

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN MONGOLIA

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1. Women's status: a review

In recent years, women's role in society has been indicated as an important subject of study. Understandably, women's status cannot be studied within a single discipline and requires a multi-disciplinary approach because of the multiple roles they have to perform. Broadly speaking, the status of women can be defined in terms of degree to which they have access to valued resources such as, in education and training; employment; health care; access to political participation. Women's status can be compared with women to women of different places, regions or countries in the light of above-mentioned indicators. It can also be compared with men.

Demographers are specially interested in the study of the status of women because it is one of the most important factors in the process of demographic transition especially in the process of fertility decline. Among various socio-cultural and economic factors, the education of women, their participation in economic activities and involvement in family decision making, including the age of marriage, are few important indicators which are supposed to determine the status of women and, in turn influence the fertility level in the population.

Several studies (Mukherjee, 1975; Ranade and Ramachandran, 1975) have revealed that even in the societies where social, cultural and economic pressures on early marriage are high, women's education and their employment have an effect on marital postponement and, thus, on fertility. Mukherjee, Ranade and Ramachandran have also observed that women's education and their participation in economic activity helps them to improve their status and to participate in the decision making in the family, including issues like use of contraception, timing and number of births.

Over the past 70 years there have been significant improvements in Mongolian women's literacy and education, employment experience, health status, life expectancy, and social freedoms.

According to the Global HDR 1997, Mongolia has a gender-related development index (GDI) value of 0.650, which is ranked 80-th among the 175 countries listed (United Nations, 1997). Compared to women in many other developing countries, women in Mongolia have a far better status, both in an absolute sense and relative to their male counterparts. As is usual in most countries, female life expectancy in Mongolia is higher for women than for men (65.4 and 62.1 years respectively). Male-female inequality in literacy rates has nearly been eliminated (Table 1). Women in Mongolia form an important part of

the professional work force. In 1996, women constituted 43% of doctorates, 31% of economists, 80% of medical doctors, and 70% of lawyers. Females also comprised of 46% of the workforce in agriculture, 42% in industry, 56% in trade, and 65% in hotel and catering, 64% in education, and 67% in the health sector, but the rate of unemployment is higher amongst women than men (UNDP & Government of Mongolia, 1997).

In 1996 elections, Mongolian women won 9.2% of the parliamentary seats and men dominated the higher posts of decision making in Mongolia. Representation of women in other responsible positions such as ambassadors, chairpersons is very much lacking. There are no women aimag governors, and only 7.5% of department and divisional heads in central government are women (WIRC, 1997).

TABLE 1. SOME SELECTED SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS, BY SEX, MONGOLIA, 1997

Socio-economic and demographic indicators	Female	Male
1. Literacy rate	96.3	97.5
2. Gross enrolment rate in education		
- Primary level	85.1	85.0
- Secondary level	61.1	46.4
- Tertiary level	17.5	7.9
- Combined	63.0	54.6
3. Economic activity rate	63.5	65.1
4. Occupation (%)		
- Administrative and Managerial	18.7	81.3
- Professional and Technical	61.6	38.4
- Clerical and Sales	35.7	64.3
- Services	55.4	44.6
5. Unemployment rate	7.2	6.3
6. Life expectancy at birth (yrs)	65.4	62.1
7. Singulate mean age at marriage (yrs)	21.3	24.1
8. Contraceptive prevalence rate	59.5	na

Source: "Mongolian Statistical Yearbook, 1997", NSO, UB, 1998

Note: na - not available

2. Need for the study

In 1990 like other socialist countries Mongolia began to move from a centrally planned economy to market oriented one. The country experienced deep economic, social and political changes. As a result of the transition to market economy, regional disparities in the development are increasing and women's access to valued resources in terms of some indicators are more suffering, particularly women's work participation.

Keeping the above background in view this paper tries to study the status of women in different regions in the three periods of time 1979, 1989 and 1997.

3. Objectives

The general objective of this paper is to study regional disparities in women's status of Mongolia.

4. Data, Methodology and Variables

4.1. Data source

This study is based on secondary data. The statistics on socio-economic and demographic variables which reflect the status of women are collected from the following national censuses and surveys, special national statistical publications on women, yearbooks published by the National Statistical Office of Mongolia.

1. "Population of Mongolia", SSO, Ulaanbaatar, 1994
2. "Women and Children of Mongolia", SSO, Ulaanbaatar, 1995
3. "Mongolian Statistical Yearbook, 1997", NSO, Ulaanbaatar, 1997

4.2. Methodology and Variables

To have an idea about the status of women, the following variables have been considered:

- (i). The level of fertility (Measured by Total fertility rate -TFR).
- (ii). Women's education (Measured by women's literacy rate. Women's literacy rate is taken as number of literate female population over 15 years per 100 female population over 15 years).
- (iii). Women's economic activity (Measured by the women's work participation rate. This rate is the number of employed females per 100 female population of working age. In case of Mongolia, range of working age for females is between 15 and 55 years).
- (iv). The singulate mean age at marriage (Calculated from data on marital status by age).
- (v). Women's health care (Measured by female infant mortality. Female infant mortality is the number of deaths of female infants (under one year of age) per 1000 female live births).
- (vi). Women's longevity (Measured by life expectancy at birth. This is the number of years a new born female infant would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of female birth were to stay throughout the girl's life).

Most of the analyses have been done through cross tabulations of various indicators computed in rates, and ranks for the three periods of time, 1979, 1989 and 1997.

5. Limitation of data

Though some of the variables like decision-making, women's unpaid and paid employment, personal autonomy and mobility etc. affect women's status - due to lack of sufficient data these variables could not be considered.

6. Analysis of data

Women's education

Education is an important step in improving the status of women specially because it is a prerequisite for employment in the modern sector of the economy. In recent decades educational opportunities have been expanded in Mongolia.

Table 2 shows that Mongolia has highly literate women, and the distribution of education across regions is relatively egalitarian. It is observed in this table that the literacy rate increased over the period. During the past 18 years, there was around 10 point's increase in literacy rate of southern and eastern and in other two-region literacy rate increased by only 7 points during the same time period of 1979-1997.

Region	1979	1989	1997	Rank
1. Western	88.7	91.1	92.1	1
2. Eastern	88.7	91.1	92.1	2
3. Southern	88.7	91.1	92.1	3
4. Central	88.7	91.1	92.1	4
5. National level	88.7	91.1	92.1	5
1. Western	71.1	73.5	74.5	1
2. Eastern	71.1	73.5	74.5	2
3. Southern	71.1	73.5	74.5	3
4. Central	71.1	73.5	74.5	4
5. National level	71.1	73.5	74.5	5
1. Western	18.7	19.7	20.7	1
2. Eastern	18.7	19.7	20.7	2
3. Southern	18.7	19.7	20.7	3
4. Central	18.7	19.7	20.7	4
5. National level	18.7	19.7	20.7	5

Source: 1. "Women & Children of Mongolia", UNFPA, 1997. 2. "Statistical Yearbook 1997", UNFPA, 1998. Note: Female literacy rate at 15 years and above.

TABLE 2. WOMEN'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS, BY REGION, MONGOLIA, 1979, 1989 and 1997.

Socio-economic and demographic indicators/Regions	1979	1989	1997
<u>Total fertility rate</u>			
1. Western	8.0	5.5	3.4
2. Eastern	7.6	4.8	2.7
3. Southern	7.3	4.8	3.0
4. Central	6.8	4.6	2.2
5. National level	7.4	4.4	2.4
<u>Women's literacy rate</u>			
1. Western	86.8	91.7	94.5
2. Eastern	85.7	93.8	95.1
3. Southern	83.5	92.8	93.6
4. Central	90.3	95.6	97.3
5. National level	88.2	94.9	96.3
<u>Women's work participation rate</u>			
1. Western	77.6	77.2	67.6
2. Eastern	85.5	83.6	66.7
3. Southern	87.4	80.3	68.3
4. Central	79.3	78.3	60.8
5. National level	78.5	77.4	63.5
<u>Female infant mortality rate (per 1000 births)</u>			
1. Western	68.5	61.4	39.1
2. Eastern	69.1	60.3	37.0
3. Southern	62.5	64.2	40.1
4. Central	89.5	57.7	33.7
5. National level	75.7	64.3	39.8
<u>Female life expectancy at birth (yrs)</u>			
1. Western	63.3	62.7	64.0
2. Eastern	63.0	64.2	63.9
3. Southern	62.9	63.6	63.8
4. Central	63.3	64.3	64.9
5. National level	62.4	62.9	65.4
<u>Singulate mean age at marriage for females (yrs)</u>			
1. Western	18.3	19.0	20.6
2. Eastern	18.4	18.9	19.6
3. Southern	18.9	19.4	20.7
4. Central	19.0	19.6	21.3
5. National level	18.5	19.7	21.3

Source: 1. "Women & Children of Mongolia", SSO, UB, 1995

2. "Statistical yearbook-1997", NSO, UB 1998

The study of regional differences in the literacy rate is done by ranking the indicators of women's socio-economic and demographic in the regions. The ranking of literacy rate in the central region was highest in all three periods of time, followed by the eastern and the western regions. From this table it is clear that women's literacy rate for the central region is higher than those for other three regions.

TABLE 3. CHANGES IN WOMEN'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS, BY REGION, 1979-1997, MONGOLIA.

Socio-economic and demographic indicators	1979-1989	1989-1997	1979-1997
<u>Total fertility rate</u>			
1. Western	-2.5	-2.1	-4.6
2. Eastern	-2.8	-2.1	-4.9
3. Southern	-2.6	-1.7	-4.3
4. Central	-2.0	-2.6	-4.5
<u>Women's literacy rate</u>			
1. Western	+4.9	+2.8	+7.7
2. Eastern	+8.1	+1.3	+9.4
3. Southern	+9.3	+0.8	+10.1
4. Central	+5.3	+1.7	+7.0
<u>Women's work participation rate</u>			
1. Western	-0.4	-9.6	-10.0
2. Eastern	-1.9	-16.9	-18.8
3. Southern	-7.1	-12.0	-19.1
4. Central	-0.9	-17.6	-18.5
<u>Female infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births)</u>			
1. Western	-7.1	-22.3	-29.4
2. Eastern	-8.8	-23.3	-32.1
3. Southern	+1.7	-24.1	-22.4
4. Central	-31.8	-24.0	-55.8
<u>Female life expectancy at birth (yrs)</u>			
1. Western	-0.6	+1.3	+0.8
2. Eastern	+1.2	-0.3	+0.9
3. Southern	+0.8	+0.2	+0.9
4. Central	+1.0	+0.6	+1.6
<u>Singulate mean age at marriage for females (yrs)</u>			
1. Western	+0.7	+1.6	+2.4
2. Eastern	+0.6	+0.7	+1.3
3. Southern	+0.6	+1.3	+1.8
4. Central	+0.6	+1.7	+2.3

Source: Computed from Table 2.

Note: Positive values indicate an increase and negative values a decrease.

This is because the central region is economically and socially more developed compared to the others. It may also be noted that in the central region, the capital city Ulaanbaatar, Darkhan and Erdenet are located. So as far as the level of literacy is concerned women from the central region enjoy higher status compared to women of other regions.

TABLE 4. WOMEN'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS' RANKING IN DIFFERENT REGIONS, 1979, 1989 AND 1997, MONGOLIA.

Socio-economic and demographic indicators	1979	1989	1997
<u>Total fertility rate</u>			
1. Western	4	4	4
2. Eastern	3	2	2
3. Southern	2	3	3
4. Central	1	1	1
<u>Women's literacy rate</u>			
1. Western	2	4	3
2. Eastern	3	2	2
3. Southern	4	3	4
4. Central	1	1	1
<u>Women's work participation rate</u>			
1. Western	4	4	2
2. Eastern	2	1	3
3. Southern	1	2	1
4. Central	3	3	4
<u>Female infant mortality rate</u>			
1. Western	2	3	3
2. Eastern	3	2	2
3. Southern	1	4	4
4. Central	4	1	1
<u>Female life expectancy at birth</u>			
1. Western	1	4	2
2. Eastern	3	2	3
3. Southern	4	3	4
4. Central	2	1	1
<u>Singulate mean age at marriage for females</u>			
1. Western	4	3	3
2. Eastern	3	4	4
3. Southern	2	2	2
4. Central	1	1	1

Source: Computed from Table 2.

Note: Except ranks for TFR and IMR for all other indicators' rank "1" indicates topmost value of women's socio-economic and demographic indicators, rank "2" the second and so on, and rank for TFR and IMR "1" indicate the lowest value of fertility and mortality, rank "2" the second and so on.

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<u>Total fertility rate</u>			
1. Western	4	4	4
2. Eastern	3	2	2
3. Southern	2	3	3
4. Central	1	1	1
<u>Women's literacy rate</u>			
1. Western	2	4	3
2. Eastern	3	2	2
3. Southern	4	3	4
4. Central	1	1	1
<u>Women's work participation rate</u>			
1. Western	4	4	2
2. Eastern	2	1	3
3. Southern	1	2	1
4. Central	3	3	4
<u>Female infant mortality rate</u>			
1. Western	2	3	3
2. Eastern	3	2	2
3. Southern	1	4	4
4. Central	4	1	1
<u>Female life expectancy at birth</u>			
1. Western	1	4	2
2. Eastern	3	2	3
3. Southern	4	3	4
4. Central	2	1	1
<u>Singulate mean age at marriage for females</u>			
1. Western	4	3	3
2. Eastern	3	4	4
3. Southern	2	2	2
4. Central	1	1	1

Source: Computed from Table 2.

Note: Except ranks for TFR and IMR for all other indicators' rank "1" indicates topmost value of women's socio-economic and demographic indicators, rank "2" the second and so on, and rank for TFR and IMR "1" indicate the lowest value of fertility and mortality, rank "2" the second and so on.

Women's economic activity

The role of women in the economy is more generally accepted now than in the past in Mongolia. Women are given more opportunities to play a role in occupational activities and education. Changing social and economic conditions have also forced women to work outside the home. Thus women are found in various economic sectors including industry, handicrafts, agriculture, commerce and the service industry.

Table 2 and Table 3 present women's work participation rates by region and its changes in 1979-97. In the last two periods of time, women's work participation rate has decreased in each region. These declines are due to the process of transition from centrally planned economy towards market oriented system. Under the centrally planned economy, every person in the labour force was gainfully employed, automatically, so the activity rate was high. The main reasons for decline in women's work participation rate are the decline of foreign investment, lack of job opportunities, the decline in production, privatisation of state properties, cut down of the staff members in the state organisations. As a result of the transition to a market economy, women are suffering more.

TABLE 5. SELECTED INDICATORS OF SOCIAL-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, BY REGION, MONGOLIA, 1997

Socio-economic and demographic indicators	Western region	Eastern region	Southern region	Central region
1. Percentage of urban population (%)	24.0	31.2	42.0	48.5
2. Physicians per 1000 population	1.4	1.6	1.9	2.3
3. Health expenditure per capita (Tgk)	518.4	451.1	441.7	1078.6
4. Education expenditure per capita (Tgk)	728.3	572.6	418.5	1449.7
5. Household income per person (Tgk)	66731	65265	77869	87068
6. Percentage of population under official poverty line (%)	23.4	18.8	26.4	18.7

Source: "Human Development Report Mongolia 1997", UNDP & Government of Mongolia, UB, 1997

According to regional disparities analysis in women's work participation rate, the lowest participation rate was in the western region in 1979-1989 and the highest rates of 87.4 and 83.6 were in the southern and the eastern regions respectively. In 1997, the lowest was in the central (60.8) and the highest in the southern region (68.3). In other words women's work participation ranking was the highest in the southern region, followed by the eastern and the lowest in the western and the central regions. Local socio-economic conditions of the regions influence the economic activity of women and produce considerable differences in economic activity of women.

Women's participation rate in economic activity ranged from 87.4 in the southern to 77.6 in the western region, while the national level was 78.5 in 1979 whereas in 1997, it varied from 68.3 in the southern to 60.8 in the central region, while national level was 63.5.

Considering women's work participation it is found that the status of women has fluctuated over the years and over the regions.

Women's health care and longevity

Using data from Table 2 and Table 3 it can be said that in all three periods of time, female infant mortality declined in each region, but it was observed that in southern, it increased only in 1989. The IMR decline over the 1990s is better than the trend observed during the preceding 10 years in most of the regions. The lowest female infant mortality was found in the southern and the highest in the central region in 1979 whereas the lowest was found in the central and the highest in the southern region in 1997. Generally IMR varied greatly from region to region compared to the other variables.

Life expectancy at birth for females has performed well in Mongolia. In the past 18 years life expectancy at birth has increased by about 1-3 years. Much of these gains have been due to cuts in death risks during the first years of life. Since 1989, life expectancy has increased in all of the three regions but the eastern.

Compared to others life expectancy for females in the central region is slightly higher. Its ranking was highest in 1989 and 1997. It can be said life expectancy of females has been better in central region compared to all other regions in 1979-1997.

Women's singulate mean age at marriage

In Mongolia legal aged marriage for girl is 18 years. Mean age at first marriage in 1979 was very much uniform in all regions. The uniformity in mean age at first marriage prevailed during 1979-89. Mean age at first marriage increased gradually in each region during the years 1979-1997. In 1997, except in the eastern region (19.6) in all other regions mean age at marriage was above 20 years. Compared to other regions age at first marriage is slightly higher in the central region (21.3). It is clear that women marry later in the central region than in the others. This may reflect a whole complexity of social and cultural differences.

Certainly one of the factors that play a vital role is the tendency among the women from the central region to seek higher education. It may also reflect an attitude within certain sectors of the central region that marriage should be postponed until one has sufficient financial or professional security, or at least favourable prospects. From this table it can be said that the status of women was quite high in the central region during 1979-97.

Table 6 reveals women's socio-economic and demographic indicators' average ranking in the regions in 1979-1997. From this table it is clear that on considering various indicators it can be said that the status of women in the central and eastern regions is higher than that women from the western and southern regions.

TABLE 6. WOMEN'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS AVERAGE RANKING IN THE REGIONS IN 1979-1997, MONGOLIA

Socio-economic and demographic variables	Western	Eastern	Southern	Central
1. Total Fertility Rate	4	2	3	1
2. Women's Literacy rate	3	2	4	1
3. Women's Work participation rate	3	2	1	3
4. Female Infant Mortality Rate	3	2	3	2
5. Female Life expectancy at birth	2	3	4	1
6. Female Singulate mean age at marriage	3	3	2	1
7. AVERAGE RANKING	3	2	3	2

Source: Estimated from data given in Table 4.

7. Summary and conclusions

The goal of this paper is to study the status of women in the regions of Mongolia. Following are the major findings of this study:

- The comparison of regions shows that in all the regions the status of women has improved considerably in terms of all indicators except for economic activity
- In the central and eastern regions the status of women is higher than in the other two regions.
- Regional variation in socio-economic and demographic indicators of women in 1979 was high compared to the other two periods, i.e. 1989 and 1997. It had decreased in 1979-89, but increased in 1989-97. This increase is due to deep economic, social and political changes in the 1990s.

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increased in all of the three regions but the eastern region.

Compared to others life expectancy for women is higher. It was highest in 1991 and 1997. The goal of this paper is to study the status of women in the regions of Mongolia. Following are the major findings of this study:

The comparison of regions shows that in all the regions the status of women has improved considerably in terms of all indicators except for economic activity. The indicator of economic activity was very low in 1979. In the eastern and western regions the status of women is higher than in the other two regions. The indicator of economic activity was above 30% in the eastern region and below 20% in the other two regions. Regional variation in socio-economic and demographic indicators in 1979 was high compared to the other two periods, i.e. 1989 and 1997. It had decreased in 1979-89, but increased in 1989-97. This increase is due to demographic, social and political changes in the 1990s.

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