportunities, financial inclusion, education, and policy interventions.

2.1 Concept of Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Development

Economic empowerment is commonly defined as the process through which women gain access to and control over financial resources, enabling them to make strategic life choices (Alam et al., 2023). It is closely linked to sustainable development, as empowered women tend to invest in health, education, and nutrition, benefiting families and communities in the long run (Dorfleitner & Nguyen, 2024). In Bangladesh, studies indicate that economic empowerment leads to improved social indicators, such as reduced child mortality and higher literacy rates (Shohel et al., 2023). Economic empowerment is a multidimensional process that enhances women's ability to access and control economic resources, improve decision-making power, and actively participate in economic activities. Scholars such as Kabeer (2012) and Sen (1999) define economic empowerment as the ability of individuals, particularly women, to make meaningful life choices by overcoming financial dependency (Dupuis et al., 2022). This empowerment is not only about increasing income but also about strengthening women's agency, self-reliance, and social standing. The link between economic empowerment and sustainable development is well-documented in global development literature. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), emphasize that economic inclusion of women leads to inclusive economic growth, poverty reduction, and social progress (Andriamahery & Qamruzzaman, 2022). Studies suggest that when women have financial independence, they tend to reinvest in their families and communities, leading to improved health, education, and economic stability (M. M. Rahman et al., 2023).

In Bangladesh, research by (Shohel et al., 2021) indicates that economically empowered women contribute significantly to community resilience by ensuring better education for their children, improved nutrition, and overall household well-being. The World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report (2021) also highlights that countries with higher female labor force participation tend to experience stronger economic growth and social development.

2.2 Role of Employment and Entrepreneurship

A substantial body of literature emphasizes the role of employment and entrepreneurship in women's economic empowerment. The expansion of the ready-made garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh has been a key driver of women's workforce participation, employing around 4 million workers, the majority of whom are women (Khondkar & Honey, 2022). Studies suggest that wage employment in this sector has improved women's bargaining power within households, contributing to gender equality (Wei et al., 2021). Entrepreneurship is another significant pathway to empowerment. Microfinance institutions (MFIs), particularly Grameen Bank and BRAC, have facilitated women's access to capital, enabling them to start small businesses (M. M. Rahman & Huq, 2023). However, some researchers argue that despite the positive impacts, microfinance alone is insufficient to ensure long-term empowerment due to issues such as debt dependency and limited market access (Shohel et al., 2023).

2.3 Financial Inclusion and Access to Resources

Financial inclusion plays a crucial role in the economic empowerment of women by enabling them to access capital, savings mechanisms, and credit facilities, which are essential for entrepreneurship and financial independence. The World Bank (2018) defines financial inclusion as the availability and accessibility of financial services such as bank accounts, credit, insurance, and digital payment systems to individuals, particularly marginalized groups like women. In Bangladesh, financial inclusion has been widely recognized as a tool to reduce gender disparities in economic opportunities and enhance sustainable social development (T. Sarker et al., 2024). Microfinance has been a transformative force in Bangladesh, providing financial access to millions of women who were previously excluded from formal banking systems. Institutions like Grameen Bank, BRAC, and ASA have pioneered microcredit programs aimed at helping women start small businesses, invest in productive assets, and improve their livelihoods (Khanum et al., 2022). Research indicates that women participating in microfinance programs experience increased financial stability, decision-making power, and social mobility (Hasan Emon & Nisa Nipa, 2024). However, while microfinance has been instrumental in enhancing women's financial independence, scholars debate its long-term impact. Studies by Noor & Hoque (2021) suggest that in some cases, microcredit leads to over-indebtedness, as high-interest rates and lack of financial literacy make it difficult for women to repay loans. Moreover, some studies indicate that male family members often control loan usage, limiting its empowerment potential (Islam, 2020). The rise of digital financial services (DFS), including mobile banking and digital payment platforms, has significantly improved women's financial inclusion in Bangladesh. Platforms like bKash, Rocket, and Nagad have made banking services accessible to women in rural and semi-urban areas, reducing the gender gap in financial access. According to the Bangladesh Bank (2022), mobile financial services (MFS) have enabled women entrepreneurs to receive payments, save money securely, and conduct transactions without physical barriers (Akter et al., 2021). Despite these advancements,

challenges persist, including digital literacy gaps, lack of ownership of mobile devices among women, and socio-cultural restrictions on financial decision-making (Noor & Hoque, 2021). Addressing these barriers through financial education programs and policy interventions can further enhance women's participation in the digital economy. Ownership of land, property, and other productive assets is another critical aspect of women's economic empowerment. Studies indicate that secure property rights enable women to access credit, invest in businesses, and gain economic security (Khanum et al., 2022). However, in Bangladesh, women face significant legal and societal barriers in property inheritance and ownership due to traditional patriarchal norms. Although the Muslim Family Law Ordinance (1961) and the Hindu Women's Right to Property Act (1937) provide some legal rights, many women still struggle to claim or retain inherited property due to male-dominated family structures and legal complexities (T. Sarker et al., 2024). Efforts to improve women's land and property rights through legal reforms, awareness campaigns, and support from civil society organizations have shown some progress. Programs like USAID's Property Rights Initiative and the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) aim to educate women on their legal rights and assist them in property-related disputes. Strengthening women's property rights is essential to ensure their long-term economic security and social empowerment.

2.4 Policy Frameworks and Government Initiatives

The government of Bangladesh has implemented several policies and programs to promote women's economic participation. The National Women Development Policy (2011) and Vision 2041 emphasize gender mainstreaming in economic activities (Hasan Emon & Nisa Nipa, 2024). Social protection schemes, skill development programs, and special incentives for women entrepreneurs have contributed to positive outcomes. However, scholars argue that structural barriers, including legal and institutional challenges, continue to restrict the full realization of women's economic rights (Islam, 2020).

2.5 Challenges and Barriers to Economic Empowerment

Despite progress, numerous challenges continue to hinder women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh, limiting their ability to contribute fully to sustainable social development. The gender wage gap remains a significant issue, with women earning substantially less than men even when performing similar roles, reflecting deep-rooted structural inequalities in the labor market (ILO, 2019). Additionally, limited mobility, particularly in rural areas, restricts women's access to employment opportunities, as societal norms often discourage them from working outside the home (Dupuis et al., 2022). Workplace discrimination, including harassment, lack of maternity benefits, and inadequate policies supporting work-life balance, further discourage female workforce participation, leading to high dropout rates (M. M. Rahman & Huq, 2023). Another pressing issue is restricted access to technology, as digital literacy gaps and socio-cultural barriers prevent many women from utilizing online financial tools, e-commerce platforms, and digital banking services, thereby limiting their entrepreneurial potential and access to formal financial systems (Rahman et al., 2022). Moreover, legal and institutional barriers, such as difficulties in land ownership, lack of collateral for loans, and bureaucratic challenges, make it harder for women to establish and scale businesses. Societal expectations regarding unpaid care work also place an overwhelming burden on women, reducing their availability for economic participation. These interconnected

challenges highlight the urgent need for comprehensive policy interventions, gender-sensitive financial initiatives, and cultural shifts to create a more inclusive and enabling environment for women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh.

2.6 Link between Women's Empowerment and Sustainable Social Development

Studies indicate that women's economic empowerment contributes to broader social development. Empowered women invest more in education, healthcare, and family welfare, leading to intergenerational improvements in human capital (Polas et al., 2022). Research in Bangladesh supports this, showing that households with economically active women have better nutrition, higher school enrollment rates, and lower poverty levels (M. M. Rahman & Huq, 2023). The existing literature highlights the significance of women's economic empowerment in achieving sustainable social development in Bangladesh. While considerable progress has been made through employment, financial inclusion, and policy initiatives, structural barriers continue to pose challenges. Future research should focus on overcoming these barriers through innovative policy measures, digital transformation, and gender-sensitive economic reforms.

3.0 THEORETICAL REVIEW

The economic empowerment of women has been examined through various theoretical lenses that explain its significance, challenges, and impact on sustainable social development. Several economic, sociological, and feminist theories provide a framework for understanding how financial independence enhances women's agency, social mobility, and contribution to national development. This section explores key theoretical perspectives that underpin the discourse on women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh.

3.1 Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (1999)

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach is one of the most influential theories in understanding women's economic empowerment. Sen argues that empowerment is not merely about increasing income but about expanding individuals' capabilities to make choices and lead lives they value. Economic resources enable women to access education, healthcare, and opportunities for personal and professional growth, ultimately improving their overall well-being. In Bangladesh, research suggests that financial independence enhances women's ability to participate in decision-making within households, communities, and workplaces (Muneeb MEHTA et al., 2022). However, Sen also acknowledges that social norms and institutional barriers can restrict women's ability to utilize economic opportunities, making policy interventions crucial for genuine empowerment.

3.2 Feminist Economics Theory

Feminist economists' critique traditional economic models for failing to account for gender disparities in labor, wages, and access to resources. Nancy Folbre (1994) highlights the "invisible" economic contributions of women, particularly in unpaid labor such as caregiving and household work, which are essential for economic stability but often undervalued in economic analyses. In Bangladesh, women's unpaid labor remains a significant issue, as many engage in domestic work without financial recognition. Feminist economic theory argues that

policies must address these inequalities by implementing gender-sensitive labor laws, equal pay structures, and support systems such as childcare facilities to enable women to participate fully in economic activities (Sultana et al., 2020).

3.3 Structural Functionalism

Structural functionalist theory, as proposed by Talcott Parsons (1951), views society as a system in which different parts must function together for stability and development. This perspective suggests that women's economic participation strengthens family structures and enhances community resilience. When women are empowered economically, families experience improved income security, better education for children, and overall social progress. In Bangladesh, studies show that women who earn an income contribute significantly to household decision-making, reducing gender disparities in family dynamics (Alam et al., 2023). However, critics argue that structural functionalism often reinforces traditional gender roles rather than challenging them, necessitating a more transformative approach to gender equality.

3.4 Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986)

Pierre Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of networks, relationships, and social connections in accessing economic opportunities. Women's economic empowerment is not only about financial resources but also about their ability to engage in networks that facilitate business growth, employment, and entrepreneurship. In Bangladesh, microfinance institutions such as Grameen Bank and BRAC have demonstrated how collective financial models empower women by providing them with access to capital, skill development, and peer support (Dorfleitner & Nguyen, 2024). However, gender norms often limit women's ability to build and utilize social capital effectively, making targeted interventions necessary to foster their inclusion in business and professional networks.

3.5 Dependency Theory

Originally developed to explain global economic inequalities, Dependency Theory (Frank, 1967) has been applied to gender studies to analyze how women's economic subordination mirrors larger systems of dependency. In many developing economies, including Bangladesh, women remain financially dependent on male family members due to restricted access to resources, education, and employment. This theory argues that breaking this cycle of dependency requires systemic changes, including government policies that promote financial inclusion, gender-responsive budgeting, and legal reforms that protect women's economic rights.

These theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding of the economic empowerment of women and its implications for sustainable social development in Bangladesh. While the Capability Approach highlights the importance of expanding women's choices and opportunities, Feminist Economics critiques the undervaluation of women's labor and calls for gender-sensitive economic policies. Structural Functionalism underscores the positive impact of economic empowerment on families and communities, whereas Social Capital Theory emphasizes the role of networks and support systems in fostering financial independence. Finally, Dependency Theory explains the structural constraints that perpetuate

economic disparities. A combination of these theoretical approaches is essential for developing holistic policies and interventions that ensure long-term, meaningful economic empowerment for women in Bangladesh.

4.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- i. The primary objective of this study is to explore the role of women's economic empowerment in fostering sustainable social development in Bangladesh. Specifically, the research aims to:
- ii. Examine the relationship between women's economic empowerment and sustainable social development in the context of Bangladesh.
- iii. Identify key factors influencing women's economic participation, including employment opportunities, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and access to resources.
- iv. Analyze the impact of economic empowerment on women's social status, decision-making power, and overall well-being.
- v. Evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and initiatives aimed at enhancing women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh.
- vi. Identify major challenges and socio-cultural barriers that hinder women's full economic participation and propose potential solutions.
- vii. Assess the role of financial inclusion, digital banking, and microfinance in promoting women's entrepreneurship and economic independence.
- viii. Provide policy recommendations for creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for women's economic empowerment and sustainable development.

5.0 METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the impact of women's economic empowerment on sustainable social development in Bangladesh. A descriptive survey design was utilized to collect numerical data, allowing for statistical analysis and objective interpretation of findings.

5.2 Population and Sample Size

The target population for this study comprised economically active and non-active women from various socio-economic backgrounds in Bangladesh. A sample of 278 respondents was selected using simple random sampling to ensure equal representation and minimize bias. This sample size was deemed appropriate for statistical generalization and data reliability.

To determine the appropriate sample size (n) for a given population, we use the sample size formula based on a confidence level, margin of error, and population variability. One widely used formula for sample size calculation is:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{E^2}$$

Where:

- n = Sample size
- Z = Z-score (based on confidence level)
- p = Estimated proportion of the population (assumed 0.5 if unknown)
- E = Margin of error (e.g., 5% = 0.05)

Suppose we want to determine the sample size for a large population with:

- Confidence level = 95% ($Z = 1.96$)
- Margin of error = 5% (0.05)
- Estimated proportion (p) = 50% (0.5) for maximum variability

Applying the values to the formula:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{E^2}$$
$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times (1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$
$$n = \frac{3.8416 \times 0.25}{0.0025}$$
$$n = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$
$$n = 384.16$$

Since we are working with whole people, we round up to $n = 385$ for a large population.

Adjusting for a Finite Population (if known):

If the total population (N) is small, the sample size should be adjusted using the finite population correction formula:

$$n_{adj} = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{n-1}{N}}$$

Where:

n = Sample size from the previous formula

N = Total population size

For example, if the total population is 1000, the adjusted sample size would be:

$$n_{adj} = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{n-1}{N}}$$

$$n_{adj} = \frac{385}{1 + \frac{385-1}{1000}}$$

$$n_{adj} = \frac{385}{1+0.384}$$

$$n_{adj} = \frac{385}{1.384}$$

$$n_{adj} = 278$$

Thus, for a population of 1000, the required sample size would be 278 respondents instead of 385.

5.3 Data Collection Method

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire, which was designed to capture responses related to women's financial inclusion, employment status, decision-making power, and socio-economic challenges. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions measured on a Likert scale, along with multiple-choice and demographic questions. The survey was administered both online and in-person, ensuring accessibility to respondents from diverse backgrounds.

5.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, and percentage) were used to summarize demographic variables and key responses. Additionally, inferential statistical tests, such as chi-square tests and regression analysis, were conducted to examine relationships between economic empowerment and social development indicators. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. Respondents' identities remained confidential and anonymous, and participation was voluntary, allowing them to withdraw at any stage without consequences.

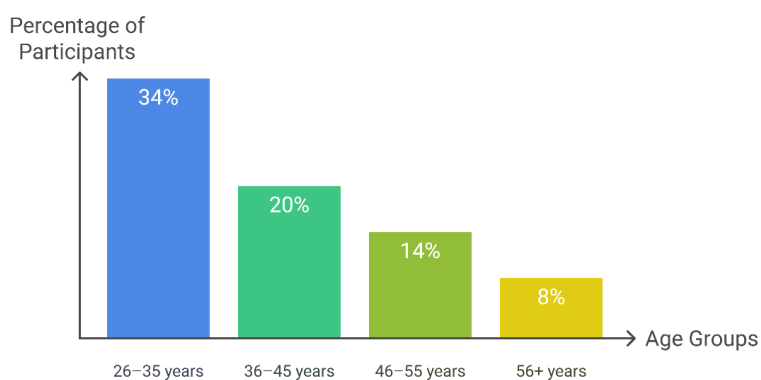
6.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 278)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Distribution	18–25 years	67	24%
	26–35 years	94	34%
	36–45 years	56	20%
	46–55 years	39	14%
	56+ years	22	8%
Marital Status	Single	89	32%
	Married	144	52%
	Divorced	28	10%

	Widowed	17	6%
Educational Level	No formal education	22	8%
	Primary	39	14%
	Secondary	67	24%
	Higher Secondary	83	30%
	Bachelor's or above	67	24%
Employment Status	Unemployed	45	16%
	Self-employed	78	28%
	Salaried Employee	67	24%
	Business Owner	45	16%
	Homemaker	43	16%
Monthly Income (BDT)	Below 5,000	56	20%
	5,000–15,000	83	30%
	15,001–30,000	67	24%
	30,001–50,000	45	16%
	Above 50,000	27	10%



Age Distribution of Survey Participants

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Survey Participants

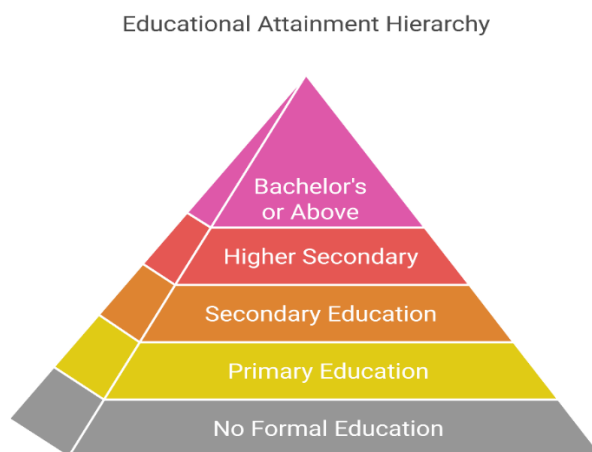


Figure 2: Educational Attainment

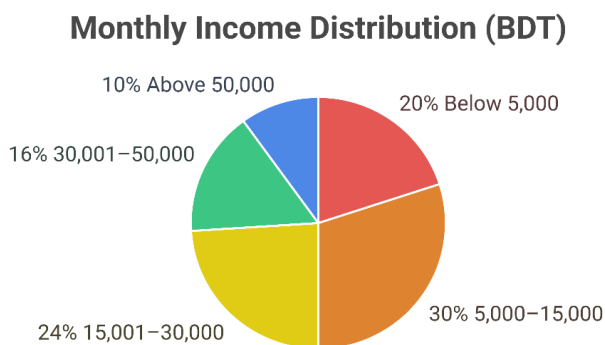


Figure 3: Monthly Income Distribution

The study surveyed 278 respondents, capturing diverse perspectives on women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh (Table 1). The age distribution (Figure 1) revealed that the largest group (33.8%) belonged to the 26–35 years category, followed by 18–25 years (24.1%). This indicates that a significant portion of economically active women falls within the early-to-mid career stages. The marital status data showed that 51.8% were married, followed by 32.0% single, highlighting that most respondents were balancing family and financial responsibilities. In terms of education, 29.9% had completed higher secondary education, and 24.1% held a bachelor’s degree or higher, reflecting a moderate level of formal education among respondents (Figure 2). Regarding employment status, 28.1% were self-employed, followed by 24.5% in formal employment, indicating that a significant proportion of women engaged in income-generating activities outside traditional jobs. Monthly income was distributed in figure 3, 10% of the respondents earned the highest income level above 50,00 and 20% of the respondents earned the lowest income level below 5000.

6.2 Economic Empowerment and Decision-Making

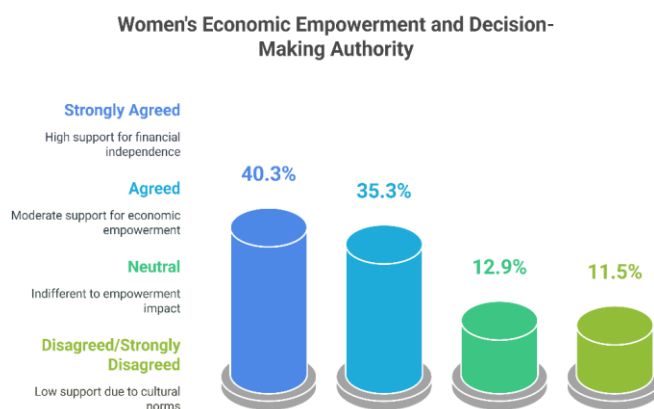


Figure 4: Women’s Economic Empowerment and Decision-Making

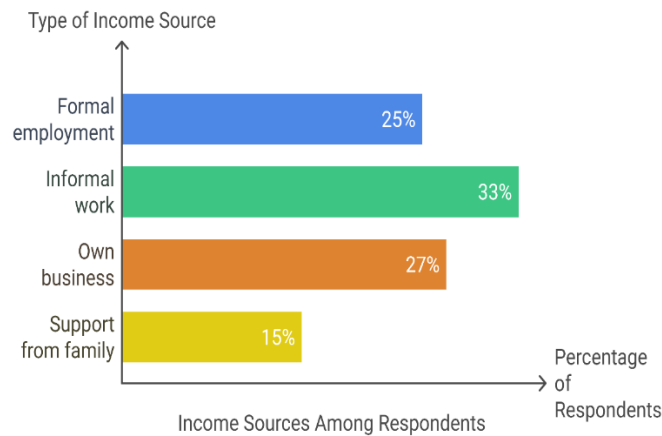


Figure 5: Income Sources among Respondents

A critical aspect of women's economic empowerment is financial independence and decision-making power. The results showed in figure 4 that 40.3% of respondents strongly agreed and 35.3% agreed that economic empowerment improves women’s household decision-making authority. This suggests that financial independence contributes to greater autonomy for women in family and social settings. However, 12.9% remained neutral, while 11.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that cultural and social norms still influence decision-making structures within households. Income sources among respondents were distributed in figure 5.

6.3 Access to Vocational Training and Employment

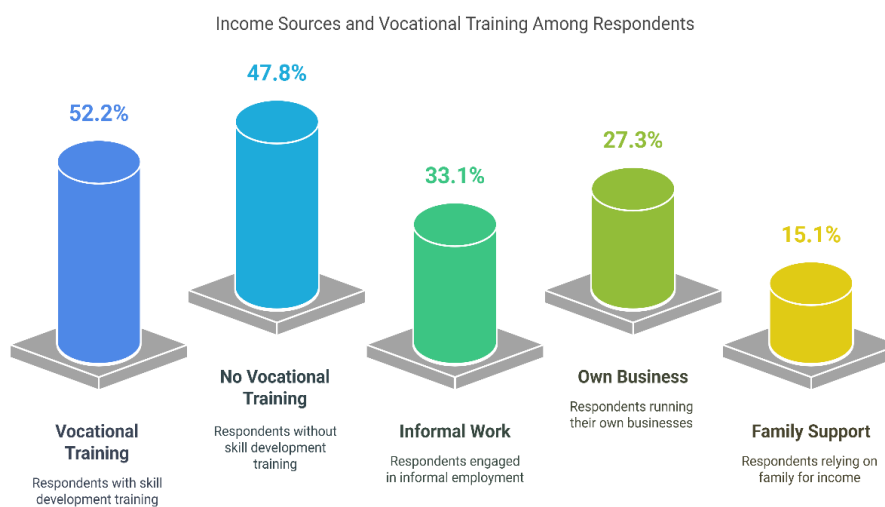


Figure 7: Income Sources and Vocational Training among Respondents

Regarding vocational training and skill development, 52.2% of respondents had received some form of training, while 47.8% had not, highlighting the need for further skill development programs to bridge the gap. In terms of income sources, 33.1% were involved in informal work, while 27.3% operated their own businesses, reflecting the increasing participation of women in entrepreneurial activities (Figure 7). However, 15.1% relied on family support, indicating economic dependency among a segment of respondents.

6.4 Financial Control and Household Contributions

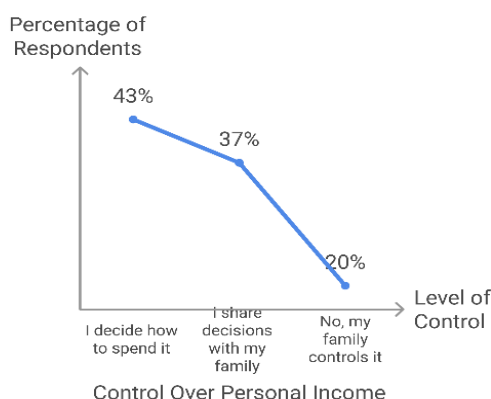


Figure 8: Control over Personal Income

One of the key indicators of economic empowerment is control over personal income. When asked about control over personal income in figure 8, 42.8% of respondents reported independent financial decision-making, while 37.4% shared financial decisions with family members. However, 19.8% stated that their income was controlled by others, signifying that financial dependence remains a challenge for some women. The findings revealed that 42.8% of women had full control over their earnings, while 37.4% shared financial decisions with their family. However, 19.8% reported that their income was controlled by other family members, highlighting persistent financial dependency.

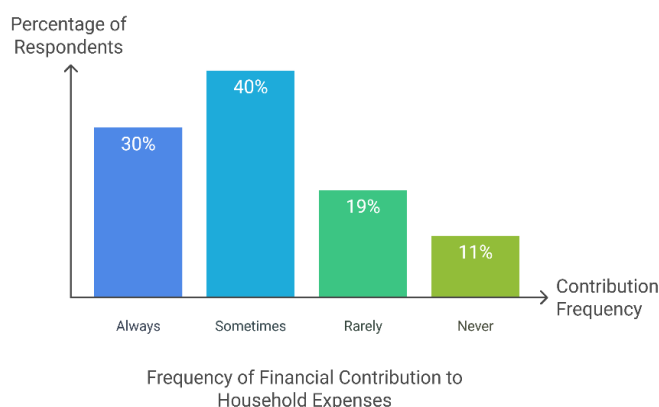


Figure 9: Financial Contributions to Household Expenses

The study also explored financial contributions to household expenses in figure 9, where 29.9% of women contributed regularly, while 38.5% did so occasionally. This suggests that although many women are earning, not all have consistent financial responsibility within their households.

6.5 Workplace and Wage Inequality

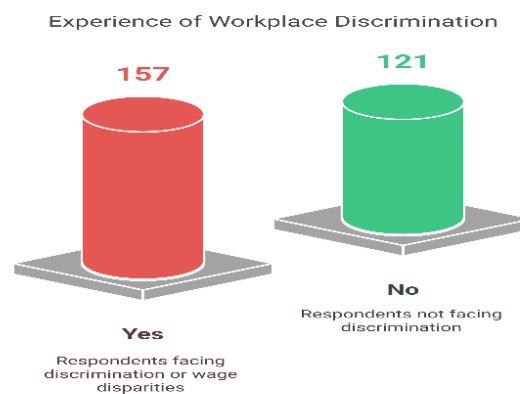


Figure 10: Experience of Workplace Discrimination

The survey found that 41.7% of respondents experienced gender-based wage disparities, while 38.5% believed that workplace discrimination hindered their career growth (Figure 10). Only 19.8% reported equal opportunities and pay, highlighting the need for stronger legal frameworks and enforcement of equal pay policies.

6.6 Financial Inclusion and Access to Credit

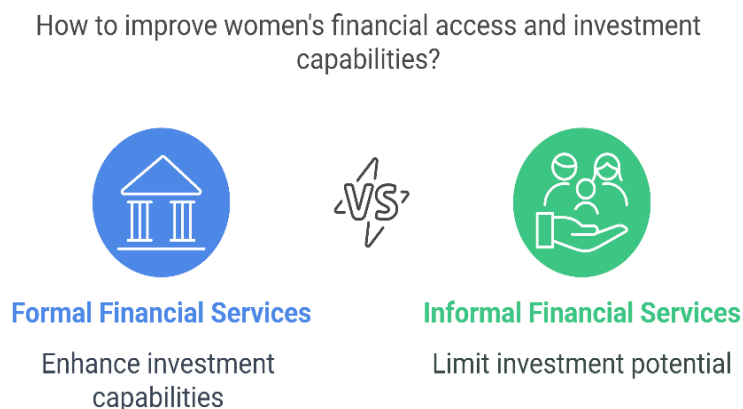


Figure 11: Women's Financial Access and Investment Capability

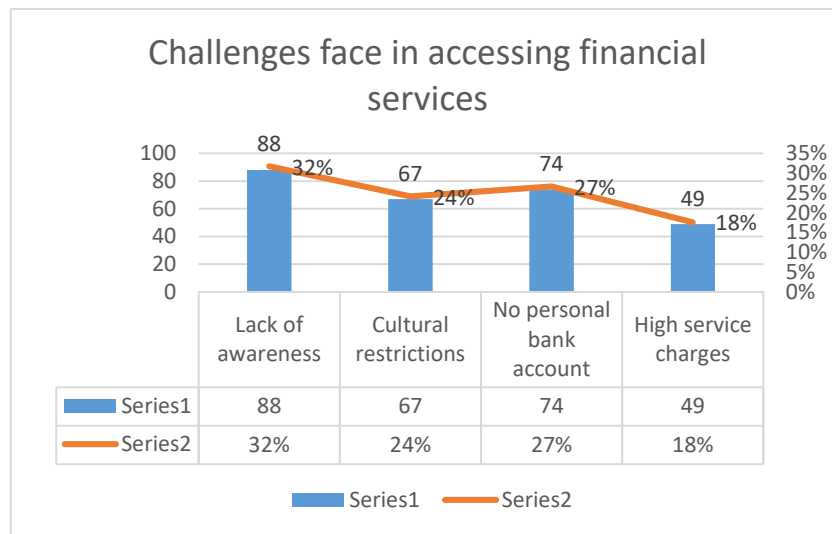


Figure 12: Challenges Face in Accessing Financial Services

The study showed that only 35.6% of respondents had access to formal financial services, while 64.4% relied on informal savings or loans from family and microfinance institutions. Limited access to financial services restricts women’s ability to invest in businesses, highlighting the importance of expanding banking inclusion and digital financial literacy programs (Figure 12).

6.7 Discussion and Implications

The results confirm that economic empowerment positively influences women’s autonomy and decision-making power, aligning with Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach, which emphasizes the role of financial resources in expanding choices and improving well-being. However, despite increasing participation in income-generating activities, barriers such as limited access to training, financial control by male family members, and informal employment challenges continue to restrict full economic independence. The findings also support Feminist Economics Theory, which argues that women’s unpaid labor and caregiving roles contribute to economic structures but remain undervalued. Many women in this study engaged in informal work or relied on family support, indicating the need for policy interventions, such as equal pay, formal employment opportunities, and improved access to financial services. Furthermore, the role of vocational training emerged as a crucial factor in economic empowerment. Expanding access to skill development programs, especially in rural areas, can enhance women’s ability to secure higher-paying jobs and establish sustainable businesses. While progress has been made in enhancing women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh, significant challenges remain. Addressing financial dependency, improving access to skill development, and promoting workplace inclusivity are essential steps toward ensuring sustainable social development through women's economic participation. Future policies should focus on strengthening financial literacy, increasing women's access to digital banking and entrepreneurship opportunities, and promoting gender-sensitive labor laws to create a more inclusive and equitable economic environment.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance women's economic empowerment and promote sustainable social development in Bangladesh:

1. The government, NGOs, and private sector organizations should increase vocational training programs, particularly in rural areas, to equip women with relevant skills for the job market. More digital literacy and technology-driven skill programs should be introduced to help women access online businesses, remote work, and e-commerce platforms (Halimuzzaman et al., 2023).

2. Financial institutions should simplify loan application processes and offer low-interest credit programs tailored for women entrepreneurs. Microfinance institutions should improve outreach to underserved women, ensuring they have the necessary financial support to start and expand businesses. Digital banking and mobile financial services (MFS) should be promoted to enable women to manage and control their income independently (Halimuzzaman & Sharma, 2024).

3. The government should enforce equal pay regulations to reduce the gender wage gap in formal and informal sectors. Organizations should implement family-friendly workplace policies, including maternity leave, childcare facilities, and flexible work arrangements, to encourage female workforce participation. Awareness campaigns should be conducted to combat workplace discrimination and sexual harassment, ensuring a safe working environment for women (Uddin et al., 2024).

4. Community awareness programs should be designed to challenge traditional gender norms and encourage men to support women's economic independence. More women should be encouraged to take on leadership roles in business and policymaking, ensuring gender-balanced decision-making at all levels (Datta et al., 2024).

5. Government and Policy Interventions. The government should implement targeted economic policies to support women in agriculture, small businesses, and service industries. Public and private partnerships should be established to create women-focused economic zones, where female entrepreneurs can collaborate and receive business support. Stronger legal frameworks should be enforced to ensure women's rights in property ownership, inheritance, and financial transactions (Al Masum, 2014).

By implementing these recommendations, Bangladesh can accelerate women's economic empowerment, reduce gender disparities, and foster sustainable social development.

8.0 LIMITATIONS

Despite its valuable insights, this study has several limitations. First, the research focused only on 278 respondents, which, while statistically significant, may not fully represent the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of all women in Bangladesh. Second, the study relied on self-reported data, which may introduce bias due to respondents' personal perceptions and experiences. Additionally, the research was cross-sectional, capturing data at a single point in time, limiting its ability to assess long-term trends in women's economic empowerment. Another limitation is that qualitative insights were not included, which could have provided a deeper understanding of the cultural and societal barriers faced by women. Finally, external factors such as policy changes, economic fluctuations, and regional disparities were not

extensively analyzed, which may have influenced the results. Future research should consider a larger sample size, longitudinal analysis, and mixed method approaches to address these limitations comprehensively.

9.0 CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of women's economic empowerment in promoting sustainable social development in Bangladesh. The findings reveal that financial independence, access to vocational training, and participation in income-generating activities significantly enhance women's decision-making power and overall social status. However, challenges such as limited access to financial resources, societal norms, and workplace inequalities still hinder women's full economic participation. Strengthening financial inclusion, expanding skill development programs, enforcing equal pay policies, and fostering gender-inclusive decision-making can create a more supportive environment for women's empowerment. While the study provides valuable insights, further research with a broader scope and a mixed-methods approach is needed to explore long-term impacts. Ultimately, empowering women economically is not only a pathway to gender equality but also a key driver of sustainable economic and social progress in Bangladesh.

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