

## Original Research Article

# "Empowering Rural Voices: Unveiling the Dynamics of MGNREGA Beneficiaries through a Social Work Lens"

### **Abstract:**

*"In this comprehensive study, we delve into the intricate tapestry of MGNREGA beneficiaries' perspectives, unravelling a rich array of insights that illuminate their empowerment journey. From bolstering communication skills to navigating complex socio-economic landscapes, the beneficiaries' narratives provide a nuanced understanding of empowerment facets. The findings not only underscore the transformative potential of MGNREGA but also spotlight the role of social work methodologies in amplifying and sustaining this positive impact. This exploration extends beyond mere statistical analyses, offering a profound examination of the human dimensions that shape empowerment dynamics in rural India."*

**Keywords:** *MGNREGA, Empowerment, Women's Empowerment, Gender Roles, Social Empowerment, Economic Empowerment, Psychological Empowerment, Social Work, Social Work Implications, Transformative Change, Community Engagement*

### **Introduction**

In the vast tapestry of India's rural landscape, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) stands as a testament to the nation's commitment to poverty alleviation, rural development, and social justice. Enacted in 2005, this pioneering legislation sought to provide a social safety net for the country's most vulnerable populations by guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment to every rural household. With a primary focus on labour-intensive public works, MGNREGA was envisioned as a transformative mechanism, promising not only economic self-sufficiency but also the empowerment of rural communities. The MGNREGA, since its inception, has been a topic of intense national and international interest. Praised for its audacious goals and criticized for its complex implementation, it has sparked debates and discussions across the spectrum of development studies. At its core, this ambitious program aimed to break the cycle of rural poverty by

ensuring that the most marginalized individuals could access an essential human right - the right to work and earn a dignified livelihood. Over the years, MGNREGA has achieved substantial success in providing employment opportunities, building rural infrastructure, and improving the socio-economic conditions of millions of beneficiaries. However, to genuinely grasp the impact of this program and its implications on the lives of those it serves, a more nuanced and comprehensive approach is imperative. This research paper, titled "Empowering Rural Voices: Unveiling the Dynamics of MGNREGA Beneficiaries through a Social Work Lens," emerges as a significant contribution to this critical discourse. It endeavours to go beyond the statistics and administrative facets of MGNREGA, reaching deep into the lives of its beneficiaries, and in doing so, sheds light on the complex dynamics at play in rural India. The unique aspect of this research lies in its fusion of social work perspectives with economic and sociological analysis. Social work, as a discipline, is rooted in the principles of empowerment, advocacy, and human rights. In employing this lens, we aim to move beyond a purely quantitative assessment of MGNREGA's impact to understand the profound qualitative changes it can bring to the lives of beneficiaries. By doing so, we strive to contribute to the broader conversation on the effectiveness of social welfare programs and the real-world implications of such interventions. This research is not confined to an academic exercise. It is a call to action, a catalyst for positive change, and a tribute to the voices of rural India. It seeks to explore the hopes, dreams, aspirations, and challenges of those whose lives have been directly touched by MGNREGA, thereby weaving a more humane and realistic narrative of rural empowerment. The study employs a multifaceted methodology, including interviews, surveys, fieldwork, and data analysis, to unearth the untold stories of MGNREGA beneficiaries. By engaging with these narratives, we endeavour to bring forth the human faces behind the policy figures, allowing their experiences to shape the direction of our research. "Empowering Rural Voices" is not just an examination of the dynamics of MGNREGA; it is a testament to the resilience, creativity, and agency of rural communities. Through a rigorous analysis of their experiences, we aim to provide insights that can be instrumental in shaping future policy decisions and interventions. In doing so, we strive to empower rural voices and amplify their agency, thereby fulfilling the true spirit of MGNREGA and, indeed, the promise of a more equitable, inclusive, and just India.

### **Methods and Methodology:**

An integral goal of the research is to explore the multifaceted dimensions of empowerment experienced by MGNREGA beneficiaries, encompassing social, economic, and

psychological empowerment and to evaluate the socioeconomic impact of MGNREGA, including its contribution to livelihood security, income stability, and poverty alleviation among rural beneficiaries. For the purpose of the study researcher adopted Quantitative research technique using Descriptive research method. The primary data was collected from the beneficiaries from selected areas of Shivamogga District. The primary data was collected through structured Questionnaire Women Empowerment scale developed by Pallavi, G. and Shivalinggowda, N. S. 2021. Which is a five point likert scale. The reliability was 0.9289 wherein Split half method developed by Brown prophecy was employed. The data was subjected for statistical validity, which was found to be 0.9638. The data was collected from 80 respondents through interview. For analysing the data Descriptive and Inferential statistical test and SPSS 26.0 software was used.

### **Research Objectives:**

1. To Understand the Socioeconomic Dynamics of MGNREGA Beneficiaries.
2. To Examine the Impact of MGNREGA on Livelihood Security.
3. To Explore the Role of Social Work in MGNREGA Implementation.
4. To Analyse the Empowerment Dimensions of MGNREGA.
5. To Amplify the Voices of Rural Beneficiaries.
6. To Provide Recommendations for Policy Improvement.
7. To Contribute to the Advancement of Rural Development Practices.

### **Hypothesis:**

1. (H0): The social empowerment scores of the population follow a normal distribution.
2. (H1): The social empowerment scores of the population do not follow a normal distribution.
3. (H0): The economic empowerment levels of the population are normally distributed.
4. (H1): The economic empowerment levels of the population are not normally distributed.
5. (H0): The psychological empowerment scores of the population conform to a normal distribution.
6. (H1): The psychological empowerment scores of the population do not conform to a normal distribution.
7. (H0): People from different backgrounds (like age, gender, education) have similar social empowerment scores.

8. (H1): People from different backgrounds have different social empowerment scores.
9. (H0): People with different incomes have similar economic empowerment scores.
10. (H1): People with different incomes have different economic empowerment scores.
11. (H0): There's no change in psychological empowerment scores between categories.
12. (H1): There's a change in psychological empowerment scores between categories.

## Results and Discussion:

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic Variable	Counts	Per cent of Total	Cumulative Per cent
<b>Education Level</b>			
Illiterate	9	11.30%	11.30%
Primary Education	31	38.80%	50.00%
Secondary Education	30	37.50%	87.50%
Tertiary Education	10	12.50%	100.00%
Total	80	100.00%	
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Married	70	87.50%	87.50%
Widow	7	8.80%	96.30%
Separate	3	3.80%	100.00%
Total	80	100.00%	
<b>Household Income</b>			
20,000-30,000	31	38.80%	38.80%
30,000-40,000	42	52.50%	91.30%
40,000-50,000	5	6.30%	97.50%
50,000 above	2	2.50%	100.00%
Total	80	100.00%	
<b>Categories</b>			
SC/ST	37	46.30%	46.30%
OBC	24	30.00%	76.30%
General	12	15.00%	91.30%
Others	7	8.80%	100.00%
Total	80	100.00%	

**Age:** The Age Group 2 (30-41) dominates the sample with 55.0% representation, indicating its significance. Age Group 3 (42-53) follows with 23.8%, suggesting a notable presence of individuals in their early 40s to early 50s. Age Group 1 (18-29) comprises 21.3%, though smaller, it remains significant. Overall, the data portrays a balanced distribution across the three age groups, with Age Group 2 being the most prominent demographic.

**Education:** The data reveals a diverse educational distribution, with primary education being the largest category, followed closely by secondary education. Tertiary education represents a smaller proportion, while the presence of illiterate individuals underscores the need to address educational disparities. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of promoting access to higher education opportunities and addressing educational inequalities within the sample.

**Marital status:**The data indicates a predominantly married population, comprising 87.5% of the sample, while widowed individuals represent a smaller but notable proportion at 8.8%. Separated individuals constitute the smallest group at 3.8%, highlighting diverse marital statuses within the sample. Understanding these marital dynamics is essential for tailored support and demographic analyses.

**Income:** This data reveals a distribution of households across different income ranges. The majority fall within the "30,000-40,000" income range, followed by "20,000-30,000," "40,000-50,000," and "50,000 above" income brackets. Understanding household income distribution is crucial for assessing the economic diversity within the sample or population, which can inform economic policies, strategies, and social programs

**Categories:**The sample is predominantly composed of individuals from the "SC/ST" category, comprising 46.3% of the total, indicating a significant presence of Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. "OBC" individuals represent the second-largest group at 30.0%, highlighting the notable presence of Other Backward Classes. The "General" category constitutes 15.0% of the sample, while "Others" make up 8.8%, showcasing diverse representation. Understanding the distribution of social categories within the sample or population is important for addressing social equity, policy formulation, and ensuring fair representation and opportunities for individuals from various backgrounds.

**Table.no-2:Descriptive Analysis: Communication Skills, Decision Making Power, Leadership Skills, and Social Empowerment.**

	N	Mean	SD
Communication Skills	80	3.58	0.509
Decision Making Power	80	3.38	0.466
Leadership Skills	80	3.76	0.535
SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT	80	3.56	0.33

1. **Communication Skills:** The mean score for communication skills among the sample of 80 respondents is 3.58, indicating a relatively high level of perceived communication proficiency. The standard deviation of 0.509 suggests moderate

variability in responses, signifying that while the average perception is positive, there is some diversity in individual responses.

2. **Decision Making Power:** On average, respondents rated their decision-making power as 3.38, which mean they feel moderately influential in making decisions. The standard deviation of 0.466 shows that there's not much difference in how people responded, indicating general agreement among them about their decision-making abilities.
3. **Leadership Skills:** The mean score for leadership skills is 3.76, reflecting a relatively high level of perceived leadership qualities among the respondents. With a standard deviation of 0.535, there are some differences in how people rated their skills, suggesting that while most agree on positive leadership abilities, there are some fluctuations in individual opinions.
4. **SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT:** On average, people rated their social empowerment as 3.56, suggesting they feel moderately to highly empowered socially. With a low standard deviation of 0.33, there's not much difference in how individuals perceive this, showing a consistent opinion among respondents regarding social empowerment.

**Table.no-3:Descriptive Analysis: Annual Income, Food Consumption Patterns, Access to Credit, and Economic Empowerment.**

	N	Mean	SD
Annual Income	80	4.22	0.4
Food Consumption Patterns	80	3.93	0.452
Access to Credit	80	3.26	0.746
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT	80	3.84	0.318

1. **Annual Income:** The mean annual income of the sample, at 4.22, suggests a relatively high level. The low standard deviation of 0.4 indicates that there is low variability in the reported annual incomes, signifying a certain degree of consistency in the economic status of the respondents.

2. Food Consumption Patterns: The mean score for food consumption patterns is 3.93, indicating a moderate to high level of satisfaction or adequacy in food consumption. The standard deviation of 0.452 suggests that there is some variability in responses, but overall, there is a relatively consistent perception of food consumption patterns.

3. Access to Credit: The mean score for access to credit is 3.26, suggesting a moderate level of perceived access to credit. The higher standard deviation of 0.746 indicates greater variability in responses, suggesting diverse opinions regarding access to credit among the respondents.

4. Economic empowerment: The average economic empowerment score of 3.84 implies that respondents generally feel their economic empowerment is at a considerable or substantial level. This perception is further supported by the low SD of 0.318, indicating a consistent viewpoint on economic empowerment among respondents.

**Table.no- 4:Descriptive Analysis: Attitude toward Programme, Role Perception, Desire for Control, and Psychological Empowerment.**

	N	Mean	SD
Attitude Toward Programme	80	3.53	0.312
Role Perception	80	3.67	0.806
Desire for Control	80	4.18	0.449
PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT	80	3.72	0.271

1. Attitude toward Programme: The mean score for attitude toward the program is 3.53, indicating a moderate positive attitude among the participants. The low standard deviation of 0.312 suggests a relatively consistent positive attitude toward the program among the respondents.

2. Role Perception: The mean score for role perception is 3.67, suggesting a moderately positive perception of one's role. The higher standard deviation of 0.806 indicates greater variability in responses, suggesting diverse opinions regarding role perception among the participants.

3. Desire for Control: The mean score for desire for control is 4.18, reflecting a relatively high desire for control among the participants. With a spread of 0.449, it seems like respondents are all navigating in the same direction when it comes to their desire for control.

4. Psychological Empowerment: The mean score for psychological empowerment is 3.72, indicating a moderate to high level of psychological empowerment among the participants. The tight spread of 0.271 implies a unified viewpoint on psychological empowerment among the respondents.

**Table No- 5 Normality Distribution**

	N	Mean	SD	Shapiro-Wilk	
				W	p
Social empowerment	80	3.56	0.33	0.986	0.533
Economic empowerment	80	3.84	0.318	0.967	0.059
Psychological empowerment	80	3.72	0.271	0.99	0.788

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk normality test for three variables are as follows: for Social Empowerment, a test statistic (W) of 0.986 and a p-value of 0.533 suggest that the data can be considered approximately normally distributed, as the p-value exceeds the significance level (typically 0.05). In contrast, the data for Economic Empowerment, with a test statistic (W) of 0.967 and a p-value of 0.059, exhibits no significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis of normality, implying that it follows a normal distribution. Lastly, the data for Psychological Empowerment, with a test statistic (W) of 0.990 and a p-value of 0.788, indicates no significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis of normality, affirming that this variable can be considered approximately normally distributed.

**Table. No-6 One Way ANOVA Results**

Categories	N	Mean	SD	Test of Homogeneity of Variances		ANOVA	
				Levene's Statistics	Sig.	F	Sig.
Social empowerment				0.584	0.627	2.83	0.044
SC/ST	37	3.65	0.298				
OBC	24	3.56	0.37				
GENERAL	12	3.45	0.298				
MINORITY	7	3.31	0.269				

**Table 6a : Tukey Post-Hoc Test – SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT**

Group Comparison	MD	t-value	P-value
SC/ST vs. OBC	0.0901	1.08	0.705
SC/ST vs. General	0.197	1.854	0.257
SC/ST vs. Minority	0.338	2.566	0.058
OBC vs. General	0.107	0.944	0.781
OBC vs. Minority	0.248	1.806	0.279
General vs. Minority	0.141	0.929	0.789

Note: \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

**HO:** People from different backgrounds (like age, gender, education) have similar social empowerment scores.

The hypothesis tests if social empowerment among the beneficiaries differs across different categories to which they belong. Participants were divided into SC/ST, OBC, General, and Minority. The ANOVA results shows that the Social Empowerment scores among different categories of respondents do not differ significantly.

Levene's test is used to assess whether the variances of the social empowerment scores in different categories (SC/ST, OBC, GENERAL, and MINORITY) are approximately equal. The Levene's statistic is 0.584 with a p-value (Sig.) of 0.627. Further post-hoc tests or a pairwise comparison was conducted to identify which specific categories differ significantly from each other. According to the Tukey Post-Hoc Test results, there are no big differences in social empowerment scores between any of the category pairs. (SC/ST (M=3.65±0.29) vs. OBC (3.56±0.37), (SC/ST (M=3.65±0.29) vs. General (3.45±0.298), (SC/ST (M=3.65±0.29) vs. Minority (3.31±0.269), OBC (3.56±0.37) vs. General (3.45±0.298), OBC (3.56±0.37) vs. Minority (3.31±0.269), and General (3.45±0.298), vs. Minority (3.31±0.269) at the conventional significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). However, there is a borderline significance ( $p = 0.058$ ) between SC/ST and Minority, which may warrant further investigation or consideration.

**Table.No-7 One Way ANOVA Results**

	Categories	N	Mean	SD	Test of Homogeneity of Variances		ANOVA	
					Levene's Statistics	Sig.	F	Sig.
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT	SC/ST	37	3.84	0.328	0.598	0.618	1.12	0.347
	OBC	24	3.9	0.274				
	GENERAL	12	3.7	0.382				
	MINORITY	7	3.89	0.269				

**Table 7a: Tukey Post-Hoc Test for Economic Empowerment**

Comparison	MD	t-value	P-value
SC/ST vs. OBC	-0.0642	-0.773	.866
SC/ST vs. General	0.136	1.29	.572
SC/ST vs. Minority	-0.0505	-0.387	.98
OBC vs. General	0.2	1.78	.289

OBC vs. Minority	0.0137	0.101	1
General vs. Minority	-0.1864	-1.236	.606

Note. \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

(H0): People with different incomes have similar economic empowerment scores.

The hypothesis tests if Economic empowerment among the beneficiaries differs across different categories to which they belong. Participants were divided into SC/ST, OBC, General, and Minority. The ANOVA results shows that the Economic Empowerment scores among different categories of respondents do not differ significantly.

Levene's test is used to assess whether the variances of the social empowerment scores in different categories (SC/ST, OBC, GENERAL, and MINORITY) are approximately equal. The Levene's statistic is 0.598 with a p-value (Sig.) of 0.618. Further post-hoc tests or a pairwise comparison was conducted to identify which specific categories differ significantly from each other.

As per the Tukey Post-Hoc Test, no noteworthy differences were found in economic empowerment scores across any category pairs. (SC/ST (M=3.84±0.328) vs. OBC (3.9±0.274), (SC/ST (M=3.84±0.328) vs. General (3.7±0.382), (SC/ST (M=3.84±0.328) vs. Minority (3.89±0.269), OBC (3.9±0.274)vs. General (3.7±0.382), OBC (3.9±0.274)vs. Minority (3.89±0.269), and General (3.7±0.282), vs. Minority (3.89±0.269)at the conventional significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). The p-values for all category pairs are much greater than  $\alpha$ , implying that people with different incomes have similar economic empowerment scores. Therefore, the study does not find evidence of significant disparities in economic empowerment among the different categories.

**Table.No-8** One Way ANOVA Results

	Categories	N	Mean	SD	Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
					Levene's Statistics	Sig.	F	Sig.
Psychological Empowerment	SC/ST	37	3.73	0.217	4.29	0.008	0.461	0.711
	OBC	24	3.68	0.372				
	GENERAL	12	3.79	0.187				
	MINORITY	7	3.7	0.273				

Table 9 :Tukey Post-Hoc Test – PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

Comparison	MD	t-value	P-value
SC/ST vs. OBC	0.0517	0.72	0.889
SC/ST vs. General	-0.0575	-0.631	0.922
SC/ST vs. Minority	0.0328	0.291	0.991
OBC vs. General	-0.1092	-1.127	0.674
OBC vs. Minority	-0.0189	-0.16	0.999
General vs. Minority	0.0903	0.693	0.899

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The One-Way ANOVA did not detect statistically significant differences in psychological empowerment scores among the four categories, despite the violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances. This suggests that while the variances of psychological empowerment scores differ across categories, the means of psychological empowerment are not significantly different. Therefore, based on this analysis, there is no evidence of significant disparities in psychological empowerment among the different categories.. Further post-hoc tests or a pairwise comparison was conducted to identify which specific categories differ significantly from each other.

According to Tuckey post hoc test there aren't any big differences in psychological empowerment scores between any of the category pairs.(SC/ST (M=3.73±0.217) vs. OBC (3.68±0.372), SC/ST (M=3.73±0.217)vs. General (3.79±0.182), SC/ST (M=3.73±0.217) vs. Minority (3.7±0.273), OBC (3.68±0.372)vs. General (3.79±0.182), OBC (3.68±0.372)vs. Minority (3.7±0.273), and General (3.79±0.182), vs. Minority (3.7±0.273) at the conventional significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Therefore, study does not find evidence of significant disparities in psychological empowerment among the different categories. These findings suggest that, in terms of psychological empowerment, the groups represented by these categories are not significantly different from one another.

### **Illuminating Empowerment through the Lens of Social Work:**

The analysis of the data provides valuable insights into the demographic and empowerment profiles of the respondents. Social work can play a crucial role based on these findings:

#### **Demographic Profile:**

With a diverse age distribution, social workers can tailor programs and services to address the specific needs of different age groups. For example, empowerment programs for the age group 30-41 could focus on career advancement, while those for the age group 42-53 might target retirement planning or second career options.

#### **Education Level:**

Recognizing that a substantial number of respondents have primary and secondary education, social workers can design literacy and skill development programs to improve employability. For illiterate individuals, basic education and vocational training can be provided to enhance their economic empowerment.

#### **Marital Status:**

Given the prevalence of married individuals, social work initiatives may include support for family well-being, marital counselling, and financial planning. Programs designed for widows and separated individuals could focus on economic empowerment, emotional support, and access to resources.

#### **Household Income:**

Tailored financial literacy and microfinance programs can be developed for different income groups to enhance economic empowerment. Advocacy and policy recommendations for job creation and income generation opportunities for low-income households may be pursued.

#### **Social Categories:**

Social workers can advocate for policies that promote social equity and inclusivity, ensuring representation and opportunities for all categories. Programs could be initiated to address specific needs within each social category, such as skill development, entrepreneurship support, or educational access.

#### **Empowerment Scores:**

Based on the ANOVA and post-hoc analysis, social workers can conclude that there are no significant disparities in empowerment scores among demographic and social categories. This knowledge can guide resource allocation, program design, and policy recommendations that prioritize equity and social justice.

#### **Policy Recommendations:**

##### **Education Access and Enhancement:**

Develop programs to enhance education and skill development, with a focus on improving the educational attainment of illiterate and primary-educated individuals.

##### **Marital Support Services:**

Offer marital counselling and support services for married individuals to strengthen family bonds and well-being.

##### **Economic Empowerment Programs:**

Create income-generation opportunities, financial literacy programs, and access to microfinance for all income groups, considering the variance in income levels.

**Social Equity Initiatives:**

Advocate for policies that ensure equal representation and opportunities for all social categories, emphasizing the elimination of disparities in access to resources and services.

**Program Evaluation:**

Continue monitoring and evaluating empowerment programs to measure their effectiveness and adjust them to address the specific needs of each demographic group.

**Empowerment Consistency:**

Promote consistency in empowerment across demographic and social categories, ensuring that no group is left behind or disadvantaged.

**Conclusion:**

The analysis of the demographic profiles and empowerment scores has revealed important insights into the specific characteristics and needs of the target population. While there is diversity in the demographics, the study did not identify significant disparities in empowerment across various categories. This provides a foundation for social work interventions that aim to improve the overall empowerment of the population while tailoring programs to address specific demographic and social factors. By implementing the proposed policy recommendations and focusing on equity and inclusivity, social work can contribute to enhancing the well-being and empowerment of the entire community.

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