



Report on project titled
“A Study on the Empowerment of Women Enrolled in the MSW Course
under Netaji Subhas Open University”
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Conducted by Ms Kasturi Sinha Ghosh

Asst Prof in Social Work

Under UGC-DEB project

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Introduction

Education is an effective instrument for sustainable development of every nation. Women, we know occupies a very significant role in our society. In India, women education has become a major milestone for their empowerment, as educated women may play an important role in the overall development of country, as they not only perform a major part within the family but even make a significant contribution in the public sphere also. The aspect of women's education has drawn the attention of the policy makers and it has been embraced as an important issue by them in our country. Today empowerment of women is a matter of "Women's Right" as it extends access for quality education to a woman which is essential not only for promoting gender equality but also to address the full spectrum of 21st century challenges. In India women do not use their rights and neither are considered independent to take any decision, thus to provide equal status in the society women need to be empowered. Women's empowerment in India is largely dependent on various factors that may include geographical location (urban/rural), educational status, social status (caste and class), and age. Policies on women's empowerment exist at the national, state, and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation. However, there are significant gaps between policy formation and actual implementation at the community level. Women can be empowered only when they are literate and educated. Education gifts women the freedom for development. In contemporary Indian Societies today, the female literacy levels according to the Literacy Rate 2011 census has been 65.46% where the male literacy rate has been over 80%. Being literate or having only primary education is not just enough but it is essential for women to pursue the higher education as it can ensure women's rights, dignity and ensure their security as well.

The barriers in women's education may be categorized in the following manner-

Psychological barriers includes Limited career aspirations, low self-esteem / under valuing of their skill, feeling intimidated by male competitors.

Institutional Barriers includes bias in recruitment and promotion, limited opportunity for exercising leadership, women exclusive criteria, omission of critical materials on and by women in class rooms, lack of literate or leadership skills for women.

Situational Barriers includes Process of Socialization (Patriarchy), Cultural barriers, Family responsibilities, lack of support from the family, unfriendly campus climate, lack of network support for coping, time constraint , lack of mobility.

Other barriers include includes curricula that do not fit to the needs of the job, unfriendly learning environment, fear of sexual harassment, Inadequate gender awareness training for teachers, discriminatory approach in education, lack of Technical education and fear about technologies

The relationship between education and empowerment has been widely debated in development literature. In recent times, social capital and community-centric learning have been increasingly recognized as important variables in the empowerment process. Women empowerment is receiving world attention, United Nations has included gender equality and women empowerment in its development goals. Women empowerment is an essential ingredient for achieving all the development goals

Distance Education and Women Learners

Distance Education is a global and rapidly growing phenomenon which offers formal learning opportunities to people who would not otherwise have access to schooling or college education. Teachers and students are separated by physical distance and the means by which they communicate range from basic print material and the use of postal services to highly sophisticated communication technologies.

The special characteristic of distance education is that it is endowed with high flexibility and can meet the demands of education for all and 'continuing education' which the conventional education system is unable to meet. Further, distance education takes education to places and people hitherto unreached, transcending social, economic and geographical equality and thereby opens a new vista in our striving towards breaking the barriers of 'opportunity and equity'. Through distance education it is easier to transport knowledge to people than transport people to the people of knowledge. Because of these special features of distance education, it benefits certain categories of people who for various reasons are unable to avail of the formal education system. These include persons without formal qualifications, persons belonging to different age groups, disadvantages groups, and employed persons. There are large percentages of women in all the above categories. Thus women as a category could really take advantage of the provision of distance education in a large measure. Women constitute about fifty percent

of the total population, but they form only nine percent of the total productive work force. The main reason for this poor share is low literacy level among women. When this major chunk is educated, no doubt, they can contribute significantly for the development of the country and can there by empower themselves.

Women empowerment is a global issue. Empowerment is an active multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.

Women form the pivotal point around whom family life and living revolves. When economic level of a family goes down, women are the worst sufferers. The poorer the family the greater is its dependence on women's economic productivity. Also illiteracy among women often leads to a poor self-image, lack of knowledge and self-worth, making them susceptible to being deprived of their rights and playing an active role in the society and restricts their economic productivity. Literacy among women opens the possibility of unlimited exposure to new information and more importantly to new ways of thinking and new perspectives on existing information. Also literate women are able to constructively express their talents and give direction to their aptitude. This enables them to lead a life which is fulfilling and satisfying. Through education we expect our women learners to attain the following-

- Be confident enough to tackle any kind of problem
- Enhancement of career opportunities
- Increase in their level of satisfaction
- Development of Skill
- Extending learning opportunities for disadvantaged or dropout
- Bring about a change in their perspective of life
- Development of decision making capacity
- Have a respectable position within their family and community
- Learn with more flexibility in time and space
- Enable them to face challenges in life

- Raise the overall literacy rate of the country and State
- Finally Empowerment of Women learners

As women have gradually become empowered at the individual and collective levels through Distance Education, they have been able to tackle their personal problems such as access to drinking water, payment of minimum wages, access to health services, ensuring functions of the village school, children's participation in education and have taken collective action against domestic and social violence. It is interesting to note that women learners are now increasingly opting for distance education. According to the secondary source of data, 40 to 50 percent of the students from majority of the open and distance education institutions are women.

Women Learners of Social Work Department of NSOU

Social work is an academic discipline, which aims to promote social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Social work engages professionally qualified people who work to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing of the community people. Though it is a matter of great challenge to run a professional course like Social Work, through Distance mode as it requires extensive Field Work and Research activities, but the Social Work department of NSOU, with the support of efficient counsellors have been coming up with methods to supervise and monitor such curriculum with lot of innovations.

The present study was taken up as a project with an objective to understand “How MSW course has been an instrument for Empowerment for the women learners of NSOU”

Women of our society are still deprived of acquiring higher education and become victims of such social problems which pose hindrances for her to continue with her studies. Some of the major reasons for the cause of drop outs amongst the women in the higher level education are early marriage, lack of support and restrictions from the family, Cultural Barriers, lack of infrastructure, distance of the Educational Institutions, unsuitable timing of the courses, age factors, non-availability of many options in selecting the courses etc. However, as we know the Open Learning system operates with the notion to reach the unreached, and is more inclusive in nature, therefore this versatile system has become an answer for many aspiring learners of our community who genuinely want to go for their higher studies. The ODL by following a “Right Based Approach” has truly being meaningful for our learners especially the women dwelling in remote areas, as now the education is indeed in their doorstep!

Therefore, research paper discusses the impact of literacy and education on empowerment of women as well as the suggestion to improve the changes that need to be considered for women empowerment and economic development.

Methodology

The Study conducted was Exploratory in Nature, and Case studies were adopting Snow ball sampling. 16 Women Learners and 2 Academic Counsellor were interviewed for the study

Area of Study-

The study had been conducted by selecting four PCP centres namely Raj College Bardhwan, Cooch Behar College, Bijoy Krishna Girl's college and Women's Christian College. These centres were selected purposively, so that the learners from all over West Bengal could be easily selected, as we may cover North, South, East and the Western part of Bengal

Time Period Selected- 3 years

2010-2012

2012-2014

2015-2017

Objective of the Study

- To find out areas in which the women learners of MSW are engaged after obtaining their degree.
- To explore if there is an increase in the decision making ability of the women learners.
- To identify barriers impeding women's advancement in university education.
- To explore why women selected the distance mode of education instead of conventional system of education and also why did they choose Social Work for higher studies. subject.
- To assess the impact of distance university education on women.
- To analyse how effective is the teaching –learning process which is adopted particularly to train the learners in a professional course like Social Work.

- To find out the barriers that the women learners faced while perusing the course.
- To get an idea about the aspirations about the MSW course from the women learners who are presently enrolled in the Social Work course.

Case Studies with Analysis

Understanding the Women Learners of MSW Course

Case 1

Kamolika Ray, a 24 years old girl, lives in a village of Nadia District of West Bengal. Her parents were not educated and she was the first generation learner. She started her basic education in an ICDS centre from where she got admitted to a local Government school from where she passed her class 10th and 12th examination with flying colours. In her school days she attended many awareness camps organized by her school on, issues related to “Human Rights”. Later even she organized such camps in her school for her junior classes.

Her parents did not want her to go out of the village and planned to get her married. Kamolika who already knew the importance of education, convinced her parents with the help of her teachers. Kamolika who made up her mind to go for further education came to know about the Open learning system, and joined open university for higher studies, she obtained a degree in Social Work. Today Kamolika is working in an NGO which is committed to work in the field of Child Rights. Kamolika shared that she had been able to aware her community against child marriage though still a lot of work in needed to be done in this field.

Kamolika is into a relationship with her co-worker and they plan to get married after a couple of years, since they are not yet economically strong to start a family as she wants to give the best to her children and fulfill their needs.

Analysis

Kamolika has been able to realize her rights and entitlement by organizing such awareness generation camps. It is only because of her strong determination, that she found ways for perusing higher education. Though she stays in a rural community yet she has learnt to make her own choices. The unique technology of Open Learning system has made the education possible for everyone today.

Case 2 -

Imrana Khatun (Name Changed), a Muslim girl was from an affluent business class family from a rural belt of South 24 Pargana district of West Bengal, acquired her basic education from a local Government school. Soon after finishing her school her parents decided to get her married. Imrana was also very happy to know that she was going to get married. While discussing about her marriage plans with some of her close friends she came to know that they would start going to college for pursuing their graduation. Imrana became a little eager to go to college with her friends, not because that she would become a graduate, but to experience a new life, which she thought would be full of fun. She told her father about, to which he agreed, with the condition that the day her marriage shall be fixed she must quit the college. Imrana thus got the permission of her father and she joined the nearby college. Initially Imrana used to love going to college, but never concentrated in her studies, as she knew very soon she would be quitting the college and enjoyed herself with her friends. However, one day while attending a lecture on “Women Empowerment “she realized her mistake, and understood the value of education. Her subject teacher played an important role in bringing about this transformation. That was a turning point of her life. However, her marriage was fixed and according to her commitments to her father, Imran left her college and got married to Yusuf, who was an engineer by profession. Imrana told her husband that she wishes to continue her education. Meanwhile her Mother –in- law who was though very friendly, but asked her to become a mother and start her family life. One day Yusuf told Imrana that she may still continue with her education through Open Learning Education System. Thus Imrana once again enrolled herself to the nearby Study Centre of an Open University and could fulfil her dreams without hampering her family life. Today Imrana has completed her Post Graduate and has joined a NGO, and works as a Project Coordinator.

Analysis-

Imrana belonged to a conservative family, and it is because of her socialization and cultural upbringing that she found it natural to get married at a young age soon after finishing her school. In this case we get evidence that it was due to the influence of peer groups that she thought of joining college, just to get a new experience. However, she later was able to realize the importance of higher education when she came across such environment before. Though Imrana got married, but Yusuf, her husband was educated and he realized Imrana’s point of view and enrolled her to an Open University. In this case the Open Distance Learning system

proved to be a boon and Imrana got the opportunity to complete her higher studies and became self-reliant.

Case 3

Jyoti Murmu (Name changed), tribal girl, lived with her parents and two siblings in a remote village of Purulia District. Her father was a healer of the village, while her mother was engaged in making bamboo baskets. Jyoti was the third child of the family. Though she had an elder brother, but her parents never discriminated between the children. Though the family income was not enough yet Jyoti's parent could arrange just sufficient meal for the entire family, however none of the three children were sent to school. According to Jyoti her father was quite a respectable person of the village as he cured many villagers from serious illness and their family was leading a happy life. However, the problems began when Jyoti's mother conceived for the fourth time and she had some complication related to her pregnancy. Even her father failed to intervene, finally a NGO which worked in the area of Maternal and Child Health came to their village for an awareness camp on immunization, came to their rescue and suggested them to take Jyoti's mother to visit the nearest Sub Health and they had no other choice but to go to the nearby Health Care Centre for treatment. Unfortunately, it was too late and her mother had a miscarriage and suffered from acute anemia.

It was during this period that the family, for the first time came in contact with a world which was different from their's. Though they had heard of modern technologies for treatment but they were seeing it for the first time. Jyoti, then a nine-year-old girl somehow got influenced by this and spoke to the NGO workers expressing her desire to learn the scientific and modern methods of treatment and then she was told that unless she starts going to school, and acquire education, she will not be able to fulfill her dreams. It was an eye opening experience for her father also, and realized his fault and decided to send all his children to the local school. This was how Jyoti along with her siblings started going to school. Though Jyoti's brother failed his class tenth examination, but she became the first to pass the examination, eventually she also cleared her Higher Secondary exams. She wanted to continue her further studies for which she had to travel about 12 kilometers to reach her institution, but her father was not ready to her that far, as the roads were not well connected and he found it unsafe. Jyoti did not stop here she, she made up her mind to continue her education, she got admitted in an undergraduate course from, NSOU after which she joined MSW from NSOU again.

Today Jyoti is 24 and has become an ASHA Worker and today she is actively involved in promotion of better Health Care facilities within her community and sensitizes the community people about the importance of healthy and hygienic life.

Analysis-

The story of Jyoti tells us though there is no gender discrimination in the tribal societies, but still these communities are excluded from social development aspects, because of their own cultural beliefs and taboos. Even though we have so many schemes and programmes for the upliftment of the Tribal societies, yet these societies are lagging behind. Perhaps these people lack the information about such schemes and thus remain deprived. The Tribal communities are still unaware about the importance of education, may be because of the fact that there are very less primary schools in such remote areas and another possible reason could be non-availability of study materials in local languages. It seems that there are hardly any colleges for higher education in these areas, and people do not find it convenient to send their children, especially girls, outside for higher education. But if they are guided properly they may surely do well in their life.

Case 4

Sreemoyee Biswas, woman learner from Krishna Nagar, Nadia District of West Bengal, suffered from extreme inferiority complex for being a dwarf. She did not have confidence and was ridiculed by her friends and even unknown people because of her short height. Though she believed that physically she did not have any problem, but due to social stigma, Sreemoyee broke mentally. Unfortunately, soon after completing her graduation from a local college she lost her both parents, from whom she used to get at least some moral support. Now she was left all alone with her two brothers and an elder sister, who was already married. Her brothers took charge of the entire household, and at this juncture, Sreemoyee planned to appear for competitive examination for Government Service. While she was preparing herself, she came to know about a short term course on Child Right and Protection offered by NSOU, she joined the course and successfully completed it. It was after the completion of the course that she learned about a Post-Graduation Course in Social Work and found it convenient to join, as it would help her to get a Master degree and also become a professional in this field. Thus she joined the course in 2017. According to her, this was probably for the first time that she did not have to face “Body Shaming”, as all of her classmates and the teachers encouraged her and were ready to help her whenever needed. She even went for field work and data collection. She

shared that she was blessed to have such wonderful classmates who helped her to complete the course without any difficulties and even the teachers appreciated her whenever she answered in the PCP session.

Sreemoyee has been able to clear a written examination for a Government job and is waiting for her interview, which she is hopeful to succeed.

Analysis

It is probably because of the general sentiment and support of the learners of the Social Work, that helped Sreemoyee to regain her confidence and this was for the first that she enjoyed learning in such an supportive learning environment which encouraged her to progress in her career.

Case 5

Rahul Sahu

Rahul, who is a transgender, loves to dress up as a woman, and wants to get an identity of her own. Rahul though stayed with her own parents faced lot of social lampooning; she was called by different kind of names. But nothing really affected her. She finished her school and joined Vidyasagar College for her Bachelor degree. Her classmates never accepted her, and she used to feel left out and alone. In this way she somehow completed her graduation withstanding humiliation and ill behaviour from her fellow batchmates. Then she came to know about MSW course offered by NSOU. One advantage of joining an Open University she thought was, she would not have to attend the classes regularly. Rahul after getting enrolled in 2016, did not attend the initial few PCP sessions for her own reasons. However for the field work session she had to attend her first PCP. Rahul was a little hesitant to enter the PCP session, however she attended it. This was for the first time that Rahul was scolded by the Counsellor for not attending the PCP sessions regularly, and wasting his money. With the help of his classmates and encouragement of his counsellors Rahul completed his course. Meanwhile Rahul got a job in a reputed NGO which worked for the cause of HIV-AIDS. Rahul went to Netherlands to represent a conference on AIDS awareness. Rahul today has no ambiguity regarding his identity and is very happy and successful in his life.

Analysis

It was because of the cordial relationship between her classmates and affectionate behaviour of the teachers that Rahul gained her lost confidence. Rahul was ridiculed before for attending her classes, but it was in NSOU that she got scolded for being absent in the PCPs. This is probably because of the core concept of the Social Work curriculum, of accepting individual as they are and not judging them by their appearance.

Case 6

Poroma Mukherjee obtained Master Degree in Social Work (MSW) from Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) in the year 2015. At present she is pursuing her Ph.D. from Assam University, A Central University, Silchar. Her PhD topic is “Problems of Elderly at Old Age Homes: A Comparative Study of India and Bangladesh”. She is a visiting faculty in the Department of Social Work at Pabna University of Science and Technology, Bangladesh and also teaching social work in RabindraBharati University, Kolkata, since 2017. Poroma had attended several National and International Seminars as Paper Presenter as well as Resource Person. Poroma is very ambitious and wants to be an academician in future. She feels that NSOU has extended all kinds of support to her and has the best teaching-learning arrangements.

Analysis

It seems Poroma is quite ambitious. She has been able to fulfil her dreams and has made her own identity. She is satisfied with her present status and feels that it was because of NSOU, that she could establish herself and the teaching learning process helped her to develop to go for Research activities.

Case 7

Soumita had an inclination to work for the development of humanity and work for the people who are deprived of their basic rights. After completing her Graduation, she planned to study Post Graduation in Social Work (MSW). She found that Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) was the only option to her, as according to her it was cost effective and far more flexible in nature. Soumita during her field exposure, as an important curriculum of MSW course, came across an NGO which worked for the rights of domestic helpers. Later, soon after completing her MSW course in 2011 from NSOU, she got a job in this organization. After gaining some experiences, she joined ‘SEWA’, a well-known national NGO of India. She represented India in several conferences in abroad like Cameron, Japan, Singapore and

Thailand. Today she is the State Coordinator of 'SEWA'. She expressed her drive to give training to the present learners of NSOU and willing to extend any kind of support to the University.

Analysis

NSOU could generate confidence and courage to represent her country in an international forum. She always wanted to fight for ensuring the rights of marginalized segment, and NSOU trained her in a course which helped her to work for the cause for humanity. She also expressed her wish to even help her alumni for their future career.

Case 8

Deepshikha Shikdar from North 24 Parganas, joined NSOU for getting a degree in MSW in 2017. Deepshikha already had a LLB degree, but she was not able to establish in her life. Later she came across a newspaper and came to know about 'Social Work' and felt that the combination of her knowledge in Law and Social Work would help her for a better career option. Deepshikha gradually started liking the subject and it became a passion for her. She devoted herself completely in the curriculum and voluntarily carried out extensive field work in Right to Education Act and also on many legal issues to know the actual legal need of community from which she came from. Deepshikha passed her MSW from NSOU with 1st Class marks.

Today she has own registered NGO which works for promoting education and health in Kanchrapara. She also got a job in Kendriya Vidyalaya as a Counsellor. Deepshikha is thankful to the University for offering a course which helped her to become successful in her career.

Analysis

The knowledge of law helped her to carry out Social Work practice in much more interesting way. Deepshikha in true sense took a multidisciplinary approach and was quite innovative and intelligently blended both the disciplines and made her training successful.

Case 9

Radhika Chakraborty, a Kolkata based learner from BPD, Sociology NSOU, was advised by her counsellor to join MSW course from NSOU for a better future. Radhika was not sure it would be a good idea to join the course. However she reluctantly joined the Course from

Manindra Chandra College Study Centre in 2016, without really knowing how it will help her in her career in future. Gradually Radhika started gaining interest for the subject. She made it a habit of attending all the PCPs and even prepares study notes of her own. Radhika completed the course successfully with flying colours and applied for jobs in various NGOs and got one, but she kept on looking for better opportunities. Finally, she got a job in a JJ Home as a counsellor and she was happy about it. Radhika enjoys her work and feels that she knows much better about her job and can compete with any candidate from conventional Universities. Later Radhika also joined a certificate course in Child Rights and Protection from NSOU.

Analysis

It is evident from the above case that most the counsellors of NSOU truly understand the worth of the learners and encourage them to take up courses according to their aptitude. Radhika on the other hand is very straight forward and knows her capacity.

Case 10

Purnima Chetri

Purnima Chetri, from Darjeeling District, is a keen Social Worker today who works for the rural communities of the hilly region. She joined Social Work Course from NSOU in 2016. Though she could have joined the PCP centre from Siliguri college, yet she decided to come all over from Darjeeling to Kolkata and join Manindra Chandra College study centre as she felt that the scope in Social Work profession was much better in Kolkata. Purnima was a studious learner and always attended her PCP sessions meticulously. However, she took up her Field Work and then her Research activity in Darjeeling District. Purnima later got a job in health sector in Darjeeling district and cleared her MSW course with marks.

Analysis

Purnima, selected perhaps did not get a good feedback about the Siliguri Study Centre, so she decided to move to Kolkata, this shows she was very focused and wanted to achieve the best. Moreover, NSOU will also have to look into the matter and sort it out immediately.

Case 11

Nipa Pradhan

Nipa belongs to the Toto community, from a tribal region of Jalpaiguri North Bengal. She had a dream to become a doctor. However, she could not get through her Medical entrance

examination, nor did she secure expected marks in her Higher Secondary examination. Nipa was depressed and since she had no choice she had to enrol herself in BA (Hon) in English Literature with History and Political Science as her pass subjects in Siliguri College. After completing her graduation, she came to know about the Social Work course from her own college, which was also a Study Centre of NSOU. Thus Nipa got an admission, to MSW course from NSOU in 2017. Nipa who always had a desire to work in the Health sector choose to carry out her Field from a Government Hospital and for her Dissertation she selected a topic on the Health aspects of the Toto community. Nipa after completing her course has joined a local NGO and is working as a Health Worker and says she is blessed to be NSOU, as to some extent she could accomplish her dreams.

Analysis

Nipa at last was able to do what she actually wanted in her life. It is because Social Work is inter disciplinary in nature, that the learners get an opportunity to know about various fields and choose an area according to their own choice for their future career.

Case 12

Maya Rani Das

Maya Rani Das a 65-year-old lady from North Kolkata joined MSW Course from NSOU in the year 2017 so that she may become a post graduate. According to her, it was her granddaughter a class 4 student, who inspired her to join the course. Maya was a graduate at the time of her marriage, but due to her family responsibilities she could not continue with her further education. She forgot about her desires and concentrated on raising up her two children and looked after her household, but she was very popular in her locality as she used to participate in many voluntary activities like teaching the street children, help the local club members during various health camps organized by them. One day she told her granddaughter to concentrate on her studies, otherwise she would also have to be a housewife like her with no ambition in life. Maya's granddaughter told her to go for further studies, and spoke to her mother about it. This time her daughter in law took initiative and found about the MSW Course, which would be according to her choice. Maya happily joined the course. She completed the course though with not high marks, but she was now a Post Graduate. Maya has no intention to get a job, but she is much content to have achieved a higher degree in academics in her life.

Analysis

Though Maya Rani did not make any career out of her MSW degree, but she was happy enough to be a qualified Social Worker with a Master Degree. She loved to be highly educated and NSOU gave her to the opportunity to fulfil her dreams even at this age. She voluntarily helped people in need. Thus Open University helps its learners to learn at their own pace and choice

Case 13

Anupama Biswas, a married woman from Nadia district was often battered and tortured by her husband, one day she was badly abused by her husband and was even thrown out of her house with a three year old daughter. Anupama was so lost and did not know how she would manage her life in this way. Anupama was in great need of a job. Anupama was a commerce graduate, and joined a local NGO and looked after the documentation work. Though the salary was not enough however she could meet her needs. Then she was asked by the president of her NGO's governing body to get a MSW degree and this may help her to get a promotion and she may even have some financial gain. Thus Anupama enrolled herself in this course. While pursuing the course one of the counsellors conducted a session on laws related to marriage thus she came to know about the domestic violence Act and many other legal acts pertaining to marriage. The counsellor helped her to see a lawyer in a family court; Anupama then lodged a complaint against her husband and fought for the legitimate rights of her daughter and herself. According to Anupama, MSW has enabled her to speak for her own rights, and this has also motivated her to fight for the rights of other women of her community.

Analysis

The Social Work Course not only helped Anupama to get established professionally, but it also enables her to know about her personal rights and entitlements. She came to know how she may protest against the injustice done to her and became empowered to lodge a case against her husband who abused her for days together.

Case 14

Arpita Chakraborty a Master degree holder in Rural Education from Kalyani University joined a short term course in Women's Studies from NSOU. After completing the course she thought of again joining a Master Degree in Social Work as she thought she could appear for NET examination as Rural Education do not have any NET examination till date. While doing her MSW, she got interested in taking about a Research in livelihood of the Patua community of Medinipore and Puruliya district. Later she did an excellent Research on the same area, and was well appreciated for her Research Work. Arpita, plans to publish her Dissertation and presently is working as a Town planner in Kalyani Municipality on contractual basis. She has a desire to go for Phd very soon.

Analysis

Arpita is a very ambitious girl and has enough potential to achieve her dreams. She is very intelligent and knows what she wants for her future.

Case 15

Shelly Dutta was a very dynamic girl right from her school days. She could never tolerate any injustice done to anyone. She would participate in several community services in her locality, perhaps all this incidence urged her join MSW course from NSOU. She did a remarkable field work and selected very interesting Research topic for her dissertation. Later she also did a short term course in Child Rights and Protection from NSOU. She has been associated with NSOU in various outreach programmes even after passing the course. She has been working in several projects and has also taken up freelancing jobs. She loves to accept challenges and has done remarkable jobs in the field of child trafficking.

Analysis

Shelly from the very beginning had a helping attitude. She is also very daring and may go to any extent for the protection of the rights of people. Shelly has promised to work for humanity throughout her life.

Case 16

Preeti Guchait, a graduate in Bengali from Puruliya was keen to work with the tribal population in her district, as she felt that the health aspects of the tribal community is neglected. She thought of joining a course which might help her in understanding the tribal life better. She thought of joining Anthropology, but since she did not have Anthropology in her graduation she could not pursue higher education in it. Then she came across Social Work course offered by Bankura University, however the timings and the course fees did not permit her to get an admission, she then came to about the MSW course from NSOU and happily joined it. Preeti attended her PCP in Burdawan Raj College study centre and enthusiastically did her field work as well her dissertation. She passed her MSW in 2019 and immediately after getting the degree she even cleared an examination and got a job in ICDS.

Analysis

NSOU has been a boon to Preeti as she could carry on with the course which she desired to take up for her career at her own choice and requirement. She was finally being able to get a job according to liking which was in the area of Health.

Perspectives of the Counsellors

Counsellor 1

Sri Sajal Das on the basis of his teaching experiences under NSOU as a Counsellor of PGSW since inception in 2005 to till date shared many interesting facts. That may be pointed out herewith as follows:

Learners like Senior State Civil Service (Exe) Cadres, Officers serving at the Directorate level of Calcutta Tramway Company, Senior Manager (Personnel) of Haldia Dock Complex (CPT), Officials of Burdwan University & Calcutta University and so many from other departments of both Government, semi Government and PSUs have undergone courses like PG in Social Work under NSOU. Some of them have been found to stand besides many other learners for helping financially in their second year admission, form fill up for term end examinations and doing field & project works etc.

In case of women learners, it has been found that during first five years, a good number of women working in Govt Schools, Pvt Schools, NGOs, Mahila Samities and Housewives were pursuing MSW from NSOU who were basically urban area based economically better. After 2010 onwards the trend of women's enrolment in MSW in NSOU has been changed. Good number of rural women and young girls came into the MSW programme with poor financial background, a quite a large number of unemployed young girls as well as working women between twenty and forty took enrolment. However, since last 2015 onwards a lot of fresher girls soon after passing their graduation are also joining the course.

Counsellor 2

Rupdatta Sen, had been conducting MSW PCPs since 2015. She has observed that women learners of MSW Department of NSOU are quite committed and attends the PCP sessions very seriously. They are focused and want to have a career. They ask relevant questions in the sessions and have a passion for the subject. The women learners inspite of having their families and their own personal problems make it a point to come the study centres and be in touch with

their respective counsellors. Being Sunday, at times some issues like lack of proper toilet and canteen facilities in the study centres and improper transportation facilities may cause to some problems for the women learners. However, if the concerned authorities take these issues such problems may be solved. Ms Sen recommended more of on line classes to resolve the problem

Analysis

The counsellors of MSW Course have been able to motivate their learners. They have shown the right direction to the learners and have been able to understand the problems of especially women learners. They have always appreciated them for their efforts. They shared that the MSW course is becoming very popular, so even the freshers are enrolling for the course

Results and Discussions

The study reveals that the Women learners of MSW Course are well aware of their future career and are quite empowered to take their own decisions. The flexible pattern of imparting education is a great advantage particularly for the women learners particularly enrolled in an Open University. The MSW department has been catering to a diverse learner community. Even elderly learners get opportunities to gain knowledge and education. The learners from Rural and marginalized communities are enrolled in the course. The subject of Social Work has been able to generate lots of self-determination within the learners. Today the women learners from NSOU are doing Phd, getting prepared for NET or working in various NGOs and even Government Agencies Though there may be some challenges but it may certainly be resolved.

Let's quickly glance at the major findings and propose some suggestion

Findings

- The Study reveals that learners of the Northern Part of Bengal have problems in establishing themselves as there are less NGOs and thus the scope for jobs are also limited.
- NSOU has been able to create a good impact on the women learners of surrounding areas which are lesser developed as, or who belong to minority community.
- The Learners have not only been able to take decision about their professional life, they also became empowered in their personal life also

- Some of the Women learners found it difficult to go find NGOs in their area or later find suitable guides for their Dissertation work.
- Women learners found it difficult to come to Kolkata for appearing in the Viva voce examination
- There are learners who are seriously engaged in their academic development, as they are pursuing PhD and are also preparing for NET.
- Many Women Learners have completed their MSW course for getting promotion in their professional life.
- Women Learners particularly of North Bengal are keen to open up their own NGOs.
- There are some learners who choose to work as freelancer.
- There are however still some learners from remote areas who are not allowed to go out to work, and they have to follow the instructions of the head of the Family.
- Some of the students requested to start courses on counselling and gerontology.
- The learners wanted to have an orientation in ICT.

Suggestion-

- Awareness programme regarding the distance education courses for women in urban, rural and tribal areas will provide opportunity for women to gain knowledge about existing educational facilities.
- The courses for women in distance education should be application oriented so that it will help them in their economic and social empowerment.
- The course materials should be simple, preferably in regional languages to make women more comfortable to use.
- The gender component should be incorporated in the syllabus of all discipline.
- The fee should be affordable to weaker sections of the society especially women.
- Gender sensitization programmes should be organized to sensitize the teachers and learners.
- Confidence building and personally building programmes are essential to help women to overcome resistance in distance learning.

- Women should be motivated and trained to use technology for faster and easier learning.
- A separate channel for local T.V. and radio must be introduced to promote distance education for women.
- Study centres with a library should be opened in each village to facilitate women.
- A good response is required from the distance education providers for the enquiries of the learner from various places.
- A recognition is also required for distance education degrees among the educational institutions, employers and in the society.
- The quality of the study materials should be enhanced and availability should be made in time for the learners.
- The contact programmes in Distance Education should be flexible to suit to the timing of working women in urban and rural areas.
- Promotion of Open learning system and ICT support.
- Development of E-resources and online courses
- To strengthen the sexual harassment cell of the educational institutions
- Inclusion of more women representatives in the Governing body, Academic council so that they may speak for women students.
- Improvement of infrastructure along with hostel facilities
- Scholarship schemes and facilities for Career counselling
- Easy bank loans
- Introduction of courses which are related to development of indigenous skill
- The courses for women in distance education should be application oriented so that it will help them in their economic and social empowerment.

- The course materials should be simple, preferably in regional languages to make women more comfortable to use.
- The gender component should be incorporated in the syllabus of all discipline.
- The fee should be affordable to weaker sections of the society especially women.
- Gender sensitization programmes may be organized with the help of local governments to sensitize the Women learners even before advertising the courses, such awareness programme regarding the distance education courses for women in urban, rural and tribal areas shall provide opportunity for women to gain knowledge about existing educational facilities.
- It should be mandatory to organize induction programmes in the beginning and also organize special lectures in between the academic sessions to discuss matters regarding the Field work and Dissertation activities with the women learners.
- Confidence building and personally building programmes are essential to help women to overcome resistance in distance learning.
- Women learners may be given some training to use technology for faster and easier learning.
- Study centres located in remote villages may have some basic library facilitate.
- Special care must be taken to maintain the toilets in the study centres, especially in the PCP Centres which are used by the women learners
- The quality of the study materials should be enhanced and availability should be made in time for the learners.
- The Special lectures should be flexible to suit to the timing of working women in urban and rural areas.
- Providing some lodging facilities women candidates in the Regional campuses
- Canteen facility may be provided. The local Women Self Help Groups may be invited to run such canteens

- Special facilities may be given to learners who are pregnant or have to be responsible for their minor children.
- Introduction of courses which are related to development of indigenous skill, particularly in the Tribal areas.
- Inclusion of more women representatives in the Governing body, Academic council and sexual harassment cell, so that they may speak for women learners.

Conclusion

Women empowerment is an essential element for national development. Since women constitutes half of the population there can be no development unless the needs and interests of women are fully taken into account. Therefore, whenever policies are amended or new policy are initiated government has to consider the interest of women towards the new policy initiative. More and more awareness for women empowerment through education need to be undertaken through free workshop and seminars, women councils in rural areas as even today many women are not aware of their basic rights. In order to motivate rural women for higher education some scholarships should be announced for rural women and government should ensure that this educational scholarship should go to deserving candidates.

The government body or NGO should arrange programmes for interaction with other empowered women in the society for motivating women. The institutions that are engaged in various fields of social work can start short term diploma or certificate courses in areas of rural development with special emphasis on projects for women's development. Even many female celebrities can participate in these programmes toward empowering women as they are the effective role model for many to follow.

Health care and education are the least considered sector in financial budget as compared to the rest of the world. It is imperative on the part of the government to scale up the investment in education and health sector for women. The government should increase investment to achieve gender parity and higher level of enrolment in completion of secondary and tertiary education. Provide women and girls better health care services, social services, decent employment and other support so that they are able to achieve full benefit of education.

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