

**RESEARCH PAPER****The Role of Education and Mental Well-Being in Empowering Women for Social Progress****<sup>1</sup>Dr. Shazia Inayat Ali and <sup>2</sup>Farah Sami**

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**ABSTRACT**

Education provides the empowerment of knowledge, skills, confidence, and the ability to make decisions. Psychological well-being provides the ability to address difficulties and form healthy relationships that contribute to the family, the community, and society as a whole. Even though there is progress in education and in viewing the importance of mental health, numerous barriers still exist for women. Gender inequality, poverty, discrimination, cultural barriers, and inadequate health care and social stigma all impede the empowerment of women. The study results indicate a significant positive correlation between education and the mental well-being of women. The data sample is based upon 200 observations for this research analysis. Educated women were more confident and had better mental health, more job opportunities, and improved decision-making. The study suggests the need for more integrated programs that combine education and mental health services and gender-based social programs for the empowerment of women.

**KEYWORDS** Women's Empowerment, Education, Mental Well-being, Gender Equality, Social Development

**Introduction**

In the recent past, women's empowerment has been at the top of the agenda of social and economic development priorities. Women's empowerment is the process whereby women are enabled to gain control and agency over their lives and the resources to make their own choices (UNESCO, 2026). Empowerment opens up the economic, social, political and educational spheres of life for women and enables them to challenge the structures that reinforce and perpetuate social and gender discrimination. Of the many barriers to women's empowerment, education and mental health have been identified as critical factors that affect women's empowerment and the development of society as a whole (UNDP, 2025).

Education is probably the most powerful means of effecting social change. It provides women with knowledge, skills, and competencies for personal growth and active citizenship. Women who are educated obtain better employment, have higher incomes, can make better health and family choices, and can exercise greater agency in their advocacy work. Improvements in educational attainment empower individuals to make better choices and lead to social improvements like reduced poverty, better health, and greater social and civic engagement (Yount *et al.* 2018).

While progress has been made closing gender gaps, women still have inequitable access to education. Multiple barriers exist. Institutional discrimination, negative cultural norms, gender discrimination, and limited financial means all restrict a society's ability to educate its women and children. Many international and national gender equitable education initiatives have made great progress, but many women, especially in developing and marginalized communities, are still unable to access education. This deprivation limits their socioeconomic progress and self-determination. Women empowerment is not just about gender equitable access to education. Mental well-being is also a factor. Mental well-

being refers to emotional, psychological, and social health. It is important for women to manage their mental and emotional states, form healthy and meaningful social relationships and participative decision-making. Gender discrimination, domestic violence, women's caregiving roles, workplace equity, and social norms, affect women differently, and indirectly affect their mental health, and impact their empowerment (Sharma & Kaur, 2020).

Mental well-being and education have a reciprocal relationship. Education complements good mental health by improving self-esteem, social consciousness and providing the cognitive ability to think critically and solve problems. Women with strong mental well-being also pursue educational opportunities. Having both access to education and mental well-being allows women the ability to break barriers to full social and economic participation. Women's advancement does not just benefit women. It positively impacts families, communities, and even countries. Research shows that improvements in women's education positively impact their children's education and health, and lead to women's increased community and economic engagement. The changes initiated by women positively impact future generations and result in better communities (UN, 2023).

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal 3, 4, and 5, emphasize health, education, and women's empowerment. They also recognize that achieving these goals will require multiple approaches to create both educational opportunities and accessible mental health care. It will be the responsibility of policy makers, educators, and health and community service providers to create environments that support the development of women intellectually, emotionally, and socially. Women, especially in developing nations, face many barriers to both health and education. Poverty forces families to send educated children to menial jobs and to marry off daughters. Disrupting education through early marriage and childbearing results in a lifetime of limited opportunities. Work discrimination and the gender pay gap also cause stress and mental illness. The stigma surrounding mental health in developing nations also prevents women from receiving treatment (Eagly & Sczesny, 2019).

Empowerment of women has some advantages and disadvantages with the development of technology. Virtual classrooms offer women the chance to learn skills even if they are in isolated areas. Digital counseling and therapy can be found and accessed more easily. Unfortunately, women are at a greater threat of experiencing online inequality and cyberbullying. The importance of education and mental health was made very clear during the COVID-19 outbreak. Schools being closed meant many millions of girls lost their only access to an education. At the same time, the loss of mental health during this time was particularly damaging to women. This showed us that systems lack the capability to meet the educational and mental health needs of women in times of emergencies. Community support systems are very promising in women empowerment. Encouraging family, friends, and mentors as well as community groups can be very supportive in the pursuit of education and mental health. These systems are very important to overcome the barriers women face and to build the confidence to seek opportunities which empower them (Kabeer, 2016).

Work environments are very important in women empowerment and mental health. Support for gender equality, balance in work, and mental health in the workplace can promote the well-being of women and further their mental health. Negative reinforcement will counteract the support barriers that women face in the pursuit of education. Empowerment, mental wellness, and education are very much interconnected. Education equips women with the ability to think critically and advocate for themselves. Psychological resilience and well-being give the fortified strength and assurance to women to achieve greater goals. Together they can set women on the path to reaching their goals of autonomy and economic gains. Given the importance of the issues raised above, this research intends to study the contribution of education and mental well-being to the social empowerment of women. By examining the views of women from different backgrounds, this study intends to develop applicable recommendations to assist and guide the design of policies and

programs. It is critical to understand the interaction of the issues in order to develop interventions that address educational and mental health inequities, and to achieve ongoing empowerment and gender equality (Miedema *et al.* 2018).

### **Literature Review**

Women's empowerment has been a subject of research in sociology, psychology, education and development studies. Most scholars of women's empowerment agree that it involves increasing access of women to resources, opportunities and the ability to make choices. Both education and mental well-being are lauded as important constituent elements of women's empowerment. Education is said to enhance productivity. The Human Capital Theory contends that education is an investment that begets economic returns and upward social mobility. In the case of women, education implies economic empowerment and the ability to negotiate as an equal partner in the family (Nussbaum, 2011).

Sen's Capability Approach is concerned with improving the freedoms and the agency of people. In Sen (1999), education is the path people take to make choices and lead a life that is meaningful to them. In the case of women, education brings an array of employment opportunities and enhances one's ability to strengthen one's social and political engagement as well as heightens personal empowerment all the while reducing one's susceptibility to social and gender discrimination. The results of most studies show that there is a positive relationship between women's education and empowerment. The evidence demonstrates that educated women tend to marry later, have fewer children, are more active in the labor force and have a greater say in family matters. Furthermore, education increases women's awareness of their rights and improves access to health care.

Malhotra *et al.* (2002) viewed empowerment as a construct with economic, sociocultural, familial, legal, political, and psychological dimensions. They argued that mental empowerment included psychological empowerment, self-confidence, self-esteem, and mental well-being. Mental well-being has emerged as a crucial dimension of empowerment. The World Health Organization describes mental health as a state of well-being in which individuals realize their abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and are able to contribute to their community. Good mental health allows women to reach their educational and career goals. There is research evidence to show that women suffer from higher levels of anxiety and depression than men. This is attributed to a combination of biological, social, and environmental causes. Psychological distress amongst women, caused by gender-based violence, economic problems, caregiving, and social discrimination, can restrict empowerment opportunities and negatively impact educational attainment (Malhotra *et al.* 2002).

According to Self-Determination Theory, the fulfillment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness positively impacts psychological well-being. Academic environments that support these needs can help improve mental health and promote achievement among women. Studies based in developing countries show that mental health can be positively impacted by the right type of educational interventions. While literacy improves self-confidence and social participation, vocational training helps build economic independence and psychological resilience. The evidence supports the idea that education can improve the mental well-being of the community directly and indirectly. Education and mental well-being are two sides of the same coin. Socioeconomic improvements and improved reasoning skills lead to better mental health with increased educational attainment. Positive mental health, in turn, promotes the attainment of educational goals (Psaki *et al.* 2018).

Social support networks are key components in mediation for empowerment. Psychological well-being and educational achievement are positively affected by family support, peer support, and community support. Women who are socially supported are

more likely to pursue education and are more likely to seek help for their psychological issues. Women's educational and psychological issues are heavily influenced by gender roles and social expectations, particularly in developing countries where mobility, education, and careers of women are heavily restricted by social beliefs. These restrictions can result in poor self-image and a sense of helplessness. There is a strong correlation among mental health, economic empowerment, and educational attainment. Education is the gateway to employment, which provides economic empowerment. Financial independence enhances self-image and the ability to make decisions. It also negatively impacts financial and mental stress (Sharma & Kausar, 2020).

Research on women's mental well-being in the workplace emphasizes the need for supportive environments. Flexibility in the workplace, equality, and mental health resources lead to satisfaction and empowerment. Discrimination and harassment lead to poor mental health and impairment to professional advancement. Worldwide, women have greater access to education because of the recent innovation in digital technologies and online educational resources. Improved digital mental health technologies have also provided teletherapy and online counseling.

The recent research in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic focused heavily on the mental health and educational hardships of women. The burden of sick and dying family members and loss of employment contributed to the heightened stress and anxiety. There was a greater disruption in the education of girls facilitated by the unresponsive support systems (Narayan, 2005).

The focus of feminist theories is on the structural features of empowerment. Here, education and interventions in mental health are placed in the context of the wider systems of oppression. Structural obstacles of the workplace in the form of inequitable policies, abusive and discriminatory laws, the inequitable distribution of resources, and patriarchy require an integrated approach. Intersectionality emphasizes the plurality of women's experiences. Aspects such as women's socioeconomic status, ethnicity, the presence of a disability, and geography determine women's access to education and mental health systems. As a result, women's empowerment calls for the integration of a plurality of inequities. Research shows that mental health programs that are integrated with educational programs reinforce women's empowerment. Programs that combine educational and mental health services strengthen women's empowerment by enhancing their self-confidence, resilience, and leadership (Stromquist, 2015).

The gaps in the research on the intersection of education and mental health in varying contexts, despite the strides that have been made in developing both of these disciplines, are of great concern. Of special interest are the strategies that seek to address inequities in the long term and promote empowerment in a sustainable way. This study aims to address these gaps by analyzing these interfaces within a framework that is holistic and recognizes the importance of the interconnectedness of education, mental health, and empowerment.

## **Material and Methods**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to examine the relationship between education, mental well-being, and women's empowerment.

### **Population and Sample**

The target population consisted of women aged 18–55 years from urban and rural communities.

- Population: Adult women
- Sample Size: 200 respondents
- Sampling Technique: Stratified Random Sampling

**Data Collection Tools**

**Primary Data**

- Structured Questionnaire
- Five-point Likert Scale
- Personal Interviews

**Secondary Data**

- Academic Journals
- Government Reports
- Books
- International Organization Publications

**Table 1**  
**List of Variables**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Dependent Variable</b>
Education Level	Women's Empowerment
Mental Well-being	Women's Empowerment

**Data Analysis Techniques**

- Frequency Distribution
- Percentage Analysis
- Mean Score Analysis
- Correlation Analysis
- Descriptive Statistics

**Results and Discussion**

**Table 2**  
**Educational Attainment of Respondents**

<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Primary	30	15
Secondary	50	25
Higher Secondary	45	22.5
Graduate	50	25
Postgraduate	25	12.5
Total	200	100

The findings indicate that 62.5% of respondents possess higher secondary education or above. This suggests a relatively educated sample, enabling meaningful assessment of education's influence on empowerment.

**Table 3**  
**Perceived Impact of Education on Empowerment**

<b>Response Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Strongly Agree	90	45
Agree	70	35
Neutral	20	10

Disagree	15	7.5
Strongly Disagree	5	2.5
Total	200	100

Eighty percent of respondents agreed that education significantly contributes to empowerment. This supports the hypothesis that education enhances confidence, decision-making abilities, and socioeconomic opportunities.

**Table 4**  
**Mental Well-being and Self-Confidence**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	85	42.5
Agree	75	37.5
Neutral	20	10
Disagree	15	7.5
Strongly Disagree	5	2.5
Total	200	100

Approximately 80% of respondents reported that positive mental well-being enhances self-confidence and participation in social activities.

**Table 5**  
**Correlation Between Education and Mental Well-being**

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Education and Mental Well-being	0.72

The correlation coefficient of 0.72 indicates a strong positive relationship between educational attainment and mental well-being. Women with higher educational levels tend to experience better psychological health and resilience.

**Table 6**  
**Barriers to Women's Empowerment**

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Financial Constraints	60	30
Social Norms	50	25
Mental Health Challenges	40	20
Limited Educational Access	30	15
Workplace Discrimination	20	10
Total	200	100

The most significant barrier to women's empowerment was deemed to be financial problems, followed by social restrictions, with the need to offer mental health support identified by 20% of participants.

**Discussion**

Findings indicate that the most important factor for women's empowerment is education. Better education positively impacted women's confidence, ability to make decisions, and their ability to participate in the economy. Findings were consistent with previous studies that identified education's incredible potential for improving women's agency and their overall status in society.

This study also highlights the value of good mental health for empowerment. Women who reported good mental health had greater confidence and were more active in their communities. Good mental health adds to the beneficial effect that education has on empowerment.

The high level of education and good mental health indicates that schools have the potential to promote mental health and resilience. Schools that promote a sense of

belonging, and support personal development, can have a positive, far reaching impact on both education and mental health.

Existing barriers of finances, social norms, and mental health mean that there is still a long way to go to improve women's empowerment. It will take concerted and collaborative efforts from government, education, health, and community services to make changes to these systems.

## **Conclusion**

Access to education and the presence of empowering mental health resources highly influence women's empowerment. This study's findings suggest that education increases women's knowledge and confidence, and improves their economic standing and decision-making skills. In addition, mental well-being fosters resilience, self-esteem, and social participation, which provide critical components of a strong foundation for the advancement of both the individual and the community.

This research shows that greater education and improved mental well-being positively correlate, and explains the psychological and social returns that come from investing in education. Educated and mentally well women are more likely to engage in economic activities, fight for their rights, and develop their communities.

Despite the progress made on integrating mental well-being and education, financial barriers, social and cultural constraints, mental health stigma, and inequitable access to education continuously hinder women's empowerment. Therefore, the structuring of mental health advocacy and educational advancement needs to be integrated to ensure effective women's empowerment.

Women's empowerment is a structural and economic sustainable development goal, and its advocacy leads to the strengthening of both women and children, increases community and economic well-being, and greater social well-being in the community.

## **Recommendations**

In light of the findings, the following policy recommendations are suggested:

### **Educational Policy**

- Guarantee that quality education is universally available to girls and women.
- Increase scholarship and financial aid opportunities to disadvantaged women.
- Promote digital literacy and online learning.
- Include gender equality education in school.

### **Mental Health Policies**

- Provide affordable mental health counseling services in schools and communities.
- Build mental health awareness to reduce stigma.
- Prepare teachers to notice and help mental health issues for girls.
- Implement psychological health programs in schools.

### **Economic Empowerments Measures**

- Increase women's access to trade skills and programs for starting their own business.
- Create equal access to jobs and equality in pay.
- Provide education for financial literacy and opportunities for microfinance.

### **Social and Community Initiatives**

- Create women's community support networks.
- Build stronger laws to protect against gender discrimination and gender-based violence.
- Get men and community leaders involved to promote gender equality.
- Fund mentoring programs to connect young women with accomplished women mentors.

### **Government and Institutional Actions**

- Increase funding for women's education and mental health services.
- Create policies that combine education, health, and gender equality.
- Create evaluation systems for monitoring empowerment programs.
- Support collaboration between government, NGOs, and education.
- Create women's education and health services that meet SDG gender equality goals.

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