Cultural, Social, and National Setting and the Most Common Factor that Hinders Women's Empowerment

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ABSTRACT
This study focused on the extent of women's empowerment in terms of cultural, societal, and national setting. It also determine the most common factor that hinders their empowerment. The result verified that the participants belong to the lower class. Furthermore, it was observed that their empowerment with respect to cultural and national setting is at very great extent. This signifies that they are empowered in this part most of the time. In terms of social setting they show that their empowerment is at great extent. It is revealed that illiteracy is the most common factor that hinders participants' empowerment. The study sealed that their socioeconomic status does not have an immense contribution to limit their empowerment on the cultural, social and national environment.

Keywords: cultural, social, national setting, women's empowerment, hindrances

INTRODUCTION

In a particular department there are groups of women who are designated to monitor the health of the people. This group of women are also assigned to some other functions of this department in the city. They are asked to help their colleagues in the department during times that there are activities that the government wants to extend to the people. It is expected that the people they are dealing with have different attitudes. In order to cope up with the varied attitudes of the people this group of women must possess wide knowledge, understanding and empowerment on the different aspects in life. Thus, the researchers desire to assess the extent of women's empowerment in this community in terms of cultural, societal, and national setting.

Review of Related Literature

Different researchers define SES in various manner. Commonly, SES has three levels: low, moderate, and high (Woolfolk, 2007 as cited in Brogan, 2009). According to Brogan (2009), "SES is the measure of the influence that the social environment has on individuals, families, communities, and schools. The educational level of the mother is closely associated to these factors". Mostly, low SES is associated with families at the poverty level. The preceding definition is more or less the same with what was said by Demarest, Reisner, Anderson, Humphrey, Farquhar, and Stein (1993) that, a family's socioeconomic status is based on family income, parental education level, parental occupation, and social status in the community (such as contacts within the community, group associations, and the community's perception of the family) (as cited in "Socioeconomic Status", n.d.). Based on *Fact Sheet* (2013), low SES among women and the circumstances that are associated to it such as poverty, lower education, and poor health for children and families, ultimately affect overall well-being and

quality of life of a person and to our society as a whole. Education is considered one of the most important means to empower women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence which are necessary to participate fully in development processes.

The word empowerment is very popular; however it is one of the least understood in terms of how it is to be measured or observed (Suryanarayana et al., 2010). Page and Czuba, (1999) defines "empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives". This definition gives rise to the idea that a person who is empowered will be able to act on issues which they believe important for themselves, their own lives, communities societies and for their country at large. More or less a similar definition was given by Namtip Aksornkool (as cited in Suryanarayana et al., 2010) by saying that "empowerment is a process in which women gain control over their own lives by knowing and claiming their rights at all levels of society at the international, local, and household levels". According to *United Nations Population Fund*, (2008) "women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all". It is more difficult for the family to succeed when the family size is large and the increase in the number of family members could be contributed by the low status of woman in the family. However, when the woman is empowered the whole family will be benefited. This advantage will descend to the future generation. The paper of Suryanarayana et al., (2010) expressed an agreement to the online article titled *Guidelines on Women's Empowerment* (n.d.) when they pointed out that "an empowered individual would be one who experiences a sense of self-confidence and self-worth; a person who critically analyzes his/her social and political environment; a person who is able to exercise control over decisions that affect his/her life". Furthermore they suggested other components for women empowerment and these are ... "cultural and communal aspects; information and lessons on politics; and provision of planning and thinking skills". They further elaborated that women should know that they can act upon to improve their situation.

Conceptual Framework
The researcher made questionnaire inspired by the paper of Suryanarayana**,** Raju, Himabindu, and Alekhya, (2010) was employed. The schematic diagram below illustrates the significant components that encourage the development of this study.
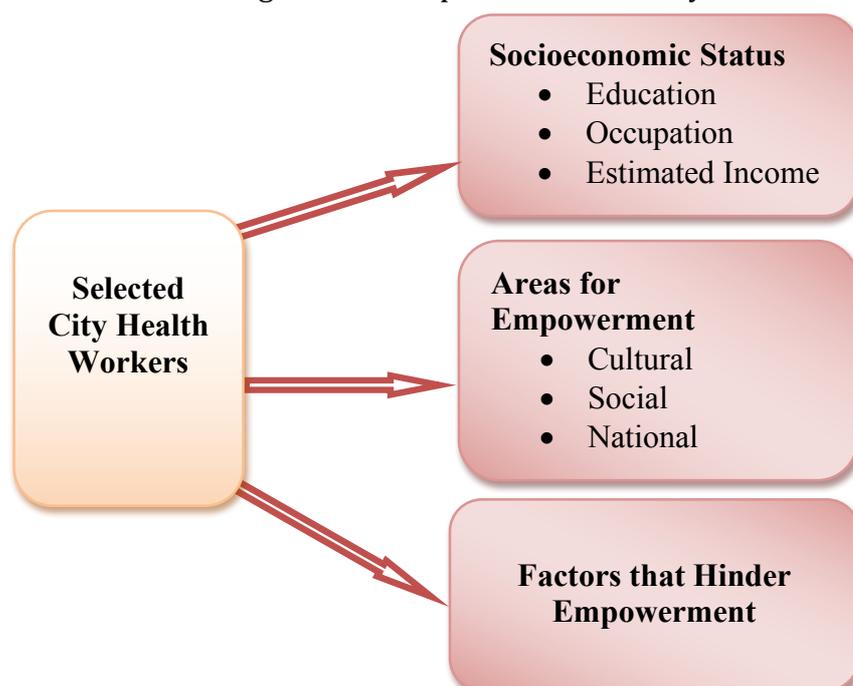
Socioeconomic Status
- Education
- Occupation
- Estimated Income

Areas for Empowerment
- Cultural
- Social
- National

Selected City Health Workers

Factors that Hinder Empowerment

Figure 1. Schematic diagram: The Research Components

The Problems

There are three main questions that the researchers specifically sought to answer, namely: (1) What is the socioeconomic status of the selected health workers? (2) What is the extent of women's empowerment in terms of cultural; social, and national setting? (3) What is the most common factor that hinders participants' empowerment?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to the different groups of people more specifically those who are in charge with the health of the citizens. They can utilize the result of this study to enhance the empowerment of the women in the said city. The findings of this study would add to the sets of valuable literature that are useful for future research endeavor which are related to this issue.

METHOD

The descriptive research method is utilized in this investigative work. A researcher made survey checklist form extracted from the paper of Suryanarayana, **Raju, Himabindu, and Alekhya,** (2010) with slight modifications in some terminologies is the main instrument used in this study to gather the data. The extent of participants' empowerment in terms of cultural, social and national context is measured by different indicators which are mentioned in Table 2, 3, and 4 below. On the other hand, the factors that hinders women empowerment are also mentioned in Table 5. All 26 employees who are working in the health sector in one of the cities in the subject country are the participants of this study. They are considered as the respondents of this study on the reason that they are more often involved in the services offered by the government; thus, the extent of their empowerment is essential to their job.

Statistical Tools and Treatment of Data

The frequency and percentile distribution were used for the interpretation of the SES of the participants. Further, the researchers constructed a four scale qualitative measurement. These are: *none at all (never empowered); less great extent (sometimes); great extent (often times); and very great extent (empowered most of the time)* to describe the gathered data as regards to the extent of women's empowerment on the areas of cultural, social and national setting. Numeric value is assigned to each qualitative scale that ranges from 1 as the lowest value to 4 as the highest value. Hypothetical mean range was also specified to give accurate value on participant's answers as follows (from lowest to highest range): 1.00-1.75; 1.76 – 2.50; 2.51-3.25; 3.26- 4.00). Moreover, though the four qualitative descriptions, namely: *seldom (infrequently), occasionally (majority of the time), frequently (most of the time), always (at all times)* are utilized, the frequency and percentile distribution are also employed to determine the most common factor that hinders the participants' empowerment.

Data Gathering and Scoring Procedure

The accomplished questionnaires were collected and the responses to each instrument were tallied. The data are then processed and tabulated. The frequency and percentage of some items were noted. The scales used by Guidance Center of La Salle Academy in SY 1999 – 2000 (as cited in Ejercito, 2010) are utilized to determine the participants'' social class grouping with slight modification as regards to monthly family income.

The Figure 2 below illustrated the weighing and scoring scales of the SES indicators such as education, occupation, and the combined monthly family income.

Figure 2. Weighing and Scoring Scales of the SES indicators

Education	Points
Not elementary graduate	2
Elementary level	3
Elementary graduate	4
High school level	5
High school graduate	6
College level	7
College graduate	8
Masters Degree	9
Doctorate Degree	10

Occupation	Category	Points
Top Government Official, College Professor, Lawyer, Engineer, Business Executives, Manager of Own Business, Scientist	A	10
Government Employee, Teacher, Nurse, Military, Police, Supervisor, Top Salesman, Foreman, Transportation Operator, Technician	B	8
Private Employee, Clerical Worker, Salesman, Driver, Mechanic, Seaman, OFW, Service Recreational Worker, Skilled Laborers	C	6
Fisherman, Farmer, Carpenter, Vendor, Store Keeper, Self-employed, Hunter, Logger, Unskilled Manual Laborer	D	4
Retired Employee, Pensionado	E	2
Non-working or housekeeper	F	0

Monthly Family Income (in terms OMR)	Points
9, 001 - 10,000.00 and above	80
8, 001 – 9, 000	72
7, 001 – 8, 000	64
6, 001 – 7, 000	56
5, 001 – 6, 000	48
4,001 – 5,000	40
3,001 – 4,000	32
2,001 – 3,000	24
1,001 – 2, 000	16
1,000 - below	8

Based on the answers of the participants and with the utilization of the   scales used   by Guidance Center of La Salle Academy in SY 1999 – 2000 (as cited in Ejercito, 2010), the points that correspond to the item as indicated above   be summed up, and from   the   total scores that are obtained as regards to participants' education, occupation, and combined monthly family income the social class groupings are determined as follows:

Total Points	Social Class
81- 100	Upper Class (High SES)
61-80	Middle Class (Middle SES)
0 – 60	Lower Class (Low SES)

The researchers made some modifications as to the amount of income. The Omani Rial (OMR) becomes the value of the currency used to suit the participants' combined income.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic Status

Brogan (2009) stated, "Socioeconomic Status (SES) classifications are established in an effort to find the means of identifying and changing inequalities". Furthermore, he stressed "SES is the measure of the influence that the social environment has on individuals, families, and communities. In this study, it shows that the participants are having the same level of their socioeconomic status. Apparently, one hundred percent (100%) of the participants belong to the lower class.

Table 1
Participants' Socioeconomic Status

Social Class Grouping	Total Points	F	%
Upper Class	81-100	-	-
Middle Class	61-80	-	-
Lower Class	0-60	26	100

This results could be an open illustration of the statement in the *Fact Sheet* (2013), which says that "disparities in the distribution of wealth, income, and access to resources, affects everyone". Furthermore, it continued revealing that negative psychological and physical health outcomes on women are linked with low SES. Moreover, it mentioned that low SES among women ultimately affects the overall well-being and quality of life of a person and to the society as a whole.

Cultural Empowerment

The role of men and women in the society are socially determined and these roles differ by locality and it changes from time to time. Women's empowerment is important to maintain progress and the comprehension of human rights ("*United Nations Population Fund*", 2008). The table below highlights the results as regards to the extent of participants' cultural empowerment.

Table 2
Extent of Participants' Cultural Empowerment

Cultural Empowerment Indicators	Item Average (μ)	QD
1. Extent of participation in crucial decision-making processes	3.19	GE
2. Scope of sharing of domestic work by men	3.12	GE
3. Feeling and expression of pride and value of work	3.35	VGE
4. Self-confidence and self-esteem	3.50	VGE
5. Ability to prevent violence	3.27	VGE
Factor Average	**3.29**	**VGE**

The results showed that among the five indicators of cultural empowerment the participants' self-confidence and self-esteem is at *very great extent* ($\mu = 3.50$). It clearly shows that this particular result elevated the entire cultural empowerment of the participants. They are empowered *most of the time* when it comes to the cultural aspects in their environment.

Social Empowerment

As presented in the table below, it can be grasped from its factor average (μ = 2.95) that participants' social empowerment is at *great extent*. It is noticeable in the indicators for social empowerment mentioned below that none of them garnered with a low or high item average in its weighted mean. This signifies that in its entirety the participants are *often times* empowered when it comes to matters in the society.

Table 3
Extent of Participants' Social Empowerment

Social Empowerment Indicators	Item Average (μ)	QD
1. Existence of women's organizations	2.88	GE
2. Allocation of funds for women and women's projects	3.04	GE
3. Increase number of women leaders at the community, city, municipality, state and national levels	2.92	GE
4. Involvement of women in the design, development and application of technology	3.15	GE
5. Involvement in community programs	3.19	GE
6. Contribution in productive enterprises	3.00	GE
7. Participation in politics and arts	2.81	GE
8. Involvement of women in non-traditional tasks	2.73	GE
9. Increase training programs for women	2.62	GE
10. Exercising women's legal rights when necessary	3.12	GE
Factor Average	**2.95**	**GE**

The study of Adamson, (2010) identified some barriers to achieve empowerment such as organizational cultures and regulatory frameworks. Women of today must have enough knowledge of some characteristics and traits in the organization in order that these would not hinder them to succeed. The present time requires great focus since less attentiveness and preparedness to relevant issues may manifest lack of empowerment. Adamson, (2010) also added that to improve participation and empowerment procedures must be established. His statement does some agreement on the indicators mentioned on the Table 3. While, in the findings of Varghese (2011) she stated "women in the Oman are better in household decision making and economic decision making than social empowerment". The time being, this result does a difference on the reason that the participants are coming from another region of the Sultanate of Oman.

National Empowerment
The results presented in Table 4 below highlights the national empowerment of the participants. It is clear in the result that the two (Nos. 4 and 5) out of five indicators are considered by the women-participants at *great extent*. This means that at *often times* they are empowered in terms of national aspects. On the other hand, three of the five indicators (Nos. 1, 2, and 3) are well-thought by the participants with the results of at *very great extent*. This signifies that alongside they are empowered *most of the time* in some point.

Table 4
Participants' National Empowerment

National Empowerment Indicators	Item Average (μ)	QD
1. awareness of my social rights	3.65	**VGE**
2. consciousness of women's political rights	3.42	**VGE**
3. integration of women in the general national development plan	3.31	**VGE**
4. existence of women's networks and publications	3.23	**GE**
5. deliberation by the media take on women's issues	3.00	**GE**
Factor Average	**3.32**	**VGE**

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that based on the overall results the women-participants' national empowerment is at *very great extent*. It indicates that they are empowered *most of the time* in relation to national matters. This result is somewhat similar to the findings of a research which was conducted in another region of the Sultanate of Oman. It revealed that

majority of their participants (women) are aware of their rights and duties related to issues in legal and political end (Varghese, 2011).

Factors that Hinder Participants' Empowerment
In the paper of Eldred, (2013) she discussed empowerment as a means of being equipped to take a better control of ones' life, including education. In the vision of a certain organization it was said that "the most vulnerable people in the world will have the power to lift themselves out of poverty and to create vital, healthy lives for their families and communities". However, it is also held that even though they have the power to boost themselves to get away from poverty they need more empowerment since there are many other aspects in the world which may hinder them to attain their goals. Women in particular need empowerment. In fact it was specifically mentioned by (*"Project Concern International",* 2016) that empowered women turn into the solution to poverty and poor health.

The Table 5 below presents the most common factors that hinder women empowerment. Loaded with the nine indicators only one of them was considered as *seldom or infrequently* a hindrance towards women's empowerment. Moreover, four of the factors appear as an impediment to women's empowerment *occasionally or majority of the time.*

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Table 5
Most Common Factors that Hinder Women Empowerment

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Factors that Hinder Women Empowerment	Item Average (μ)	QD
1. heavy work load	2.08	Occ
2. isolation/remoteness of women from each other	2.27	Occ
3. illiteracy	**3.19**	**F**
4. participation is limited due to traditional views	2.62	F
5. no funds	2.85	F
6. internal conflict/militarization/wars	1.96	S
7. disagreements/conflicts among women's groups	2.62	F
8. discriminatory policy in the environment	2.15	Occ
9. negative and sensational coverage of media	2.19	Occ

Meanwhile, the other four of the factors are pointed out by the participants as the main reasons   that frequently *(most of the time)* impede women's empowerment. These four factors occupied the mean range of 2.51 – 3.25.; however,   illiteracy ($\mu = 3.19$) shows   the higher item average among them. The result indicates that *frequently* illiteracy hindered most to women empowerment. The Oxford dictionary defines illiteracy as lack of knowledge in a particular subject and subject could mean an issue, concern, gist or matter to which in one way or another affects one's life or existence. In the study of Eldred, (2013) she stressed that literacy is important since it is a value added to communication and learning and it could be a guide towards empowerment.

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FINDINGS

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Based on the gathered data the researchers found the following:
1.   the socioeconomic status of the 100% participants of this study is at the lower class;
2.   participants revealed that they are empowered at *very great extent or most of the time* when it comes to the cultural aspects in their environment;
3.   the participants disclosed that they are empowered at *great extent or often times* when it comes to social matters;
4.   there is a split results in terms of women's empowerment in national aspects; however, the difference shown is with little significance considering that the overall

results are at *very great extent or* participants are empowered *most of the time* in relation to national matters;

5. the most common factor that hinders participants' empowerment is illiteracy

CONCLUSION

In the context of the findings of this study the researchers conclude that the socioeconomic status of the participants does not have an immense contribution to limit their empowerment on the cultural, social and national setting since the participants revealed that their empowerment in cultural and national setting are at very great extent while in the social setting is at great extent. The discoveries shown in this study are found to be not completely in agreement to some parts of other researchers' outcome as regards to these topics. Furthermore, as manifested by the participants, illiteracy is the foremost reason that hinders empowerment. Literally, any particular educational level in which may involve money is not only what literacy all about. It refers also to competence or knowledge, the know-how attitude of a person, to a specific area.

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