

Research Paper

## A Study on Perceived Women Empowerment in Female University Students

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the multidimensional aspects of empowerment, autonomy, and awareness among female university students, focusing on family, financial, career-related, and societal contexts. A survey was conducted on female students which is based on women empowerment thoughts. A structured questions based on empowerment related checklists was administered on 52 university students of Gautam Buddha University Greater Noida. Results revealed mixed findings: while 90.9% reported having career autonomy, only 12.7% had control over family income, indicating limited financial decision-making power. Family support emerged as a significant enabler, with 63.6% acknowledging its role in fostering empowerment. Autonomy in mobility, spouse selection, and marriage timing was reported by 61.8%, 63.6%, and 70.9% of respondents, respectively, highlighting progress in critical life decisions. However, reproductive autonomy remained constrained, with only 50.9% having a say in childbearing decisions. Discrimination against women (70.9%) and employment (74.5%) were reported as prevalent barriers, alongside significant awareness of domestic violence within families (63.6%). Encouragingly, 76.9% of respondents were aware of their legal rights, and 75% acknowledged their voting rights, reflecting growing civic awareness. However, awareness of political systems (57.7%) and participation in collective financial activities (36.4%) remained moderate. These findings underscore the importance of family support, educational initiatives, and policy interventions in addressing systemic gender inequalities and fostering women's empowerment. The study emphasizes the need for targeted programs to enhance financial autonomy, reproductive rights, and political engagement, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive society.

**Keywords:** *Women Empowerment, Survey study, Female University Students*

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, highlights the importance of addressing barriers that limit women's opportunities and participation across various domains of life (United Nations, 2015). The views of Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyay on women's empowerment align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5: Gender Equality, which emphasizes the elimination of gender disparities and the empowerment of all women and girls. Upadhyay's philosophy of integral humanism and the

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Received: August 21, 2025; Revision Received: March 09, 2026; Accepted: March 13, 2026

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Antyodaya principle (uplifting the last person) reflect a commitment to inclusive and equitable development, much like the SDGs' vision. Higher education is recognized as a transformative platform for promoting women's empowerment. Universities provide female students with opportunities to develop critical thinking, leadership skills, and independence, enabling them to challenge traditional gender norms and assert their agency in personal and professional spheres (Kabeer, 1999). SDG Focus to ensure women's full and effective participation in all spheres of life and eliminate discrimination, whereas Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyay emphasized the equal and complementary role of women and men in society. He advocated for removing barriers to women's participation in decision-making, employment, and societal progress. He believed that true empowerment comes from recognizing and nurturing women's potential, allowing them to contribute as equals in building a prosperous society. However, despite increasing female enrollments in higher education institutions, the extent to which female university students perceive themselves as empowered remains an underexplored area. This gap in understanding is critical, as perceived empowerment significantly influences young women's self-esteem, decision-making, and career aspirations (Malhotra et al., 2002).

SDG 4 focuses to provide inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities. Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyay stressed the importance of education for women, considering it essential for their intellectual and social empowerment. He believed education should not only focus on literacy but also inculcate values, skills, and knowledge that enable women to lead independent and meaningful lives.

In the Indian context, the issue of women empowerment holds particular relevance due to the country's socio-cultural complexities. While India has made notable progress in improving female literacy rates and increasing access to higher education for women, deep-rooted gender inequalities continue to persist. Traditional societal norms often impose restrictions on women's autonomy, limiting their ability to make decisions about their education, careers, and personal lives (Sen, 1999). Female university students frequently find themselves navigating a dual reality: on the one hand, they are exposed to empowering academic environments; on the other, they face societal pressures that reinforce patriarchal expectations (Chandra, 2020). Perceived empowerment among female university students encompasses their sense of agency, access to resources, and ability to overcome structural and cultural barriers. It involves their self-perception regarding autonomy in decision-making, participation in leadership roles, and capacity to challenge societal norms. These perceptions are shaped by multiple factors, including familial support, peer influence, institutional policies, and societal attitudes toward women (Malhotra et al., 2002). However, many female students struggle with internalized gender biases and fear of judgment, which can hinder their ability to fully leverage educational opportunities (Kabeer, 1999). SDG 8 emphasize to promote inclusive economic growth and productive employment for all, including women. Deen Dayal Upadhyay's Views recognized the importance of women's financial autonomy for their overall empowerment. He emphasized creating opportunities for women in agriculture, industry, and entrepreneurship to ensure their active participation in economic development. His concept of economic independence aligns with promoting equal pay and decent work for women.

The family is a crucial space for understanding women's empowerment as it reflects and shapes their roles, decision-making abilities, and overall agency. Below are some studies and references highlighting women's empowerment within the family context.

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Empowerment is often measured by a woman's ability to make decisions about household finances, children's education, healthcare, and other family matters. Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) examined women's autonomy in South Asia and found that education and employment significantly enhanced their decision-making abilities. Financial independence and access to household income give women a greater say in family matters. Kabeer (1999) analyzed Bangladeshi women's participation in microcredit programs and found that it strengthened their control over household resources and improved their self-esteem. The ability to make decisions about family planning and reproductive health is a critical indicator of empowerment. Upadhyay et al. (2014) studied reproductive autonomy across countries and found that women with greater decision-making power had better health outcomes. Challenging traditional roles in families leads to greater empowerment, Rao (2012) explored how education redefined women's roles in Indian families, encouraging a shift from traditional homemaking to shared responsibilities.

Existing research on women empowerment has predominantly focused on marginalized or rural women, workforce participants, or specific policy-driven interventions. While these studies provide valuable insights, they often overlook the unique experiences of female university students who occupy a transitional phase between education and professional life (Sen, 1999). This oversight creates a critical gap in the literature, as university students represent a demographic with significant potential to drive societal change. Empowering these young women can lead to a ripple effect, influencing not only their lives but also the communities and organizations they engage with in the future (United Nations, 2015). Female university students face several challenges that impede their perceived empowerment. These include limited representation in decision-making processes within universities, exposure to discriminatory practices such as harassment, and inadequate mentorship or career guidance programs (Chandra, 2020). Additionally, cultural expectations often place a disproportionate burden on young women to prioritize familial obligations over personal aspirations, leading to conflicts between traditional roles and modern ambitions (Kabeer, 1999). These challenges underscore the need for targeted interventions that address both institutional and societal barriers to empowerment. Furthermore, perceptions of empowerment are not uniform and vary significantly based on socio-economic background, cultural context, and the academic environment. For instance, female students from urban areas may perceive empowerment differently than their counterparts from rural or semi-urban regions, owing to variations in access to resources and exposure to progressive ideas (Malhotra et al., 2002). Similarly, the presence of supportive faculty, inclusive curricula, and opportunities for extracurricular participation can significantly influence how female students view their capabilities and opportunities (Chandra, 2020). This study aims to explore the perceived empowerment of female university students, focusing on their personal, academic, and social experiences. Understanding how young women perceive empowerment within the university setting can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of current policies and programs aimed at fostering gender equity. It can also inform the development of targeted strategies to create a more inclusive and supportive academic environment for women.

By examining the subjective dimensions of empowerment, this research seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and the lived realities of female university students. It will contribute to the growing discourse on gender equity in education and provide actionable recommendations for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders (United Nations, 2015). The findings will have broader implications for understanding how higher education can serve as a catalyst for women's empowerment in diverse cultural contexts. In

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conclusion, perceived empowerment among female university students is a multifaceted issue that warrants comprehensive investigation. While universities hold the potential to empower young women, their ability to do so depends on addressing the structural, cultural, and personal barriers that constrain students' agency. By focusing on the perceptions of female students, objectives of this study are to explore the factors that enable or hinder empowerment, offering a pathway to more equitable and transformative educational experiences.

1. To assess the level of awareness among female university students regarding their family, financial, and career-related contexts.
2. To evaluate the perception of female university students about autonomy, discrimination, and decision-making
3. To examine the extent of knowledge and engagement of female students with rights in legal, domestic, and political domains

### **METHODS**

#### *Research Design*

The study utilized a survey-based descriptive research design to assess the perceptions and awareness levels of female university students regarding women empowerment in various domains, including legal, social, family, and political dimensions.

#### *Sample*

The study involved a total of 52 female respondents, all of whom were students enrolled in various universities located in the Delhi-NCR region. The participants represented a diverse range of academic disciplines and backgrounds, contributing valuable insights into the research on women empowerment. To recruit participants, a convenience sampling method was employed. This non-probability sampling technique was chosen due to its practicality and efficiency in reaching individuals who were readily accessible and willing to participate in the survey. Convenience sampling was particularly suitable for this study as it allowed the researchers to focus on a population of students who were both relevant to the topic and easily approachable within the given timeframe and resources. The decision to include university students from Delhi-NCR ensured a relatively homogeneous sample in terms of educational exposure, while still reflecting variations in socio-economic and cultural perspectives. This approach facilitated the collection of meaningful data that could be analyzed to identify trends and patterns related to women empowerment among young, educated females in an urban academic setting.

#### *Material and Procedures*

A structured questionnaire was developed for data collection. The questionnaire comprised close-ended questions with possible answers. A comprehensive set of questions was developed based on a detailed review of literature related to women empowerment and its various parameters. These questions were designed to capture multiple dimensions of empowerment, including social, economic, political, and psychological aspects. To facilitate data collection and analysis, a Google Form was created featuring multiple-choice questions, allowing respondents to select the options that best align with their experiences and perspectives. This approach ensures user-friendly participation and provides structured, quantifiable data for further study. Questions covered various fields related to women empowerment i.e., Awareness of legal, social, and political rights, Perceptions of empowerment in family and societal contexts Experiences with discrimination, domestic violence, and decision-making autonomy. The survey was conducted through online and offline modes, ensuring accessibility and convenience for participants. Participants were

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informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained before filling out the questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to summarize the responses. The results were represented through tables and charts to provide a clear understanding of the findings. This method ensured a systematic and ethical approach to exploring the empowerment perceptions among female university students.

### RESULTS

The survey results highlight various dimensions of empowerment experienced by female university students, particularly in family, financial, and career-related contexts. The findings are as follows: Only 7 respondents (12.7%) reported having control over their family income, indicating limited financial decision-making power for most female students. A significant majority of 35 respondents (63.6%) acknowledged receiving support from their families, demonstrating that family backing plays a crucial role in their empowerment. Approximately 29 respondents (52.7%) stated that they have access to family resources, suggesting that while some students can utilize family assets, many still face limitations in this area. Similarly, 29 respondents (52.7%) mentioned that they have the ability to do a job based on situational needs, reflecting a moderate level of flexibility in their employment opportunities.

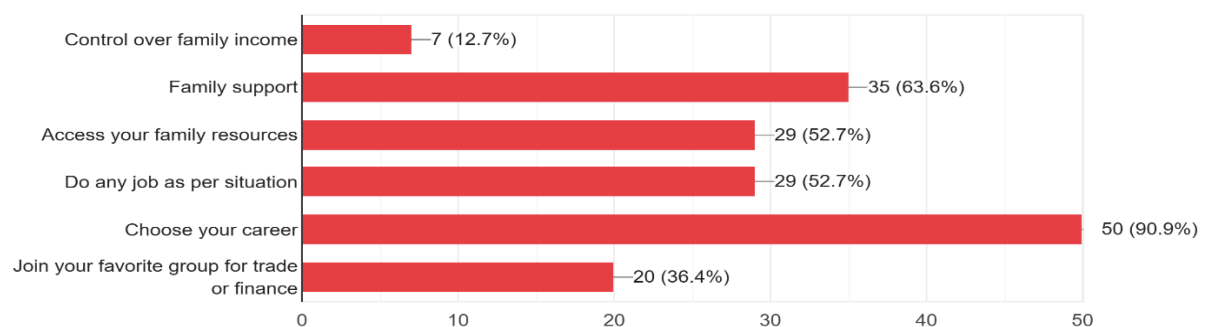
A notable majority of 50 respondents (90.9%) reported having the freedom to choose their careers, indicating strong autonomy in this aspect of their lives. Only 20 respondents (36.4%) reported the ability to join their preferred trade or finance groups, suggesting limited participation in collective financial activities or groups.

**Table 1: Perceived empowerment of family, financial, and career-related contexts in female participants.**

Issue	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Control over family income	7	12.7
Family support	35	63.6
Access your family resources	29	52.7
Do any job as per situation	29	52.7
Choose your career	50	90.9
Join your favorite group for trade or finance	20	36.4

Q 1. You feel you are able to take decision or raise your voice in family and society on following issues:

55 responses



**Figure 1: Graphical presentation of Perceived empowerment of family, financial, and career-related contexts in female participants.**

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Overall, while female university students show significant autonomy in career-related decisions, their control over family income and participation in financial groups remains restricted. Family support emerges as a key factor in fostering empowerment.

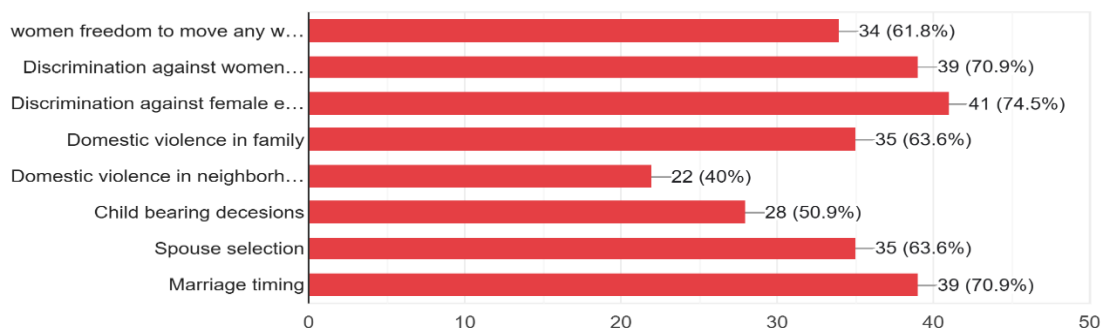
The responses of another question are provided insights into various issues related to women's autonomy, discrimination, and decision-making among female university students. The findings are summarized below: A total of 34 respondents (61.8%) reported having the freedom to move anywhere, suggesting that a significant proportion of women experience mobility autonomy, although restrictions still exist for some. The majority of respondents, 39 (70.9%), acknowledged the presence of discrimination against women, highlighting the continued prevalence of gender inequality in society. Even more pronounced, 41 respondents (74.5%) identified discrimination against female employment, indicating persistent barriers to women's professional advancement. A significant number, 35 respondents (63.6%), reported awareness of domestic violence within families, underscoring the ongoing challenges of violence against women in domestic settings. Fewer respondents, 22 (40.0%), reported witnessing or being aware of domestic violence in their neighbourhoods, which still reflects a notable prevalence of this issue in the wider community. Only 28 respondents (50.9%) reported having a say in childbearing decisions, indicating limited autonomy for women in reproductive choices. About 35 respondents (63.6%) indicated having the ability to select their spouse, suggesting progress in this area, though some women still face constraints. Similarly, 39 respondents (70.9%) reported having a say in the timing of their marriage, reflecting growing autonomy in this critical life decision.

**Table 2: Perceived empowerment of autonomy, discrimination, and decision-making in female participants.**

Issue	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Women's freedom to move anywhere	34	61.8
Discrimination against women	39	70.9
Discrimination against female employment	41	74.5
Domestic violence in family	35	63.6
Domestic violence in neighbourhood	22	40
Childbearing decisions	28	50.9
Spouse selection	35	63.6
Marriage timing	39	70.9

Q 2. You feel you are able to raise your voice in family and society on following issues:

55 responses



**Figure-2: Graphical presentation of Perceived empowerment of autonomy, discrimination, and decision-making in female participants.**

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The results reveal that while women have gained some autonomy in areas like mobility, marriage timing, and spouse selection, significant challenges persist, especially in the form of discrimination in employment, domestic violence, and limitations on reproductive decisions. These findings highlight the need for interventions to address systemic gender inequalities and promote women's empowerment.

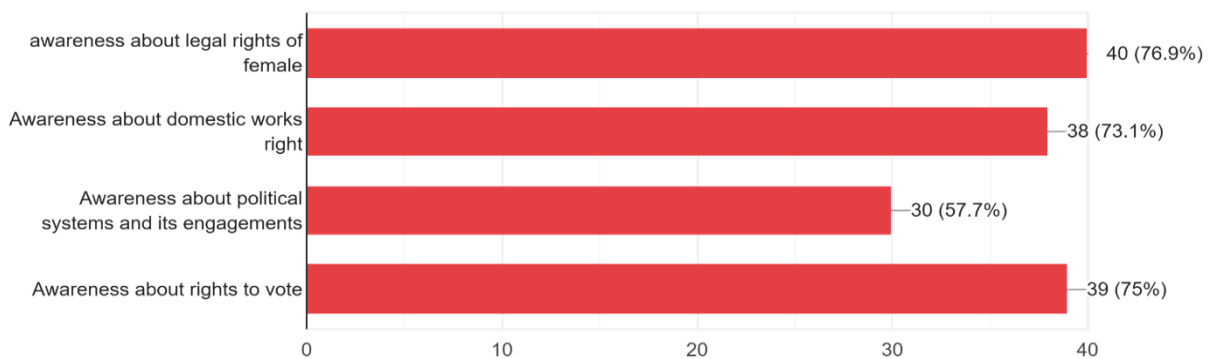
The responses of third question are highlights the level of awareness among female university students about their rights in legal, domestic, and political domains. The findings are as follows: A majority of respondents, 40 (76.9%), reported being aware of their legal rights, indicating significant progress in knowledge about legal frameworks that protect and empower women. A slightly lower but still substantial proportion, 38 respondents (73.1%), expressed awareness of their rights concerning domestic work, reflecting a growing understanding of gender equality in domestic responsibilities. Awareness about political systems and engagement was reported by 30 respondents (57.7%), suggesting a moderate level of understanding of political structures and processes among female students. An encouraging 39 respondents (75%) acknowledged being aware of their voting rights, highlighting strong civic awareness in this area.

**Table 3: Perceived empowerment of rights in legal, domestic, and political domains in female participants.**

Issues	Number of Responses	Percentage
Awareness about legal rights of females	40	76.90%
Awareness about domestic work rights	38	73.10%
Awareness about political systems and its engagements	30	57.70%
Awareness about rights to vote	39	75%

Q 3. You feel you are able to raise your voice in family and society on following issues:

52 responses



**Figure 3: Graphical presentation of perceived empowerment of rights in legal, domestic, and political domains in female participants.**

The results show that female university students possess a high level of awareness about their legal rights and voting rights, with slightly lower but still notable awareness regarding domestic work rights. However, their knowledge of political systems and active participation in such engagements remains relatively moderate, indicating room for further education and advocacy in this area.

## DISCUSSION

The survey results illuminate the multifaceted dimensions of empowerment, autonomy, and awareness among female university students, revealing both progress and persistent challenges. Interpreted through the lens of Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyay's philosophy of **integral humanism**, these findings underscore the need for holistic and inclusive approaches to women's empowerment, focusing on their roles as vital contributors to family, society, and national progress.

### *Empowerment within Family and Financial Domains*

While only 12.7% of respondents reported control over family income, reflecting limited financial decision-making power, the emphasis on economic autonomy aligns with Upadhyay's vision of uplifting women through self-reliance and equitable access to resources. He believed that the family should serve as a nurturing unit where every individual, including women, has the opportunity to flourish. The 63.6% of respondents who reported family support demonstrates the critical role of familial harmony, a cornerstone of Upadhyay's philosophy. Such support not only enables women to pursue education and careers but also provides a foundation for resilience against societal restrictions.

The moderate levels of flexibility indicated by 52.7% of respondents having access to family resources and the ability to work resonate with Upadhyay's belief in balancing familial responsibilities with professional aspirations. Moreover, the high degree of career autonomy (90.9%) reflects progress in aligning women's aspirations with societal growth, reinforcing Upadhyay's principle that education is a key enabler of self-determination.

### *Autonomy in Mobility and Life Decisions*

The findings on women's autonomy in mobility (61.8%), spouse selection (63.6%), and marriage timing (70.9%) reflect strides in critical areas of decision-making. However, the constraints in reproductive decisions (50.9%) highlight a gap that needs addressing. Upadhyay emphasized that true empowerment is achieved when women can make independent decisions in all aspects of life, including personal and familial domains, without external coercion. He envisioned a society where safety and cultural norms support women's freedom rather than restrict it, aligning with the reported concerns about mobility restrictions.

### *Addressing Barriers to Equality*

The survey's findings on gender discrimination (70.9%) and employment discrimination (74.5%) reaffirm the need for systemic reforms to dismantle structural inequalities. Upadhyay's philosophy called for a societal awakening where the dignity and equality of women are upheld. He advocated for creating opportunities for women in every sphere, recognizing that their participation is essential for a balanced and harmonious society. Addressing these barriers through education, vocational training, and moral upliftment would resonate with his ideals of inclusive development.

Awareness of domestic violence within families (63.6%) but lower awareness in neighbourhoods (40.0%) highlights the need for community-based interventions. Upadhyay's holistic approach underscores the importance of community responsibility in ensuring the safety and well-being of women, advocating for collective efforts to eradicate such issues.

### ***Civic and Legal Awareness***

Encouragingly, 76.9% of respondents reported awareness of their legal rights, and 75% acknowledged their voting rights, reflecting growing civic consciousness. Upadhyay believed that political and civic participation by women is integral to national progress. However, the relatively lower awareness of political systems (57.7%) and participation in financial collectives (36.4%) points to areas where targeted interventions are needed. Educational programs designed to enhance political and economic engagement would align with his vision of a society where women are active agents of change.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings, when viewed through Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyay's philosophy, highlight the interconnectedness of family, society, and individual growth in fostering women's empowerment. His call for Antyodaya (uplifting the last person) underscores the importance of addressing systemic barriers, enhancing educational and economic opportunities, and fostering an environment of dignity and equality for women. The survey serves as a reminder of the critical role of family, education, and systemic reforms in building an inclusive society that aligns with Upadhyay's vision of integral humanism and sustainable progress.

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### ***Acknowledgment***

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

***How to cite this article:*** Tiwari, S.K. (2026). A Study on Perceived Women Empowerment in Female University Students. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(1), 1438-1447. DIP:18.01.142.20261401, DOI:10.25215/1401.142