

Exploring Women Empowerment Levels in Welenchiti Town, East-Central Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study explores women's empowerment levels in Welenchiti Town, East-Central Ethiopia, focusing on personal, psychological, and socio-cultural dimensions. Using a descriptive research design and a quantitative approach, data were collected from 363 women through questionnaires and analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The findings reveal that women in Welenchiti Town exhibit high levels of personal empowerment, demonstrating autonomy in decisions related to healthcare access and financial contributions, although constraints remain in terms of social participation. Psychologically, the women exhibit self-satisfaction and openness to new experiences, but gaps persist in their confidence and skills in public speaking, leadership, and expressing their opinions. Socio-culturally, the women actively engage in social services and combat harmful practices, yet challenges exist in resolving household conflicts and addressing societal oppression. To achieve holistic empowerment, the study recommends initiating partnerships between stakeholders to address cultural norms, enhance women's confidence and leadership skills, and equip them with tools to challenge the societal constraints they face.

Keywords: Personal empowerment, Psychological empowerment, Socio-cultural empowerment, Economic empowerment, Political empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is a global issue that has seen significant progress in recent decades, particularly in developing regions. In Africa, initiatives such as the Maputo Protocol have aimed to promote gender equality and enhance women's rights (Moyo & Dhliwayo, 2019). Similarly, in Ethiopia, the government has taken steps to address gender disparities, including introducing policies to increase women's participation in decision-making and economic activities (Okumo, 2014). However, challenges persist, as socio-cultural norms and traditional gender roles continue to hinder women's full empowerment in many communities. Addressing these complexities requires a multifaceted approach that combines educational opportunities, economic empowerment, and the transformation of societal attitudes (LeRoux-Rutledge, 2020).

In recent years, the discourse surrounding women's empowerment has gained significant traction, particularly in developing regions. This is especially true in areas like Welenchiti Town, located in East-Central Ethiopia, where socio-economic dynamics are shifting and growing attention is being paid to gender equality. Understanding women's empowerment in this context requires a comprehensive examination of various factors, including access to education, economic participation, and societal roles. By assessing these dimensions, we can gauge the extent to which women in Welenchiti Town are able to assert their rights, make independent choices, and influence their communities.

The current paper aims to explore the levels of women's empowerment in Welenchiti Town, East-Central Ethiopia. While progress has been made in areas such as education and economic participation, there are still considerable challenges posed by entrenched cultural norms and inadequate support systems. The research gap lies in the need for a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional aspects of women's empowerment, including psychological, political, familial, personal, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions, and how they intersect to shape the lived experiences of women in this specific context. By addressing this gap, the study can provide insights that inform targeted interventions to enhance women's empowerment and promote a more equitable society in Welenchiti Town.

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2. OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women's empowerment serves as a cornerstone for achieving socio-economic development, intricately linked to broader societal progress. The active participation of women in psychology, political, familial, personal, economic, and socio-cultural contributes significantly to community resilience and prosperity.

2.2.1. Psychological empowerment of women

Psychological empowerment encompasses an individual's sense of self-efficacy, confidence, and ability to make autonomous decisions. This internal locus of control is a crucial component of women's empowerment, as it enables them to challenge and overcome societal constraints (Ogato, 2013).

2.2.2. Political empowerment of women

Women's political empowerment involves their active engagement and representation in decision-making processes, from local to national levels (Yu et al., 2023). This includes their ability to participate in elections, hold public office, and influence policy decisions that impact their lives and communities (nka et al., 2020).

2.2.3. Familial empowerment of women

Familial empowerment relates to women's autonomy and decision-making power within the household, particularly in areas such as resource allocation, childcare, and family planning. This domain is often heavily influenced by cultural norms and traditional gender roles, which can pose significant challenges to women's agency and voice within the family structure. Entrenched patriarchal structures and gender-biased socialization processes can limit women's ability to make independent decisions, control household resources, and participate equally in family-related matters (Shaw et al., 2016).

2.2.4. Personal empowerment of women

Personal empowerment encompasses women's agency over their own bodies, health, and overall well-being. This involves access to education, reproductive rights, and the freedom to make choices that align with their individual aspirations. This includes the ability to make informed decisions about their reproductive health, access to family planning resources, and the autonomy to pursue educational and professional goals without societal or familial constraints (Hinson et al., 2019).

2.2.5. Economic empowerment of women

Economic empowerment refers to women's access to and control over productive resources, such as land, capital, and employment opportunities. This dimension is crucial for women's financial independence and their ability to contribute to household and community development. It encompasses their ability to earn income, save, invest, and make strategic decisions about the use of economic resources, which can lead to greater economic security, improved livelihoods, and increased influence within the household and community (Deschenes et al., 2020).

2.2.6. Socio-cultural empowerment of women

Socio-cultural empowerment involves the transformation of societal attitudes and norms that perpetuate gender inequalities. This includes challenging patriarchal structures, promoting gender-equitable practices, and ensuring women's voices are heard and respected in the public sphere. These various dimensions of women's empowerment are intertwined and mutually reinforcing, underscoring the need for a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to addressing gender disparities (Panda, 2019).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Research Design

A descriptive research design is particularly suitable for exploring the empowerment level of women as it allows for a comprehensive examination of the various dimensions that related to their empowerment within a given context. By focusing on systematically describing the current state of women's empowerment, this research design enables researchers to capture a broad range of experiences, perceptions, and behaviors, providing a clear snapshot of how empowerment is manifested in different settings. Therefore, this study utilized a descriptive research design to accurately depict and analyze the empowerment levels of women.

3.2. Research Approach

The study utilized a quantitative research methodology, which entails the collection of numerical data such as scores and metrics. This approach enables the quantification and objective measurement of variables, thereby facilitating straightforward and manageable descriptive analysis. Accordingly, the researcher employed a quantitative approach throughout the investigation to analyze and interpret numerical data.

3.3. Data Sources and Types

Both primary and secondary data were gathered from relevant sources to achieve the study's objectives. Primary data was collected from women beneficiaries in the study area. Secondary data sources included books, articles, journals, research works, and internet resources relevant to the research topic. The data collected was primarily quantitative, with quantitative information obtained from women beneficiaries through questionnaires.

3.4. Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The sample size for this study was calculated using the Yamane (1967) formula, which is expressed as $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$, where N represents the total population size, and e denotes the margin of error. With the study population comprising 3,846 households, and the margin of error set at 7% (0.07), the formula was applied to determine an appropriate sample size. Substituting the values, the calculation proceeded as $n = \frac{3846}{1 + 3846(0.07)^2}$, resulting in a sample size of approximately 363 respondents. This method ensures that the selected sample is statistically representative of the target population, minimizing the risk of sampling bias while maintaining feasibility in terms of data collection and analysis. By employing this approach, the study achieved a balance between precision and practical constraints, enabling the generation of reliable and generalizable findings.

A multi-stage sampling approach was used to select study participants. First, sub-cities were randomly chosen. Next, Kebeles were also randomly selected. The population was then divided into two strata: married women in male-headed households and women in female-headed households, with stratified random sampling applied. The number of respondents from each group and selected Kebele was determined using probability proportional to size sampling. Finally, individual respondents were selected from the sampling frame using systematic random sampling.

3.5. Data Collection Tools

The researchers used a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires to collect primary data from the selected participants. These questionnaires were first developed in English and then translated into the local language to ensure clarity, avoid ambiguity, and facilitate understanding among the respondents. The questionnaires included Likert scale questions with five-point rating scales.

3.6. Methods of Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaires were cleaned, coded, entered, edited, and analyzed using SPSS software version 26. Descriptive statistical analysis, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, was used to explore the women empowerment level.

4. RESULT AND INTERPRETATION

4.1. The Empowerment Level of Women

The results pertaining to the degree of female empowerment in the research region are shown in this section. To give a thorough evaluation of women's empowerment, this research will employ a number of indices of empowerment, including economic, political, family, personal, psychological, and socio-cultural. To show the existing situation and differences in women's empowerment in the research region, statistical analysis and visual aids are used. In order to improve empowerment and advance gender equality, this section seeks to identify critical areas where interventions could be required.

Table 4.1: Perception of Respondents on Economic

Item no	Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1	I am generating income by my own	53	14.6	11	3.0	18	5.0	84	23.1	197	54.3
2	I have accumulated assets by my name	100	27.5	71	19.6	30	8.3	90	24.8	72	19.8
Overall mean (SD)		3.45(1.277)									

Source: Survey data, 2023

The findings in Table 4.1 highlight respondents' perceptions of their economic empowerment, focusing on independent income generation and asset accumulation. A majority (54.3% strongly agree, 23.1% agree) reported generating income independently, indicating active economic participation and self-reliance, though a minority (17.6%) disagreed, reflecting challenges in this area. In terms of asset accumulation, responses were more varied; while 44.6% expressed agreement, a significant portion (47.1%) disagreed, revealing persistent barriers to owning assets. With an aggregate mean score of 3.45 and a standard deviation of 1.277, the results suggest moderate economic empowerment among participants, marked by individual disparities. These findings underscore the need for targeted strategies to support women's economic activities and asset ownership, addressing the underlying challenges to enhance overall empowerment.

Table 4.2: Perception of Respondents on Political

Item no	Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1	I attend the speeches of election contestants	142	39.1	47	12.9	18	5.0	90	24.8	66	18.2
2	I vote for the candidate of my own choice	107	29.5	24	6.6	0	0.0	89	24.5	143	39.4
3	I have been a representative in any legal bodies of government	178	49.0	89	24.5	36	9.9	6	1.7	54	14.9
Overall mean (SD)		2.72(1.344)									

Source: Survey data, 2023

The data in Table 4.2 highlights respondents' perceptions of political empowerment, assessed through attendance at election speeches, voting independence, and government representation. A significant proportion of respondents (52%) reported not attending candidate speeches, reflecting limited engagement, though 43% participated actively. Voting

independence showed higher engagement, with 63.9% affirming they vote for their preferred candidate, while 36.1% felt restricted. However, political representation was notably low, as 73.5% disagreed with having served in government bodies, and only 16.6% reported such participation. The overall mean score of 2.72 and standard deviation of 1.344 indicate moderate to low political empowerment with varied experiences among respondents. These findings emphasize the need for targeted efforts to foster greater political participation and representation for women, aiming to strengthen their political empowerment.

Table 4.3: Perception of Respondents on Familial

Item no	Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1	I can take a family member to a health center when they have encountered a health problem	20	5.5	21	5.8	5	1.4	146	40.2	171	47.1
2	I can decide on my own to entertain guests	7	1.9	3	0.8	4	1.1	132	36.4	217	59.8
3	I can decide on my own the kind of religion that I follow	16	4.4	20	5.5	10	2.8	124	34.2	193	53.2
4	I can decide on my own about children education	66	18.2	51	14.0	89	24.5	62	17.1	95	26.2
5	I can decide on my own about children marriage	124	34.2	90	24.8	77	21.2	36	9.9	36	9.9
Overall mean (SD)		4.03(.887)									

Source: Survey data, 2023

Table 4.3 highlights respondents' perceptions of familial empowerment across five decision-making areas: health, entertaining guests, religion, children's education, and children's marriage. Most respondents reported high empowerment in health-related decisions, with 87.3% agreeing they could take family members to health centers. Similarly, 96.2% felt confident deciding to entertain guests, and 87.4% expressed autonomy in choosing their religion. However, decision-making regarding children's education showed mixed results, with 43.3% agreeing, 32.2% disagreeing, and 24.5% neutral. Autonomy over children's marriage was notably low, with 59% disagreeing and only 19.8% agreeing. The overall mean score of 4.03 and standard deviation of 0.887 suggest a high level of familial empowerment, particularly in health, religion, and hospitality decisions. Nonetheless, the findings highlight significant challenges in education and marriage-related decisions, underscoring the need for initiatives to enhance women's autonomy in all familial aspects.

Table 4.4: Perception of Respondents on Personal

Item no	Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1	I can decide on my own to go to the market to purchase clothes	4	1.1	10	2.8	6	1.7	71	19.6	272	74.9
2	I can decide on my own to go to local health center/doctor's clinic for the health care	6	1.7	6	1.7	6	1.7	70	19.3	275	75.8
3	I can decide on my own about the festival or village fair etc.	57	15.7	21	5.8	54	14.9	96	26.4	135	37.2

4	I help my family with my money	42	11.6	39	10.7	41	11.3	115	31.7	126	34.7
Overall mean (SD)		4.15(.722)									

Source: Survey data, 2023

Table 4.4 reveals respondents' perceptions of personal empowerment across four domains: purchasing clothes, accessing healthcare, attending festivals, and providing financial support. The majority expressed strong autonomy in shopping and healthcare decisions, with 94.5% agreeing they could independently go to the market and 95.1% reporting similar confidence in seeking healthcare. Decision-making about attending festivals or fairs showed more variability, with 63.6% agreeing but 21.5% disagreeing, and 14.9% remaining neutral, indicating notable constraints for some women. Financial support to families elicited mixed responses, as 66.4% agreed they could help financially, while 22.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 11.3% were neutral. With an overall mean score of 4.15 and a standard deviation of 0.722, the data reflects a high level of personal empowerment among respondents, though disparities in festival participation and financial autonomy point to areas needing attention.

Table 4.5: Perception of Respondents on Psychological

Item no	Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	41	11.3	5	1.4	28	7.7	93	25.6	196	54.0
2	I have the confidence to speak in public	88	24.2	56	15.4	46	12.7	52	14.3	121	33.3
3	I take a positive attitude towards myself	16	4.4	11	3.0	40	11.0	50	13.8	246	67.8
4	I am able to do things as well as most other	4	1.1	5	1.4	82	22.6	79	21.8	193	53.2
5	I am open to exercise new experiences	24	6.6	10	2.8	6	1.7	100	27.5	223	61.4
6	I wish I could have more respect for me	11	3.0	9	2.5	8	2.2	81	22.3	254	70.0
7	I have the ability to be a leader in a given social or economic group	94	25.9	48	13.2	94	25.9	42	11.6	85	23.4
8	I have confidence in my opinion, even if all the members are contrary to my opinion	47	12.9	54	14.9	98	27.0	76	20.9	88	24.2
Overall mean (SD)		3.87(.747)									

Source: Survey data, 2023

Table 4.5 reveals respondents' perceptions of psychological empowerment across eight dimensions, including self-satisfaction, public speaking, self-attitude, and leadership confidence. Most respondents reported high self-satisfaction (79.6% agreed), positive self-attitudes (81.6% agreed), and openness to new experiences (88.9% agreed). However, public speaking confidence was lower, with 47.6% agreeing while 39.6% disagreed. Leadership ability also showed varied responses, with 35.0% agreeing, 39.1% disagreeing, and 25.9% remaining neutral. Similarly, confidence in expressing contrary opinions reflected mixed levels, as 45.1% agreed but 27.8% disagreed, and 27.0% were neutral. The overall mean score of 3.87 and standard deviation of 0.747 indicates a generally high level of psychological empowerment, though with room for improvement in public speaking, leadership, and assertiveness.

Table 4.6: Perception of Respondents on Socio-cultural

Item no	Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1	I resolve household conflicts by replacing male	92	25.3	50	13.8	56	15.4	52	14.3	113	31.1
2	I can take challenges and believe in own self	82	22.6	23	6.3	40	11.0	113	31.1	105	28.9
3	I receive respect in the neighborhood	20	5.5	4	1.1	13	3.6	36	9.9	290	79.9
4	I actively get involved in social services	25	6.9	5	1.4	24	6.6	53	14.6	256	70.5
5	I fight against the oppressive forces in the society	71	19.6	49	13.5	48	13.2	31	8.5	164	45.2
6	I work for prevention of child labor and bonded labor	12	3.3	4	1.1	12	3.3	34	9.4	301	82.9
7	I report to legal bodies if the community practice female genital mutilation	19	5.2	7	1.9	20	5.5	26	7.2	291	80.2
Overall mean (SD)		4.02(.866)									

Source: Survey data, 2023

Table 4.6 reveals a high level of socio-cultural empowerment among respondents, with significant strengths in areas like neighborhood respect (89.8% agreement), involvement in social services (85.1% agreement), preventing child labor (92.3% agreement), and reporting female genital mutilation practices (87.4% agreement). However, perceptions were more varied regarding resolving household conflicts traditionally handled by men (45.4% agreement vs. 39.1% disagreement) and fighting oppressive societal forces (53.7% agreement vs. 33.1% disagreement). Confidence in taking challenges was moderately positive (60% agreement) but with notable gaps. The overall mean score of 4.02 reflects strong socio-cultural empowerment, though targeted interventions are needed to address disparities in conflict resolution and societal activism.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

The study reveals substantial levels of empowerment among women in the study area across personal, psychological, and socio-cultural dimensions. Women demonstrate high autonomy in personal decisions such as accessing healthcare, purchasing clothing, and contributing financially to their families, although constraints persist in areas like attending festivals. Psychologically, most women exhibit strong self-satisfaction, a positive attitude, and openness to new experiences, though confidence in public speaking, leadership roles, and expressing contrary opinions remains uneven. Socio-culturally, women are actively engaged in social services, prevention of child labor, and combating harmful practices like female genital mutilation. However, challenges remain in addressing household conflicts and confronting oppressive societal forces. Overall, while women in the study area display notable empowerment, there are distinct gaps that need attention to achieve holistic empowerment.

5.2. Recommendations

To enhance overall empowerment, multifaceted strategies are essential. Personal empowerment can be strengthened by promoting access to resources and addressing cultural norms that restrict women's decision-making in social activities. Psychological empowerment requires targeted programs to boost public speaking skills, leadership capacity, and confidence in expressing opinions. Socio-culturally, interventions should focus on equipping women with tools to resolve household conflicts and tackle oppressive societal norms through training, awareness campaigns, and legal empowerment

initiatives. Partnerships between government bodies, NGOs, and community groups can amplify these efforts, ensuring comprehensive and sustainable empowerment for women in the study area.

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