

Impact of Television Media on Women Empowerment: Reference to Gampaha District in Sri Lanka

Abstract

In the captivating realm of media influence, television stands as a powerful storyteller, weaving narratives that transcend the boundaries of households. As a pervasive element in households, television has the potential to be more than a source of entertainment it can be a catalyst for societal change. The discussion about empowering women continues to be a significant issue in the development of many countries. Here, empowerment is defined as the ability or authority to independently make decisions and take actions according to one's own will. Therefore, it is important that women have the capability to make decisions about their own lives. In that context, there is a need for something to enable and empower them. As an efficient tool for women's empowerment, television can be used to raise awareness among women in society. Therefore, this current study investigated “ the impact of television media on women empowerment with reference to Gampaha District in Sri Lanka” by conducting in-depth interviews as a data collection method. This study answers two research questions and it targeted women aged above eighteen years as a sample and a thematic analysis approach was used to interpret findings. The study revealed that although television media's influence in raising awareness about women's rights is limited, it does play a role in empowering women in areas such as physical appearance, nutrition, health, modern lifestyles, education, and employment. To enhance the contribution of television media to women's empowerment, recommendations were put forth, including ensuring the freedom of expression for both women and media entities.

Keywords: Media, Sri Lanka, Television, Women empowerment

Introduction

Women have been playing a noteworthy role in society from the beginning of the world. Women can be considered as the backbone of a country which is essential for accelerating the

development of the country. Since the monarchial era in Sri Lanka, women's contribution to the country's economic, political, social, and cultural development has been equally important to society. Sri Lanka presents itself as a country in South Asia that has a set of rich cultural norms and values toward women and their rights. More than half of the Sri Lankan population is dominated by females. Therefore, women have made their existence indispensable to this contemporary society. Even though there are a lot of opportunities for women to achieve their success, still, there is some room for degrading their values in society. Hence contemporary issues such as violence against women, discrimination, less participation in political systems, lack of recognition, and cultural barriers, are still a part of the country. Therefore, women must be empowered to conquer these challenges and to establish their role in the development process. Women in society can be empowered in different ways. Among them, mass media holds a significant place. Mass media is a part of life, and it includes a wide range of tools such as television, radio, books, magazines, and newspapers. Further, television has become the most influential media in contemporary society as it has a wider audience than other mass media tools. Therefore, the researcher has an interest in identifying the impact of television media on women's empowerment in Sri Lanka and providing suggestions to improve television media to empower women.

Research Question

The primary research question of this study is what are the impacts of television media on women empowerment in Gampaha district in Sri Lanka? And the secondary research question is how to improve television media to empower women in Sri Lanka.

Research Objectives

The main research objective of the study is to identify the impacts of television media on women empowerment in Gampaha district in Sri Lanka and subsequently, it has another objective which is to provide suggestions to improve television media to empower women in Sri Lanka.

Significance of the Study

Facilitating women empowerment in a country has a direct impact on the development of the country and media is a great tool for achieving this objective. Hence television can change women's lives by raising awareness. Further, as the researcher identified, the literature about

women empowerment with television media has not been adequately documented in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study would be helpful in evaluating the impact of television media on women's empowerment in Sri Lanka and be an inspiration for future researchers.

Literature Review

Women Empowerment

According to Ojha(2011), women empowerment is considered as a sum of empowerment including political, social, cultural, and other aspects of human life such as physical, moral, and intellectual development while Guptha (2018) has stated in his research that women empowerment refers to providing the necessary rights and responsibilities to women in order to make them self reliant. Further, as stressed by Akhter & Naheed (2014), women empowerment means the power of authority to take control over life and make independent decisions. Batliwala & Sen (2000) have also stated the same by definition, empowerment is a process by which the powerless woman gains greater control over the circumstances in her life. He further elaborated his statement by saying that empowerment leads to a growing self-confidence and an inner transformation that enables women to overcome external obstacles.

Media

Akhter & Naheed (2014) has defined media as a channel that is used to express opinion to others. Further Barber & Axinn (2004) also defined media as the transmission channels for information in any form, including television, radio, magazines, and movies. While television is considered as a tool of mass media as well as a tool for women's empowerment, Subhash & Patil (2014) stress television is an institutional source of information to create awareness about innovations and it is considered as one of the most versatile audio-visual aid.

The Impact of television media on women empowerment

Women's Right

According to Tunio & Shoukat (2015), their study has proved that television has a positive impact on women's empowerment and it increases the awareness of women's rights, especially social and economic rights. Subhash & Patil (2014) and Akhter & Naheed (2014) have also

proved that media including television plays a great positive role in promoting social awareness and educating them about their rights and laws.

Physical Appearance

Zia (2007) proved that women's expenditure on personal dressing and appearance has mainly an impact from watching television. Similarly, according to Ward & Aubrey (2017), a study has evidence that exposure to appearance-focused television content has an impact on girl's opinions of their fashions. Further, there is a piece of counter-evidence that television also has a negative impact on women by influencing and imprinting what people regard as an attractive female body as it would affect one's body satisfaction and self-esteem (Jucker, et al., 2017).

Nutrition and Health

According to Rahman, Curtis, Chakraborty, & Jamil (2017), their study has proved that women who watch television practice better reproductive health behaviors than women who do not. Pallikadavath, Sanneh, Mcwhriter, & Stones (2005) showed that being exposed to television raised women's awareness of AIDS considerably in a situation among all electronic media television was the most influential media which had an effect in improving AIDS awareness. Further, Christofolletti, et al. (2019) proved that even if there is a negative impact of excessive television watching which causes psychological health, it also reduces scores of negative moods of women.

Modern Lifestyle

Akhter & Naheed (2014) have proved that television plays a positive role in giving awareness to women to adopt impressive lifestyles while Subhash & Patil (2014) also stated that if the mass media are effective in a way which lifestyles of women will be improved and developed in day-to-day life. Jin and Jeong (2010) cited in Westoff, Koffman, & Moreau (2011) said that women prefer fewer children for a family and it is because of the emphasis on fewer quality children by television dramas.

Women's Education

Subhash & Patil (2014) also discussed how media has affected positively women's education as it is considered as one of the promising present-day educational sources. But Das (2012) has

also emphasized that television programs in the form of entertainment films or film-based programs provide little opportunities for education about new values and skills.

Women's Employment

Employment and cash earnings are more likely to empower women if women make decisions about their earnings alone or jointly with their husband rather than their husbands alone (Nayak & Mahanta, 2009). As Subhash & Patil(2014) said, economic independence has contributed a lot towards the improvement of women. Akhter & Naheed (2014) have proved that media including television plays a weak role in the professional development of women.

Methodology

This study followed a qualitative research approach to explore the in-depth understanding of the phenomena. Further, following the qualitative research approach gives a better understanding of the research area. The study population was women who live in Gampaha District. Among them, 12 women representing different cities in Gampaha District were selected as the sample for the study. The convenient and judgemental sampling methods were used to select the sample as it is the best way of getting some basic information quickly and efficiently from those who are conveniently available to take part in the study. The data would be collected by conducting in-depth interviews with an interview guide. For the study thematic analysis approach was applied where the researcher had to identify themes based on previous literature findings and then analyze the primary data under each identified theme.

Analysis and Discussion

Background of the Sample

Table 1 shows the composition of the selected respondents of the sample.

Respondents	Name (pseudonymous)	Age Category	Martial Statues	Employability
G01	Nayana	30-40 years	Married	Dressmaker
G02	Kamala	20-30 years	Married	Crafter
G03	Thamara	30-40 years	Single Parent	Run a grocery
G04	Wimala	30-40 years	Single	Laborer

G05	Naduni	20-30 years	Single	Student, Content Writer
G06	Maduni	20-30 years	Married	Housewife
G07	Sanduni	20-30 years	Single	Works in a studio
G08	Amara	20-30 years	Married	Works in a bank
G09	Upuli	20-30 years	Single	School Teacher
G10	Supuni	30-40 years	Married	Run a flower yard
G11	Dilma	30-40 years	Single	Unemployed
G12	Ganga	20-30 years	Married	Housewife

(Source: Field Data)

Factors Affecting Women's Empowerment

Women's Right

Respondents expressed varying views on the effectiveness of television in disseminating knowledge about women's rights. Upuli (pseudonymous) (G09) emphasized that television mainly covers women's rights issues during incidents like rape cases, sexual harassment, and murders related to women. After a few days, these issues receive less attention. Ganga (pseudonymous) (G12) and Maduni (pseudonymous) (G06) confirmed this sentiment, suggesting that television provides limited opportunities to acquire awareness about women's rights.

Physical Appearance

The majority of the respondents acknowledged that television had a substantial impact on their dressing choices. TV programs such as 'Nuga Sewana,' 'Seda Mawatha,' and 'Ayubowan Sri Lanka' were mentioned for providing information on cosmetics, clothing, and jewelry. Respondents like Nayana (pseudonymous) (G 01), Naduni (pseudonymous) (G 05), and Amara (pseudonymous) (G 08) noted that teledramas and reality shows highlighted women's beauty in terms of clothing, jewelry, and hairstyles. The influence of television on women's dressing patterns was widely recognized, as nearly all respondents shared similar views. Television media also had a notable impact on women's perceptions of their body size. Ten out of twelve respondents expressed that television influenced their body image. Advertisements and actresses in teledramas were identified as motivators for maintaining a good figure. Some shared personal

experiences, such as Ganga (Pseudonymous) (G 12), who mentioned calling a TV channel to inquire about a weight loss product. Amara (Pseudonymous) (G 08) admitted being tempted by advertisements for products like green tea that promised weight loss and beauty. Kamala (Pseudonymous) (G 02) highlighted how the younger generation often prioritizes appearance over values, attributing this shift to television media and social platforms. However, two respondents, Upuli (pseudonymous) (G 09) and Wimala (pseudonymous) (G 04) raised concerns about the negative effects of portraying unrealistic beauty ideals on television and the resulting mental and health issues.

Nutrition and Health

The majority of the respondents expressed the view that television media is useful in increasing awareness about diseases and health behavior. Thamara (pseudonymous) (G 03) shared a personal experience of how a specific program during her pregnancy had been helpful. Wimala (pseudonymous) (G 03) mentioned that TV programs on traditional Ayurveda medicine provided valuable information on maintaining a healthy lifestyle through advice on healthy food, medicine, and habits. Some respondents, however, felt that television media did not provide enough opportunities to enhance their awareness about diseases and health behavior. Nayana (Pseudonymous) (G 01) explained that her busy schedule led to the habit of self-medicating even for minor health issues, as she often missed health-related programs. Upuli (Pseudonymous) (G 09) emphasized the need for more programs focused on women's health in Sri Lanka and highlighted the challenges of busy schedules. Naduni (Pseudonymous) (G 05) mentioned that while she had seen brief advertisements about yearly checkups for women's health issues like cervical and breast cancers, longer and more informative programs were lacking. Dilma (Pseudonymous) (G 11) also noted that weekends often lacked health-related programming.

Modern Lifestyle

Respondents largely shared similar views that television, especially through teledramas and advertisements, frequently promotes aspects of modernity. For instance, Dilma (Pseudonymous) (G 11) highlighted that television emphasizes the use of smartphones, high-tech gadgets, expensive clothing, and English language proficiency as symbols of being modern. Thamara (pseudonymous) (G 03) expressed her fascination with certain advertised products that she couldn't afford but desired. Upuli (pseudonymous) (G 09) pointed out that while modern lifestyle

patterns ease daily tasks, they can also negatively impact women's health and make them more sedentary. She shared an example of purchasing a product she saw on TV. Naduni (pseudonymous) (G 05) mentioned how television exposes viewers to experiences they may never encounter in their lives, such as nightclubs. Some respondents recognized the educational value of television in providing awareness about modern living, even if they couldn't necessarily adopt these lifestyles themselves. Amara (pseudonymous) (G 08) shared an example of learning table manners from a television program.

Women's Education

Most respondents expressed that when they see educated and talented women on television, they feel inspired to become like them. For an example, Naduni (Pseudonymous) (G 05) wished to participate in programs like "Sirasa Lakshpathi" after watching them. Others mentioned how seeing high achievers in exams or differently-abled individuals excel on TV motivated them to work harder. However, respondents also noted that there aren't enough educational programs on Sri Lankan television. They mentioned barriers such as financial difficulties and busy work schedules. Some resorted to using YouTube for learning when they couldn't find suitable programs on TV. While a few respondents believed that television indirectly provided educational information, others, like Upuli (Pseudonymous) (G 09), emphasized the need for television channels and the government to make better use of this medium to improve women's education.

Women's Employment

Many respondents found television media to be a valuable resource for their employment. Nayana (Pseudonymous) (G 01) mentioned that outfit designs and fashion shows on television were helpful for her sewing work. Kamala (Pseudonymous) (G 02) shared how a TV program, specifically "Nuga Sewana," inspired her to start a self-employment venture to support her family. Naduni (Pseudonymous) (G 05) described how she stumbled upon a discussion about e-business opportunities on television during the pandemic, leading her to register with a company. Others also cited instances where they or their friends found self-employment opportunities after watching relevant TV programs. While some respondents believed that television media provided valuable self-employment opportunities, others, like Ganga (Pseudonymous) (G 12), expressed frustration with the predominance of entertainment and comedy shows on television.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to identify the impact of television media on women's empowerment in Lanka. The key findings of this study are the impact of television media on giving awareness about women's rights is still lacking. It hence further required attention from television channels to have a greater impact on women's empowerment in Sri Lanka. Further, it resulted that there is an impact on women's empowerment in terms of physical appearance and there is an impact of television media on giving awareness to adopt impressive lifestyles to women in Sri Lanka. Then, it says even though the attention of television media regarding this topic is less, there is an impact of existing and previous programs of television media on awareness about diseases and health behaviors. Moreover, it was found although there is a lack of TV programs directly focusing women's education, up to some extent television media has a fewer impact on women's education indirectly. Finally, it found that television media has an impact on women's empowerment in terms of women's employment. This study suggests for media organizations and sponsors in this field to introduce more programs to empower women in Sri Lanka.

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