

## **Assessment of Awareness Level of Women's Rights and Women Related Laws – A Study on Women in Thoothukudi Town**

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### **Abstract**

Women are the real pillars of the society, on which the present as well as the future generations of a nation are built. Women in India now participate in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science & technology, etc. Women are the true wealth of India. They have contributed in various fields and have made the country proud at every possible circumstance and hold important positions in the world. They are capable of leading the country, making history and inspiring many. There are innumerable laws have been enacted by the legislature, but the position of women remains unchanged. Women are the subject of mistreatment both inside and outside the house. However, another reality of Indian society is that there is a systematic discrimination and neglect of women's rights in India, which could be in terms of inadequate nutrition, denial or limited access to education, diminished health and property rights, child labour, domestic violence etc. There are many amazing examples of successful women at different levels, but at the same time violence, discrimination, torture, and exploitation make the life of another bunch of women miserable. A woman is no longer a child bearer and care taker of the home only, but a warrior who can fight for her own identity. The present study was conducted to assess the awareness level on Women's rights and women related laws among selected women of Thoothukudi Town.

**Keywords:** Women, Awareness Level, Sources of Awareness, Women's Rights, Women related Laws.

### **Introduction**

Women are the pioneers of nation and according to a report of secretary general of United Nations women constitute 50 percent of human resources, the greatest human resource having remarkable potentiality next only to man. Women in India now participate in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc. Women are the true wealth of India.

They have contributed in various fields and have made the country proud at every possible circumstance. They also hold important positions in the world. They are also capable of leading the country, making history and inspiring many. The women's rights are an absolute, fundamental and inseparable part of human rights. The complete development of women's personality, freedom and their equal involvement in political, social, economic and cultural life are sine qua non for international as well as national development. The discrimination in any form against women is violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. To prevent all these injustices against women, India drafted various instruments for protection of women's right and dignity. It is after independence, India has taken the responsibility to frame laws for the protection of women. Indian legislature has tried to modify the old concept of male subjugated society by adopting the principles of impartiality. The constitution provided equal rights of men and women and also entrusted the duty upon the state to make special provisions to recognize the interests of women effectively. As a result, various central as well as state laws were enacted to prevent exploitation and discrimination of women.

## **Related Reviews**

Women are the wealth of India and they have contributed in every field possible and have made country feel proud. However, another reality of Indian society is that there is systematic discrimination and neglect of women's rights in India, which could be in terms of inadequate nutrition, denial or limited access to education, health and property rights, child labour, domestic violence etc. A study conducted by Patil, Tadasad and Deepthi in 2015 stated that only discussion can't change the position of women. Women's rights are most often associated with reproductive rights, sexual and domestic violence, and employment discrimination. But women's rights also include immigration and refugee matters, criminal justice, health care, human rights, social security and public benefits. Hate (1978) in her book stated that there is positive change in the political, economic and social status of middle class working and non-working women living in four cities in Maharashtra with the advent of independence. Mojumalua commented on the case of Bishwanath Das Vs Maya Das, which acquires significance as it highlights the deficiencies and inadequacies that exist in the present legal system, statutory laws, judiciary and the society. The Indian society is still plagued by victimization of girl child through performance of child marriage despite the forthcoming Beijing Summit focusing on women's right and the affirmation in the UN Declaration of 1989 to which India is a signatory. There is an urgent need for law reform to protect the status and rights of child brides in India (Mojumalua, 1988). Singh, Singh and Gul in 2014 revealed that there is significant difference in awareness of legal rights between working women and non-working women. The working women have more awareness of legal rights than non-working women whereas; there was also significant difference in the exercise of legal rights between working women and non-working women. Sharma (2006) expressed the views of the author, emerged after a symposium held in

Bombay to discuss the effects of the post 1990 economic liberalization era on the women workers in organized and unorganized sectors and to recommend thereby a legal strategy for empowerment of women comparing the situation in India and U.K. It explains that due to the job losses in organized sector there will be further pressure on the unorganized sector. A study conducted by Sarkar discussed some recent Indian feminist theorizing of violence by activist leaders closely involved in movements of women as peasants, forest dwellers and members of the lower castes (Sarkar, 1994).

## **Need & Relevance**

There are many amazing examples of successful women at different levels, but at the same time violence, discrimination, torture, and exploitation make the life of another group of women miserable. We live in a world where goddesses are worshiped and women get tamed, harassed, abused, raped, and kidnapped every single day. Keeping a check on the number of women-related cases, the government of India provides crucial rights to Indian women. Unfortunately, many of the women do not know their rights. The crimes against women occur every minute in India. Women are not safe, be it their houses, public places or the workplace. They are human beings like their fellow men and enjoy the same rights and duties as men. Moreover, given the number of crimes that are committed against women, it is pertinent that women are unaware about the laws that are in place to protect them. Women should always remember that knowledge is power. As a parent, wife, daughter, employee and a woman it is important that they should be aware of these Rights and Laws for them. Thus, under these circumstances, it is very much necessary to make thorough insights to create awareness on women's rights and women related laws.

## **Objectives**

- To assess the most useful source of knowledge on women's rights and women related laws
- To analyze the level of awareness regarding women's rights among selected women of Thoothukudi town
- To suggest some measures to create awareness on women's rights and women's safety laws

## **Methodology**

### **Profile of Study Area**

Thoothukudi, also known by its former name Tuticorin, is a port city, a municipal corporation and an industrial city in Thoothukudi district in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The city lies in the Coromandel Coast of Bay of Bengal. Thoothukudi

is the capital and headquarters of Thoothukudi district. The city is also known as "Pearl City". It is a seaport which serves southern Tamil Nadu including the inland cities of Tirunelveli, Nagercoil, Virudhunagar, Ramanathapuram, Madurai etc. It is one of the major sea ports in India with its history dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. According to Confederation of Indian Industry, Thoothukudi has the second highest Human Development Index in Tamil Nadu next to Chennai. Marine fishery, pearl and chunk fishing are famous in this district from time immemorial. According to 2011 census, Thoothukudi city had a population of 237,830 with a sex-ratio of 1,010 females for every 1,000 males, much above the national average of 929. A total of 24,959 were under the age of six, constituting 12,684 males and 12,275 females. Tamil is spoken by most, and the standard dialect is the Thoothukudi Tamil dialect. English is also widely spoken. Thoothukudi had an average literacy rate of 92.10 percent with male literacy being 94.84 percent, and female literacy being 89.37 percent.

### Sampling Procedure & Data Collection

The present study was conducted to know the awareness regarding Women's rights among selected women of Thoothukudi Town. The study uses both primary and secondary data for analysis. For this research, convenience random sampling technique has been adopted. The primary data was collected from the respondents with the help of a self-constructed questionnaire. A sample size of 125 women has been purposively selected from Thoothukudi Town. The use of secondary data is made wherever necessary to a limited extent. The collected data is tabulated and discussed in the light of the objectives. The data was processed and analyzed with simple percentages and representations have been indicated through bar charts.

### Results & Interpretation

**Table 1: General Information of the Sample Respondents**

Characteristics	Number (%)	Characteristics	Number (%)
<b>Age</b>		<b>Family Type</b>	
20 - 30	47 (37.60)	Nuclear Family	86 (68.80)
30- 40	53 (42.40)	Joint Family	39 (31.20)
40-50	25 (20.00)	<b>Caste</b>	
<b>Educational Status</b>		SC/ST	26 (20.80)
Primary Education	16 (12.80)	BC	65 (52.00)
Secondary Education	30 (24.00)	General	34 (27.20)
Graduates	39 (31.20)	<b>Religion</b>	
Post Graduates	40 (32.00)	Hindu	52 (41.60)
<b>Classification</b>		Christian	61(48.80)
Housewives	30 (24.00)	Muslim	12 (9.60)
Students	40 (32.00)	<b>Marital Status</b>	
Working Women	35 (28.00)	Married	79 (63.20)
Self Employed	20 (16.00)	Unmarried	46 (36.80)

N=125

From the above table it is found that the majority of the respondents 42.4 percent (N=53) belong to the age group of 30 to 40 years, 37.6 percent (N=47) of the respondents belong to the age group of 20 to 30 years and the remaining 20 percent (N=25) of the respondents belong to 40-50 years. While analyzing the caste of the respondents it is found that more than half of the respondents (N=65, 52 percent) belong to BC, 27.2 percent (N=34) belong to General and 20.8 percent (N=26) belong to SC/ST category. 36.8 percent (N=46) of the respondents are single in status and 63.2 percent (N=79) of them are married.

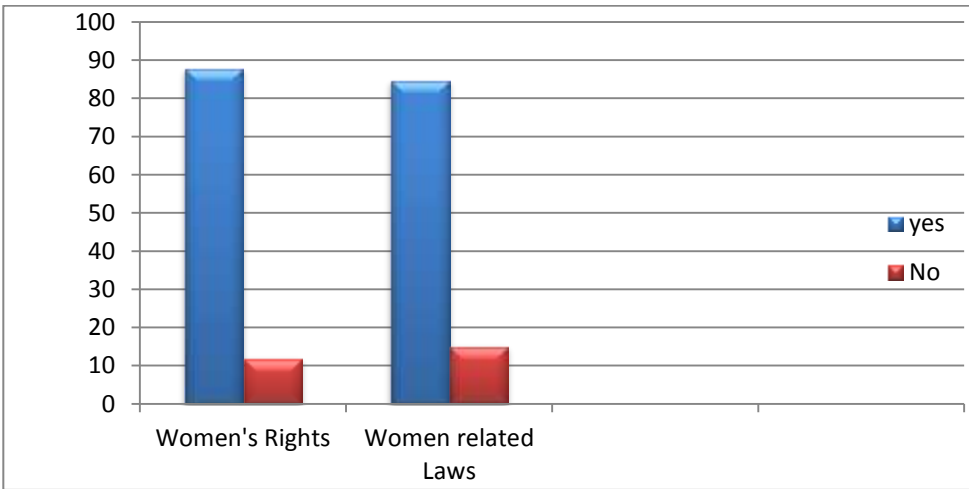
The above table also showed that 68.8 percent (N=86) of the respondents live in Nuclear families, whereas 31.2 percent (N=39) of the respondents live in Joint families. 48.8 percent (N=61) of the respondents are Christians, 41.6 percent (N=52) respondents are Hindus and only 9.6 percent (N=12) are Muslims. Regarding the classification of the sample respondents, 32 percent (N=40) of them are students, 28 percent (N=35) are working women and 24 percent (N= 30) are Housewives. The above table also explains the educational status of the sample respondents as 12.8percent (N=16) have completed their primary education, 24 percent (N=30) their secondary education, 31.2 percent (N=39) are graduates and 32 percent (N=40) are Post Graduates.

**Table 2: Awareness Regarding Women's Rights and Women Related Laws**

Women's Rights			Women Related Laws		
Awareness	Frequency	Percentage	Awareness	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	110	88.00	Yes	106	84.80
No	15	12.00	No	19	15.20
Total	125	100	Total	125	100

N=125

**Chart 1: Awareness Regarding Women's Rights and Women Related Laws**



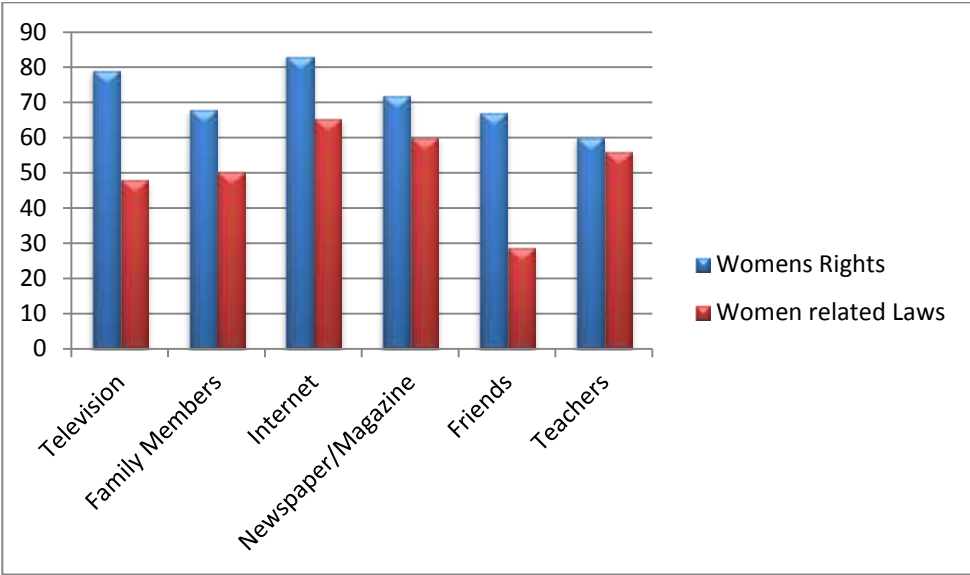
The Table and Chart 1 indicates the awareness of the respondents regarding women's rights and it is found that 88 percent (N=110) of the respondents do agree that they are aware of the women's rights and only 12 percent (N=15) of them are not aware of majority of the Women's Rights. The above table reveals that 84.8 percent (N=106) of the respondents agreed that they are aware of the Women related laws where most of them are students and working women and only 15.2 percent (N=19) are unaware of the many women related laws.

**Table 3: Preferred source for gathering Information on Women's Rights and Women related Laws**

Source	Women's Rights		Women Related Laws	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Television	99	79.20	60	48.00
Family members	85	68.00	63	50.40
Internet	104	83.20	82	65.60
Newspaper/Magazine	90	72.00	75	60.00
Friends	84	67.20	36	28.80
Teachers	75	60.00	70	56.00

N=125

**Chart 2: Preferred source for gathering Information on Women's Rights and Women related Laws**



The above table and chart indicates distribution of preferred source for gathering information on women's rights, wherein it was found that 83.2 percent (N=104) of the respondents prefer internet and social media, 72 percent (N=90) prefer

newspaper/ magazine for gathering information, 68 percent (N=85) prefer family members as their source, 79.2 percent (N= 99) as television, 60 percent (N=75) prefer teachers and 67.2 percent (N=84) preferred their friends to gather information on women's rights. Regarding the women related laws it was found that 65.6 percent (N=82) of the respondents prefer the Internet(social media), 60 percent (N=75) prefer Newspaper and Magazine, 56 percent (N=70) prefer Teachers (Having the Core Subject Legal Economics in their V Semester) 50.4 percent (N=63) prefer family members, 48 percent (N=60) prefer the Television and 28.8 percent (N=36) prefer friends.

**Table 4: Awareness Level of Sample Respondents on Special Women's Rights**

S.No	Women's Rights	Awareness Level	
		Number	Percentage
1	Right to draw an equal salary	95	76.00
2	Right to dignity and decency	78	62.40
3	Right against workplace harassment	96	76.80
4	Right against domestic violence	112	89.60
6	Female sexual assault victims have the right to keep their identity anonymous	93	74.40
7	Right to get free legal aid	80	64.00
8	Women have right not to be arrested at night	108	86.40
9	Right to register virtual complaints via e-mail or Registered Post	78	62.40
10	Right against indecent representation	56	44.80
11	Right against being stalked	48	38.40
12	Women have a right to Zero FIR	50	40.00

N=125

The above table indicates the awareness level of the respondents about the special Women Rights. 76 percent (N=95) of the respondents were aware of the right to draw an equal salary, 62.4 percent (N=78) of the respondents were aware of the Right to dignity and decency. Also, 76.8 percent (N=96) respondents revealed that they are aware of the right against domestic workplace harassment. Majority of the respondents 89.6 percent (N=112), 86.4 percent (N=108) have knowledge on the Right against domestic violence and the Right not to be arrested at Night. 74.4 percent (N=93) of the respondents were aware that Female sexual assault victims' have the right to keep their identity anonymous. 64 percent (N=80) of the respondents revealed that they were aware of the right to get free legal aid. From the study it was assessed that 62.4 percent (N=78) of the respondents were aware of the Right to register virtual complaints via e-mail or registered post, 44.8 percent (N=56) were aware of the right against indecent representation, 38.4 percent (N=48)

were aware of the Rights against being stalked and 40 percent (N=50) were aware that women have a special right to Zero FIR.

**Table 5: Awareness Level of Sample Respondents on some special Women Related Laws**

S. No	Women's Rights	Awareness Level	
		Number	Percentage
1	Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929	125	100.00
2	Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987	125	100.00
3	The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006	125	100.00
4	Special Marriage Act, 1954	95	76.00
5	Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	102	81.60
6	Indian Divorce Act, 1969	90	72.00
7	Maternity Benefit Act, 1961	86	68.80
8	Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971	80	64.00
9	Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013	84	67.20
10	Indecent Representation of Women (Prevention) Act, 1986	76	60.80
11	National Commission for Women Act, 1990	80	64.00
12	Equal Remuneration Act, 1976	96	76.80
13	Married Women's Property Act, 1874	99	79.20
14	Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005	116	92.80
15	Payments of Wages Act, 1936	98	78.40
16	National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001	80	64.00
17	Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment Bill, 2007	98	78.40

N=125

The above table reveals that 100 percent (N=125) of the respondents were aware of the well-known and very important Laws Like Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 and The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006. 76 percent (N=95) were aware of the Special Marriage Act, 1954, 72 percent (N=90) on Indian Divorce Act, 68.8 percent (N=86) on Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, 64 percent (N=80) on Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, 67.2 percent (N=84) on Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013. Majority of the respondents nearly 81.6 percent (N= 102) were aware of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and 92.8 percent (N= 116) on Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. 78.4 percent (N=98) of the respondents were aware of Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment Bill, 2007 and Payments of



Wages Act, 1936. 79.2 percent (N=99) of the respondents were aware of Married Women's Property Act, 1874, 76.8 percent (N=96) of Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, and 64 percent (N=80) of National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001.

## **Discussions**

On the analysis about the awareness level of the different laws and acts for women, it was found that more than 80 percent of the women were aware of many of their rights and laws, but they aren't able to apply it in real life circumstances. Since a majority of the sample respondents were students and working women, they were aware of the above mentioned laws and rights. On the contrary, housewives weren't completely aware of the same. The above study reveals that an increase in the literacy rate will certainly lessen the problems of females. It will also promote women to affirm their rights. The media have to play the role of building the confidence of women, so that they can fight against all odds and rise above the people's opinions and change their attitude towards women. Women group should be more active to eradicate domestic violence by creating community clubs, which will in turn create awareness among women in the grass root level.

## **Limitations**

There are some limitations of this study bearing the objectives.

- The study was mainly carried out through questionnaire techniques and telephonic conversation, which has its drawbacks.
- The data revealed by them may or may not be authentic.
- The data collected was limited to 125 respondents only as per the convenience of the investigator.
- All the respondents are only females as most of the families are headed by the male members of the house.

## **Suggestions**

The curriculum should be reviewed to identify the strength and weaknesses of integration of concepts of women's rights and each subject area. Moreover, it should be structured in such a way to create the awareness even from the age of 5 to 6 about the women's rights and women related laws. The government should arrange proper orientation and training programs for women to appreciate the value and worth so that they can realize their own worth and raise their head against the odds of life in the family as well as the society.

## **Conclusion**

The constitution of India recognizes the equality of sexes and provides many provisions, which are more favorable to women, but in actual practice they are observed more in breach than in compliance. To fulfill the constitutional mandate, our Government has taken the policy for economic empowerment of women through poverty eradication, micro credit programs, training of women to facilitate their role in all walks of life. The social empowerment of women is made possible only through the effective materialization of the constitutional provisions regarding education, health, nutrition, sanitation, gender justice and eradication of violence against women in all forms. The awareness should not just be confined to the women themselves, but should be universally known to everyone and everything concerning women. A home is the first school for a child and the mother is the foremost educator. The awareness must begin at the level of the mother bringing her son up with values that encourage him to treat women with respect and equality. This is equally important in the case of in-laws. The educators in the institutions also play a major role in sculpting the behavioural aspects of a girl child.

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