

EMERGE LEARNINGS REPORT

FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS IN INDIA ON QUANTITATIVE MEASUREMENT OF GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT MAY 2017

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The EMERGE [Evidence-based Measures of Empowerment for Research on Gender Equality] project focuses on measurement of gender equality and empowerment for development and health in India. To build understanding of the state of the field and gaps that should be prioritized for measurement development, we conducted interviews with key experts in the field. This report outlines key learnings from these interviews in terms of the experience and expertise of research leaders in this area, their recommendations regarding important and innovative measures, their concerns regarding the current gender equality and empowerment (GE/E) measures available, and priority areas for future work.

INTERVIEWS

Phone calls were conducted from January to April 2017 with identified key experts who have experience and expertise in the area of GE/E measures.¹ Research experts were identified from a BMGF-funded landscape analysis of gender equality research experts working on health or development in India. We reviewed the papers from these investigators, as well as papers citing them, to identify additional investigators. We also identified scholars by conducting a rapid review of peer reviewed publications of the last 2 years using the search terms “gender equality” or “gender empowerment” and “India” in PubMed, EconLit, SocIndex, and PsycInfo. We compiled a list of all authors and then used google to identify their self-described areas of expertise, and Web of Science to assess their H-index, which is designed to reflect the impact and use of a researcher’s work. We also used Web of Science to assess total number of publications and number of publications in the past year. The top scholars, both senior and newer scholars, were identified based on the above described indicators and contacted for interview. All identified researchers were required to highlight gender as an area of focus and have published a peer-reviewed paper as first author on gender equality and health or development in the past two years. Additional scholars were added based on recommendations from these initial scholars, subsequent to verification of active research and meeting the above noted criteria for inclusion. A total of 30 participants were included in the interviews, from the fields of economics, demography, psychology, sociology, public health and medicine, working in academic institutions as well as non-governmental organizations.

PROCEDURES

Selected scholars were contacted for interview via email and invited to participate in a short phone call on the topic of GE/E measurement in India. All interviews were conducted by trained interviewers with graduate degrees in public health and experience of working in India; phone calls were between 20-30 minutes in length. Interviewers took detailed notes from each call. Questions included the following:

1. We would like to know more about your work in gender, particularly in gender-related measurement.
2. Can you speak of your experience in the development and use of GE/E measures (probing on content foci, populations of focus, whether and how they created new measures, how they selected existing measures, and psychometric testing)? Do you have any papers you would like to share?
3. What are some of the gaps and opportunities you see in GE/E measurement in India?
4. Are you interested in measurement development? Is that their future research interest/upcoming work in pipeline?
5. Are there other researchers, within your institution, or other organizations you would recommend we reach out to?
6. Are there any researchers or projects across different dimensions in gender related work (economic, political, social, sustainability, health, etc.) you would like to recommend to us for inclusion in this effort?

Participants were thanked for their time and relevant papers, documents, or recommended contacts were collected.

¹ It is important to note here, that the EMERGE project defines measures as those directly used to collect data, and not construction of variables based on the items collected in a dataset.

KEY FINDINGS

Good Measures and Measurement Experts Exist, but Science of Measurement Could Be Improved. Researchers largely felt that there were a number of good GE/E measures at the individual and household level in India. They noted the availability of high quality large scale data sets that include GE/E measures, and the use of these measures by numerous researchers since these were publically available data sets with measures in the areas of demography and public health (NFHS), education (ASER), agriculture (WEAI) and economics (IHDS). They also noted their and others' experiences with measure development historically, as well as index development using standard measures included in the publically available data sets. However, they additionally noted that measurement science including a standard of formative work and expert input for measure development as well as broad psychometric testing was not the norm, nor was it commonly trained in India. Additionally, much of the work highlighted GE/E measurement based on gender differentials in development outcomes (e.g., employment, education, asset ownership) rather than gender empowerment (e.g., decision-making control).

Age, Culture and Contextual Adaptations of Measures Are Needed. Many researchers highlighted that, while the large scale surveys have much to offer, the measures may not always fit the diverse populations of India. For example, items on financial control may assess women's control over clothing purchases, but some women or communities may not have clothing purchase as an option, due to culture or extreme poverty. Sensitive questions such as those on domestic violence or sexual behavior may also require different approaches; the more sensitive issues may require privacy and debriefing, approaches not always taken in large scale surveys. Age was also highlighted as an issue for greater tailoring, particularly in terms of reaching 11-14 year olds, which have been less considered in prior research efforts. Ensuring that items are developmentally tailored at their level of understanding and comfort is important.

Intersectionality Must be Considered, Particularly as Relates to Mental Health. Related to adaptation was the recommendation for measures that are attune to intersectionality and the greater disadvantage that is brought by social issues like being poor, lower caste, and less educated, in addition to being female. Researchers particularly highlighted the importance of understanding the unique vulnerabilities faced by socially marginalized adolescent girls, and the role of mental health issues for them and others contending with multiple forms of social restriction or oppression. Researchers noted that the intersection of social issues with mental health is not well understood in the Indian context, nor is the trauma of experiencing or even witnessing domestic violence. Some also noted that there is inadequate research to understand and measure the social norms that restrict women's mobility and autonomy, and how these too may contribute to mental health issues or limit access to mental health care. There is a lack of measures on gender as a structural determinant of mental health starting in adolescence and morphing into more serious problems later in life.

Education Research is Often Restricted to Gender Differences. Education research is largely restricted to gender differences in performance and advancement, without sufficient measurement of what creates or influences these observed differences. Additionally, researchers were concerned that many children, and disproportionately girls, are lost to surveys due to low attendance or drop out. More recently, education surveys have started looking at the availability of toilets and water at schools, as these directly affect girls' attendance and dropout. Researchers noted the need for the surveys to be expanded to capture how onset of menstruation and availability as well as access to sanitary pads may affect girls' enrollment and dropout. Additionally, researchers recommended the need for focus on measures related to young girls' employability through education, and not just vocational skills. One researcher noted that youth surveys have documented that although girls save more than boys and as many girls have bank accounts as boys, far more number of boys had and operated their bank account independently compared to girls. Additional measures that can be more explicative regarding these types of observed findings are needed.

Time Use, Productivity and Labor Force Participation is a Major Focus. Researchers emphasized that an expansion of activity profile and time use by women is needed beyond the dichotomy of doing paid work and not doing paid work, to know how women spend their time as well as understand the various activities they do that may not be counted as full time paid work. There is currently no data on how much time women work at home or give to their family including unpaid work which is not included in female workforce participation rate. Measures do not count all the work women do and how much that contributes to the nation's GDP. Most commonly, part time agricultural work or home based agricultural work done by women is uncouned. Moreover, we still don't know much about women's power over economic resources

like ownership of assets and access to resources such as land or credit. Many household surveys ask the head of a household questions on wealth including ownership of land and assets, negating women's perspectives on these. An individual level wealth index could help measure economic assets and ownership specific to women. There is women's economic empowerment measurement development and expansion, but more is needed. For example, while bank account assessment is seen across survey, credit data on women's bank accounts is not available. Additionally, as it remains the case that women are less likely to be employed or more likely to earn less than their male counterparts, better measures of women's household economic decision-making control are needed.

Among women in labor, there is a gap in understanding what constitutes work-related empowerment. Existing measures do not assess whether a woman's labor is exploitative in nature, or is not contributing to her empowerment or financial equity. To understand the impact of women in labor on empowerment, there may be a need to look at intermediary empowerment outcomes like increased agency leading to a more sustainable empowerment. Measures of women's economic partnerships and decision making control in agriculture and other livelihoods are also lacking. In a context of organizing for women's economic empowerment, and measurement of such organizing, Self Help Groups (SHGs), funded by the government of India's National Rural Livelihood Mission and/or by non-governmental organizations, were identified as being central. Researchers described the need to assess how microcredit, solidarity and collective organization in SHG networks influence gender equality and empowerment. Many researchers discussed a critical gap in capturing the process of empowerment for women and girls, particularly in the context of the SHGs which are designed to improve agency and action. They recommended measures of women's negotiation and action to understand the empowerment process.

Measures of Women's Political Engagement and Government Leadership are Weak. SHGs and their collective action were highlighted as important for supporting women's political engagement and leadership. Through SHGs, women connect to local panchayats and authorities, but measurement of these connections and their indications of empowerment or agency are needed. Researchers highlighted that women's leadership is a particularly understudied area, and that there is a need for greater understanding of the role of gender in leadership and how gender and caste may intersect to affect women's leadership. The role of policy in this realm, and measures of women's awareness and perceptions of these policies are needed. For example, there is reserved participation for women in government positions, which can be documented at the level of parliament, but is not so easily assessed for the *panchayat*, *zila parishad* and other local levels of government. Further, women can sometimes gain the political position but are controlled by their husband, and current measures such as counts of women's representation will not capture this concern. Similarly, implementation and influence on empowerment process of various legal and behavioral incentive based government efforts remains a concern.

Data on Gender-Based Violence Outside of Domestic Violence is Limited. While researchers recognized the availability of domestic violence data, there was much concern regarding the inadequate measures of sexual violence and autonomy. While the researchers knew of the sexual violence items on large scale surveys such as NFHS, there was a collective sense that sexual violence is not as well captured by these items resulting in underreporting, especially among adolescents and older women. They also noted the need to include broader measures of coercive sexual behavior, including private and public sexual harassment. Researchers also discussed the lack of measurement of attitudes, norms, and reactions to all forms of violence/harassment of women and girls, since media coverage on the issue has increased over the past few years. There has been a lot of general public discourse, and young men and women's groups' innovative campaigns, on these issues in India in recent years that are an important indicator of change and are not captured in measurement. Measurement from men and boys, as well as police and law enforcement officials, are particularly important to capture.

CONCLUSION

Researcher knowledge, capacity, and interest in GE/E measures development in India is substantial and cuts across a number of domain areas, including economics (e.g. time use, labor force participation, asset ownership and control), household (e.g., domestic violence, household decision-making), health (sexual and reproductive health, mental health), and politics (e.g., political organizing and SHGs). Some good measures exist but gaps remain. Measures development science is nascent in India, but measurement use and index development from existing measures is common. Focus on GE/E measures development in the context of India would be timely and can build on extensive in country scientific capacities as well as substantial survey utilization at all scales and across diverse populations.

Recommended Citation

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LIST OF RESEARCHERS INTERVIEWED

Name*	Title	Institution
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Ashwini Deshpande	Professor	Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University
Bina Aggarwal**	Professor	School of Environment, Education and Development, University of Manchester
Farzana Afridi	Associate Professor	Indian Statistical Institute, Delhi
Gita Sen***	Distinguished Professor & Director	The Ramalingaswami Centre on Equity and Social Determinants of Health, Public Health Foundation of India
Hema Swaminathan	Assistant Professor	Indian Institute of Management Bangalore
K.G. Santhya	Senior Associate	Population Council
Kalpana Vishwanathan	Co-founder	Safetipin app Formerly involved with Safe Cities Survey/Safe Delhi for Women Campaign, Jagori
Lakshmi Lingam	Professor, Director's Office	Tata Institute of Social Sciences
Mala Ramanathan	Professor	Sree Chitra Triunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology
Manas Pradhan	Assistant Professor	International Institute of Population Sciences
Ratna Sudarshan	Fellow	National University for Educational Planning and Administration
Ravi Verma	Regional Director (Asia)	International Center for Research on Women
Ravinder Kaur***	Professor	Indian Institute of Technology Delhi
Rohini Somanathan	Professor	Delhi School of Economics
Sapna Desai	Independent researcher	Epidemiologist focused on women's health and evaluation
Sayeeda Unisa	Professor	International Institute of Population Sciences
Seema Sahay	Scientist	National AIDS Research Institute
Shabana Mitra	Assistant Professor	Indian Institute of Management Bangalore
Shalini Bharat	Deputy Director (Academic) & and Professor	School of Health Systems Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences
Shireen Jejeebhoy	Independent researcher	
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*Names alphabetized by first name

** Participated in an one-on-one meeting

*** Email communication