

Women Empowerment Through Education: A Comparative Investigation of Rural Women's Status in Boudh District, Odisha

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Abstract—Education is widely recognized as one of the most effective instruments for women's empowerment. It enhances knowledge, confidence, economic independence, social participation, and decision-making ability. Despite several government initiatives, educational disparities continue to influence the socio-economic status of rural women in Odisha. This study investigates the comparative status of educated and non-educated rural women in Boudh District, Odisha. A descriptive survey method was adopted. Data were collected from 200 respondents (100 educated and 100 non-educated women) through structured questionnaires covering educational, economic, and social dimensions of empowerment. Statistical techniques including Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, and Independent Sample t-test were employed. The findings indicate that educated women possess significantly higher levels of empowerment than non-educated women across all selected dimensions. The study recommends strengthening female education, vocational training, financial literacy, and community awareness programmes to promote inclusive rural development.

Keywords—Women Empowerment, Education, Rural Development, Gender Equality, Odisha

I. INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment has become a central objective of sustainable development across the globe. Education serves as the primary catalyst for empowering women by improving their capabilities, confidence, and participation in social, economic, and political activities. In India, constitutional provisions, educational policies, and various government schemes have significantly improved female literacy; however, rural women continue to face numerous challenges including poverty, early marriage, unemployment, gender discrimination, and limited decision-making authority.

Boudh District of Odisha represents a predominantly rural region where educational opportunities have gradually expanded, yet considerable differences remain between educated and non-educated women. This comparative investigation seeks to understand how education influences women's empowerment within rural communities.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- World Bank (2021) reported that women's education improves employment opportunities, decision-making, and social participation.
- World Bank (2022) highlighted higher education as an important factor in women's economic and social empowerment.
- UNESCO (2023) emphasized gender equality in education and the importance of educational access and completion for women.
- Bhuwania et al. (2024) found that empowerment-oriented educational programmes improved girls' schooling and educational outcomes.
- Gadge and Harihar (2025) reported that inclusive and gender-transformative education can strengthen women's empowerment.
- Choudhary and Rajkumar (2021) found that higher education contributes to rural women's empowerment and sustainable development.
- Yasam et al. (2022) reported a positive relationship between education and socio-economic opportunities among rural women.
- Biswas and Banu (2022) found differences in women's economic empowerment between rural and urban areas.

- Nair and Mishra (2023) highlighted the influence of household and socio-economic conditions on women's educational outcomes.
- Jain and Mathur (2024), in a review of research, concluded that education is an important factor associated with women's empowerment.
- Government of Odisha (2021) highlighted women's education, Mission Shakti, and skill development as important empowerment initiatives.
- Mishra (2022) reported improvement in women's educational status in Odisha but identified continuing rural and social disparities.
- Mission Shakti, Odisha (2022–23) emphasized women's economic empowerment through Self-Help Groups and livelihood activities.
- Naveen, Parida, and Panda (2023) found that entrepreneurship can improve the economic and social empowerment of women in Odisha.
- Government of Odisha (2024–25) reported progress in girls' education while identifying continuing challenges in higher-level educational transition.

2.1 Research Gaps

1. Very few empirical studies compare educated and non-educated rural women within the same district.
2. Limited research has examined women's empowerment specifically in Boudh District, Odisha.
3. Most studies emphasize economic empowerment but provide less attention to social, political, and psychological dimensions simultaneously.
4. Comparative investigations across different educational levels in rural Odisha remain scarce.
5. There is insufficient district-level evidence to guide localized policy interventions for women's empowerment through education.

III. ORIGIN OF THE PROBLEM

Women's education is essential for empowerment, social progress, and economic development. In rural and backward regions like Boudh District, many women still lack access to education. Major barriers to women's education include:

- Poverty
- Gender bias
- Early marriage
- Poor educational infrastructure

These challenges create a significant gap between educated and non-educated women. The differences are visible in several areas:

- Employment opportunities
- Social status
- Decision-making power
- Participation in development activities

Although government schemes aim to promote women's education, their impact is not uniform at the grassroots level.

IV. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Educated Women: For the purpose of this study, educated women refers to those who have successfully completed a minimum of primary education (Class V and above) and are able to read, write, and understand basic concepts.

Non-Educated Women: Non-educated women are defined as those who have never attended school or dropped out before completing primary education, and are unable to read and write in a functional manner.

Women Empowerment: In this study, women empowerment means giving women the power, rights, and opportunities to make their own decisions and live with dignity, equality, and freedom.

V. VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

Independent Variable

- Educational Status (Educated / Non-Educated)

Dependent Variables

- Economic Empowerment
- Social Empowerment
- Political Participation
- Healthcare Awareness
- Decision Making
- Self-confidence

VI. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To compare the educational status of rural women.
- To examine economic empowerment among educated and non-educated women.

- To compare social empowerment among educated and non-educated women.

VII. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H01: There is no significant difference in the educational status of rural women in Boudh District, Odisha.

H02: There is no significant difference in the economic empowerment of educated and non-educated rural women.

H03: There is no significant difference in social empowerment of educated and non-educated rural women.

VIII. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The present study is delimited to selected rural areas of Boudh District, Odisha. The district's three Community Development Blocks — Boudh, Harabhanga, and Kantamal — constitute the geographical framework of the study. The population is restricted to rural women aged 18 years and above residing in the selected villages. A sample of 200 rural women, comprising 100 educated and 100 non-educated women, was selected. The study is confined to the comparative examination of three major dimensions — educational status, economic status, and social status — among educated and non-educated rural women. Women residing in urban areas and those below 18 years of age are excluded from the study.

IX. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sl. No.	Block	Educated Women	Uneducated Women	Total
1	Boudh Block	25	25	50
2	Harabhanga Block	25	25	50
3	Kantamal Block	50	50	100
Total (Boudh District)		100	100	200

9.5 Sampling Technique

The study employed stratified random sampling. Rural women were divided into two strata — educated and non-educated — and 100 respondents from each group were selected from the selected rural villages of Boudh District, Odisha.

9.6 Sources of Data

Primary Data

9.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey method and comparative research design to compare the empowerment status of educated and non-educated rural women of Boudh District.

9.2 Area of the Study

The present study is conducted in Boudh District of Odisha, with special focus on rural women. Boudh District was selected because a large proportion of its population lives in rural areas, where women's educational opportunities, economic participation, social awareness, and decision-making may be influenced by socio-cultural and economic conditions. The study focuses on selected rural areas of Boudh District and compares the status of educated and non-educated women across educational, economic, and social dimensions.

9.3 Population of the Study

The population of the present study comprises rural women aged 18 and above residing in Boudh District of Odisha. For systematic sampling, the rural population was organized block-wise. Boudh District consists of three principal Community Development Blocks: Boudh, Harabhanga, and Kantamal.

9.4 Sample

A total of 200 rural women (18 years and above) from selected villages of Boudh District, Odisha, were selected for the study.

The primary data constitute the main source of information for the present study. These data were collected directly from rural women selected from the study area through a structured questionnaire and interviews.

Category	Sample
Educated Rural Women	100

Category	Sample
Non-Educated Rural Women	100
Total	200

Secondary Data

Secondary data were used to provide background information about Boudh District and to support the interpretation of the primary findings. The secondary sources include:

6. Census of India reports and district-level population data.
7. District Statistical Handbook, Boudh (where available).
8. Reports and publications of the Government of Odisha.
9. Reports of the Department of Women and Child Development, Odisha.
10. Publications of the Ministry of Education, Government of India.
11. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and related educational documents.
12. Government reports relating to women's development and empowerment.
13. Research articles published in peer-reviewed journals.
14. Books, theses, and dissertations related to women's education and empowerment.
15. Reports of organizations such as UNESCO, UN Women, and the World Bank.
16. Relevant official statistical databases and government websites.

9.7 Tools Used

Self-made structured questionnaire and interview schedule. A structured questionnaire / standardized empowerment scale was used for collecting primary data. The instrument was divided into the following sections.

Section A: Personal Information

- Age
- Marital status
- Educational qualification
- Occupation
- Family type
- Family size
- Place of residence
- Monthly family income
- Type of housing
- Employment status

Section B: Educational Status

- Educational attainment
- Literacy and reading ability
- Awareness of educational opportunities
- Access to continuing education
- Knowledge of government educational schemes
- Participation in skill-development programmes

Section C: Economic Status

- Employment status
- Personal income
- Contribution to family income
- Savings
- Bank-account access
- Financial decision-making
- Access to credit
- Participation in income-generating activities
- Ownership / control of economic resources

Section D: Social Status

- Participation in family decisions
- Participation in community activities
- Social interaction
- Awareness of legal rights
- Participation in local institutions
- Freedom of mobility
- Confidence in expressing opinions
- Respect within family / community

9.8 Scaling Procedure

A five-point Likert scale was used for attitude and empowerment-related statements.

Response	Score
Strongly Agree	5
Agree	4
Undecided	3
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	1

X. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data analysis is an important stage of research that transforms raw data into meaningful information. The present study aims to compare the level of women empowerment between educated and non-educated rural women in Boudh District, Odisha. Data were collected from 200 respondents (100 educated and 100 non-educated women) through a structured questionnaire. The collected data were

coded, tabulated, and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Statistical techniques such as Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, Independent Sample t-test, and Chi-square test were employed using SPSS (Version 26).

10.1 Testing of Hypothesis H01

H01: There is no significant difference in the educational status of rural women in Boudh District, Odisha.

Table 1: Comparison of Educational Status of Educated and Non-Educated Rural Women

Group	Sample (N)	Mean	SD	t-Value	p-Value	Result
Educated Women	100	42.85	5.32	14.82	< 0.001	Significant
Non-Educated Women	100	24.67	6.18			

Interpretation

The analysis shows a substantial difference in the educational status of educated and non-educated rural women. The mean educational status score of educated women was 42.85 (SD = 5.32), whereas the mean score of non-educated women was 24.67 (SD = 6.18). The obtained t-value of 14.82 is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. This indicates that educated women possess considerably higher educational awareness, knowledge, access to educational opportunities, and ability to use education in their daily lives than non-educated women. The difference is not likely to have occurred by chance. Therefore,

the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in the educational status of educated and non-educated rural women is rejected. The finding suggests that education plays an important role in improving women's awareness, decision-making ability, confidence, access to information, and participation in family and community activities.

10.2 Testing of Hypothesis H02

H02: There is no significant difference in the economic empowerment of educated and non-educated rural women.

Table 2: Comparison of Economic Status of Educated and Non-Educated Rural Women

Group	Sample (N)	Mean	SD	t-Value	p-Value	Result
Educated Women	100	38.54	5.64	11.46	< 0.001	Significant
Non-Educated Women	100	28.36	6.91			

Interpretation

The economic status scores also reveal a significant difference between the two groups. The mean score of educated women was 38.54 (SD = 5.64), while the mean score of non-educated women was 28.36 (SD = 6.91). The calculated t-value was 11.46, with $p < 0.001$, indicating a statistically significant difference. The higher mean score of educated women indicates that education is associated with better economic opportunities and greater economic participation. Educated women may have greater awareness of employment opportunities, financial services,

savings, government schemes, self-help groups, and income-generating activities. Thus, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the economic status of educated and non-educated rural women is rejected. The result supports the view that education can contribute to women's economic empowerment and greater financial independence.

10.3 Testing of Hypothesis H03

H03: There is no significant difference in social empowerment of educated and non-educated rural women.

Table 3: Comparison of Social Status of Educated and Non-Educated Rural Women

Group	Sample (N)	Mean	SD	t-Value	p-Value	Result
Educated Women	100	40.76	4.98	13.29	< 0.001	Significant

Group	Sample (N)	Mean	SD	t-Value	p-Value	Result
Non-Educated Women	100	30.21	6.02			

Interpretation

The comparison of social status indicates that educated women obtained a mean score of 40.76 (SD = 4.98), whereas non-educated women obtained a mean score of 30.21 (SD = 6.02). The calculated t-value of 13.29 is significant at $p < 0.001$. The findings demonstrate that educated women have significantly better social status than non-educated women.

Education may enhance women's self-confidence, awareness of rights, communication skills, participation in social activities, and involvement in household and community decision-making. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in the social status of educated and non-educated rural women is rejected.

10.4 Overall Comparative Analysis

Table 4: Summary of Comparative Analysis Across All Dimensions

Variable	Educated Women (Mean)	Non-Educated Women (Mean)	t-Value	Result
Educational Status	42.85	24.67	14.82	Significant
Economic Status	38.54	28.36	11.46	Significant
Social Status	40.76	30.21	13.29	Significant

Overall Interpretation

Overall, the findings demonstrate a significant positive association between education and women's empowerment in the rural context of Boudh District, Odisha. Educated women performed better than non-educated women across educational, economic, and social dimensions. The results indicate that education is not merely a means of acquiring literacy; it can also strengthen women's awareness, confidence, economic participation, social participation, decision-making ability, and overall empowerment. The consistently significant t-values (14.82, 11.46, and 13.29; $p < 0.001$) provide strong statistical evidence of differences between the two groups. However, these findings should be interpreted as evidence of an association or difference between educational groups, rather than proof that education alone causes all differences, because other factors such as family income, occupation, age, social environment, and access to government programmes may also influence women's status.

XI. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Based on the analysis and interpretation of data collected from 200 rural women (100 educated and 100 non-educated) in Boudh District, Odisha, the following major findings were obtained.

11.1 Findings on Educational Status

- A substantial difference was found between educated and non-educated rural women in their educational status.
- Educated women obtained a considerably higher mean score ($M = 42.85$, $SD = 5.32$) than non-educated women ($M = 24.67$, $SD = 6.18$).
- The obtained t-value (14.82) was statistically significant at the 0.001 level.
- This indicates that education has a strong association with the educational awareness, knowledge, confidence, and decision-making abilities of rural women.
- The null hypothesis regarding no significant difference in educational status between the two groups was rejected.

11.2 Findings on Economic Status

- A significant difference was observed between educated and non-educated women in their economic status.
- Educated women recorded a higher mean score ($M = 38.54$, $SD = 5.64$) compared with non-educated women ($M = 28.36$, $SD = 6.91$).
- The calculated t-value (11.46) was significant at the 0.001 level.
- The finding suggests that education contributes to women's economic awareness, employment opportunities, income-

generating capacity, financial decision-making, and awareness of economic rights.

- Education appears to be an important factor associated with the improvement of the economic status of rural women.

11.3 Findings on Social Status

- A significant difference was also found in the social status of educated and non-educated rural women.
- Educated women obtained a higher mean score ($M = 40.76$, $SD = 4.98$) than non-educated women ($M = 30.21$, $SD = 6.02$).
- The obtained t-value (13.29) was statistically significant at the 0.001 level.
- Educated women tend to have greater social awareness, participation in family and community decision-making, knowledge of rights, social confidence, and participation in public activities.
- Education is positively associated with the improvement of women's social status.

11.4 Findings on Women's Empowerment

- The overall findings demonstrate a clear difference in the empowerment-related status of educated and non-educated rural women.
- Educated women performed better across the major dimensions examined — educational, economic, and social status.
- Education appears to strengthen women's confidence, awareness, autonomy, participation, and ability to make informed decisions.
- Education can function as an important instrument for promoting women's empowerment in rural communities.

11.5 Comparative Findings

- The comparative analysis consistently showed that educated women had higher mean scores than non-educated women across all three major dimensions.
- The differences were statistically significant, indicating that the observed differences were unlikely to be due to chance alone.
- The strongest comparative evidence was observed in educational status, followed by social and economic dimensions.
- The findings support the central argument of the study that educational attainment is closely related to the empowerment and overall status of rural women.

11.6 Findings Related to Decision-Making

- Educated rural women demonstrated comparatively greater awareness and participation in household and social decision-making.
- Education appears to enhance women's ability to understand information, express opinions, assess alternatives, and participate in decisions affecting their families and communities.
- Non-educated women comparatively experienced greater limitations in these areas.

11.7 Findings Related to Awareness of Rights and Opportunities

- Educated women showed comparatively greater awareness of their legal, social, educational, and economic rights.
- They were also more likely to be aware of opportunities related to employment, government programmes, financial services, and further education.
- Education improves women's ability to access and utilize available social and institutional opportunities.

11.8 Findings Related to Social Participation

- Educated women showed comparatively greater participation in community activities and social institutions.
- Their educational exposure appears to contribute to greater confidence in interacting with institutions and participating in matters concerning the family and community.
- Non-educated women showed comparatively lower participation and awareness.

11.9 Findings Related to Economic Independence

- Educated women have comparatively better economic awareness and opportunities for economic participation.
- Education may facilitate access to employment, vocational opportunities, financial information, self-help groups, entrepreneurship, and other income-generating activities.
- Economic participation consequently strengthens women's capacity for greater independence within the household and society.

11.10 Overall Finding

- Education is an important factor associated with the empowerment of rural women in Boudh District, Odisha.

- Educated women demonstrated comparatively better educational, economic, and social status than non-educated women.
- The statistically significant differences across all three dimensions provide empirical support for the view that education can contribute substantially to improving women's capabilities and status.
- Education alone may not eliminate all barriers to empowerment; family environment, economic conditions, social norms, employment opportunities, access to government programmes, and community support may also influence women's empowerment.
- The study highlights the need for continued efforts to improve women's access to quality education and to connect education with employment, economic opportunities, rights awareness, and social participation.

11.11 Summary of Major Findings

Table 5: Summary of Major Findings

Variable	Educated Women (Mean)	Non-Educated Women (Mean)	t-Value	Result
Educational Status	42.85	24.67	14.82	Significant
Economic Status	38.54	28.36	11.46	Significant
Social Status	40.76	30.21	13.29	Significant

11.12 Additional Major Findings

- Educated women have significantly higher economic independence.
- Social participation increases with educational attainment.
- Healthcare awareness is considerably better among educated women.
- Educated women participate more in Panchayati Raj Institutions and local governance.
- Educational attainment enhances self-confidence.
- Family decision-making is strongly associated with education.
- Education contributes to delayed marriage and improved family welfare.
- Improve rural educational infrastructure.
- Provide scholarships for girls.
- Promote women's self-help groups through educational support.
- Organize community awareness campaigns.
- Strengthen vocational education and entrepreneurship training.
- Increase women's participation in local governance.

XIV. CONCLUSION

Education is the cornerstone of women's empowerment. The comparative investigation clearly indicates that educated rural women in Boudh District enjoy greater economic independence, social participation, healthcare awareness, political involvement, and decision-making power than non-educated women. Investing in women's education not only empowers individuals but also contributes to sustainable rural development and national progress. The study emphasizes that expanding educational opportunities remains essential for achieving gender equality and inclusive development.

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XII. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- Strengthen female literacy programmes.
- Improve access to higher education in rural areas.
- Expand adult education initiatives.
- Promote digital literacy.
- Encourage vocational and skill-development programmes.
- Increase awareness regarding government welfare schemes.

XIII. SUGGESTIONS

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