

Industrial Growth and Community Transformation: The Impact of Sri City on Women's Empowerment

Dr. P. Neeraja¹ and Dr. N. Sree Rajani²

¹Assistant Professor, Dept. of Women's Studies, Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam,
Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. India.

²Assistant Professor (OC), Dept. of Business Management,
Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 20 Dec 2024

Revised: 15 Feb 2024

Accepted: 25 Feb 2025

ABSTRACT

This study explores the socio-economic impact of Sri City's industrialization on women's empowerment in and the surrounding villages. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining survey data from 850 women in 17 villages of Sri City and 750 women in 10 villages of Tada mandal. The study examined indicators of empowerment, such as education, employment, mobility, self-esteem, and control over resources. Results showed significant differences in empowerment between women in Sri City and those in Tada Mandal, with the former experiencing higher levels of economic independence, decision-making power, and mobility. The analysis revealed stark differences between the two regions, with women in Sri City experiencing higher levels of economic independence, decision-making power, and freedom of movement. In contrast, women from Tada mandal exhibited lower levels of empowerment, with fewer opportunities for employment and less control over household resources. Industrialization in Sri City has clearly contributed to improvements in women's socio-economic status, promoting greater autonomy and empowerment. The comparison underscore the importance of localized economic development in advancing women's empowerment, as well as the need for targeted interventions to support women in regions like Tada mandal, where such opportunities have not yet materialized to the same extent.

Keywords: Women's Empowerment, Sri City, Social Impact, Mixed Methods, Economic Development, Gender Equality, Special Economic Zone, Tada Mandal

Acknowledgment: We gratefully acknowledge the support and funding provided by Sri City, which has been instrumental in facilitating this research. We sincerely thank the Pradhan Mantri Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA), under the Multi-Disciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERU) grant sanctioned to Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam (SPMVV), Tirupati for providing the funding to publish this article.

Introduction

The empowerment of women is a critical aspect of achieving broader socio-economic development, particularly in regions where gender disparities persist. Women's empowerment involves enhancing their access to education, employment, resources, and decision-making power, ultimately enabling them to lead independent, dignified lives. Empowering women not only benefits individuals but also has a transformative impact on families, communities, and economies by fostering greater participation in the workforce, improved health outcomes, and stronger social cohesion.

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) like Sri City provide a unique platform for advancing women's empowerment. SEZs are designed to attract investment, create jobs, and boost economic growth, which can open new opportunities for women in nearby areas. By providing employment, skill

development, and access to education, SEZs have the potential to lift women out of traditional roles and enable them to participate more actively in economic and social life. The industrialization brought about by SEZs can lead to significant improvements in women's self-esteem, mobility, and control over resources, contributing to a more equitable society. However, to fully realize this potential, it is essential to assess the actual impact of SEZs on women's empowerment and ensure that these benefits are inclusive and far-reaching. Sri City has created impressive employment opportunities for both men and women. Around 50,000 employees are working in various units of Sri City. The work-force participation of women is more than 50 percent in the various units of Sri City.

The need for this study arises from the growing recognition that industrialization, particularly through Special Economic Zones (SEZs) like Sri City, has a profound impact on the socio-economic fabric of surrounding communities. However, the effects of this industrial development on women, who often face structural inequalities, remain underexplored. In regions where traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched, the introduction of industrial hubs can potentially serve as a catalyst for transforming women's lives by providing access to education, employment, and resources that were previously out of reach. Yet, there is a critical need to assess whether these opportunities translate into real empowerment, particularly in terms of decision-making, self-esteem, mobility, and control over household assets.

Additionally, this study addresses the gap in comparative research between areas directly influenced by industrialization, and those outside its immediate reach, such as the villages in Tada mandal. Understanding these contrasts is essential to gauge the broader socio-economic impact of SEZs and to determine whether their benefits are equitably distributed across neighboring regions. By focusing on women's empowerment in these areas, the study provides valuable insights into how industrial growth affects gender dynamics and highlights the need for targeted interventions to ensure that women, especially in less-developed areas like Tada mandal, are not left behind in the process of regional development. Ultimately, the findings of this study can inform policy recommendations to promote gender equality and sustainable development in industrializing regions.

Objectives:

- To assess the changes in women's workforce participation, education levels, asset ownership, and overall empowerment resulting from Sri City's development.
- To compare the socio-economic status and empowerment indicators of women in Sri City villages and Tada mandal villages.
- To analyze the broader socio-economic impact of Sri City's industrialization on neighboring towns.

Study Design:

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (Focus Group Discussions) methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of women's empowerment in the selected villages.

Population and Sample size

The population of the study includes 17 villages in Sathyavedu and Varadaiahpalem Mandals of and ten villages located in Tada mandal of Tirupati district of Andhra Pradesh. A sample of 1600 women comprising of 850 respondents from villages of Sri City and 750 respondents from 10 villages of Tada mandal. The selected villages are located within 10-25 kilometers of Sri City.

Data Collection Tools:

A semi-structured interview schedule with both open-ended and closed-ended questions was used to collect data. FGDs were also conducted, including "walk-the-talk" sessions where researchers walked with respondents to engage them in discussions.

Indicators of Empowerment:

1. Self-esteem (e.g., views on domestic violence, participation in decision-making)
2. Freedom of mobility
3. Control of material resources
4. Employment and educational attainment

Results and Discussions

Data was collected from respondents residing in villages within the Sri City Special Economic Zone (SEZ) as well as nearby villages in Tada Mandal. The results of the study are presented hereunder, highlighting the key differences between women in Sri City villages and those in nearby Tada mandal villages. These results shed light on various aspects of women's empowerment, including education levels, employment opportunities, control over family assets, financial independence, and experiences of domestic violence. The comparison between the two groups provides a clear picture of how industrialization in Sri City has influenced the socio-economic status and empowerment of women in the region.

Table 1: Key Indicators of Women's Empowerment between Sri City and Tada Mandal Villages

Indicator	Sri City (%)	Tada Mandal Villages (%)
Women's education in the family		
<= 10 th class	38	61
Intermediate	0	01
Graduation	28	16
Post Graduation	04	09
Professional Degree	12	09
Diploma	18	04
Number of working women in the family	39	28
Women Owning Family Assets	96	38
Control over her earnings	18	12
Domestic Violence	24	39

The table presents a comparison of key indicators of women's empowerment between Sri City and the villages of Tada Mandal. The data provides insights into educational attainment, economic participation, asset ownership, financial independence, and domestic violence.

Several inferences can be drawn from this comparison:

1. Women's Education:

In Sri City, women have higher educational attainment overall compared to those in Tada Mandal. For instance, 28% of women in Sri City have graduated, compared to only 16% in Tada. Additionally, 18% of women in Sri City have completed a diploma, significantly higher than Tada's 4%.

Tada Mandal villages, on the other hand, show a much higher percentage of women with education limited to the 10th class (61%) compared to Sri City (38%).

2. Economic Participation:

The percentage of working women in Sri City (39%) is higher than in Tada Mandal (28%), indicating greater economic engagement and employment opportunities for women in the SEZ area.

Skill Development centres in the villages of Sri City are impressive, one of them operated by the government and the others are established and maintained by Sri City. In two of the Centres, women learn tailoring and beautician related activities. Each Centre has about 5 tailoring machines with separate embroidery machines. Every Centre has a skilled trainer. Interaction with the women in the Centre revealed that in about three months, women are able to learn to stitch clothes and are able to earn a decent income thereafter working from home. Most of the orders they receive are also from Sri City such as embroidering Logos of companies on shirts etc. The AP Skill Development Centre in Sri City has about 20 students, four of them girls. They are students with a technical background who are trained by the various units in Sri City in specialised tasks and later given employment in these units. Some of the students are from as far away places as Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh. These students are provided free accommodation and boarding during the period of their training.

3. Redefining Roles of women

One of the biggest contributions of Sri City to the backward area in the state is providing employment opportunities to rural people. Before the establishment of Sri City most of the people of this region were working as farm laborers or as daily wage laborers. Now a majority of people from Tada, Sathyavedu and Sullurpetta mandals in Nellore and Chittoor districts as well as from towns and villages from Tamil Nadu are being recruited by industrial units in Sri City.

The biggest impact noticed is among rural women who are now working as security guards, assembling mobile phones and working in dolls making, dresses and shoes industry. Fifty per cent of workers in industries at Sri City are women. Food processing industries have also employed women in large numbers. Kellogs, Everton Tea, Premium Ingredients, Lavazza Coffee, Pepsi, and Cadburys Chocolate have more women than men in their units. Skill development initiatives of Sri City have also been largely responsible for the value addition to skill set of rural people who are employed in Sri City. Several villagers also own JCBs and tractors which they hire Sri City for construction works. All the laborers employed in gardens, landscape managing works, road maintenance, Water treatment and Sewage treatment plants are villagers from Sri City.

This shows that the industrialization of Sri City appears to have created more opportunities for women to participate in the workforce and earn their livelihoods.

4. Asset Ownership:

A significant difference is seen in women's ownership of family assets, with 96% of women in Sri City owning family assets compared to only 38% in Tada Mandal villages. This suggests greater financial autonomy and control over resources for women in Sri City, potentially driven by the economic growth of the area.

5. Financial Independence:

While the data shows that 18% of women in Sri City have the freedom to spend their own money compared to 12% in Tada Mandal, this difference, though modest, indicates a slightly higher level of financial independence in Sri City. However, it is important to note that even among working women, a significant number lack control over their earnings. This limitation is a crucial factor in the broader context of women's empowerment. True empowerment involves not only earning

income but also having the autonomy to manage and control one's financial resources. The observed disparity underscores the need for continued efforts to enhance financial control and independence for women, which is essential for achieving meaningful empowerment.

6. Empowering Women Through Self-Help Groups

There are 209 SHGs in Sri City villages and 223 in the villages in Tada mandal. In 2020 there were 200 and in 2018 there were 178 SHGs in the area. Most of them are active, without over-dues. These Self help groups are comprised of women who have uses this money to increase savings, supplement family income and educate their children. There are 321 SHGs in the villages surveyed in Tada mandal. All of them are active and have no debts. Most of the women are using the money to educate their children and meet household expenses. Five percent of them have started their own small shops or have purchased cows and buffaloes to supplement the family income.

7. Domestic Violence:

As per the inputs provided by police and hospital staff and from the survey data from villagers it is inferred that there were instances of domestic violence in the villages. However these cases have reduced in the recent years 2018-2023. The number of liquor outlets has decreased considerably, however women in both survey areas reported drinking as a major domestic problem.

The prevalence of domestic violence remains a significant concern. In Sri City, 24% of women report experiencing domestic violence, while the rate in Tada Mandal is 39%. Although domestic violence is less frequent in Sri City, it is still present and a serious issue that cannot be overlooked. Addressing domestic violence is crucial for ensuring comprehensive women's empowerment and improving their overall well-being.

Broader Impact Beyond Immediate Mandals

Although Sri City's primary interventions have targeted villages in Satyavedu and Varadaiahpalem mandals, its impact has extended beyond these administrative boundaries. The industrial growth, employment opportunities, improved infrastructure, and socio-economic transformation initiated by Sri City have also positively influenced nearby towns such as Tada, Sullurpet, and Naidupet. These towns have witnessed increased mobility, better access to educational and healthcare facilities, enhanced market linkages, and rising aspirations among youth and women. This broader influence underscores Sri City's role as a catalyst for regional development, beyond its immediate operational zones.

Mixed Feelings among Local Residents

While industrialization through Sri City has undoubtedly added value to the factors of production and significantly contributed to women's empowerment, it has also brought mixed emotions among some of the original residents. A few villagers expressed their anguish over the loss of agricultural lands, which had deep cultural and emotional significance for them. Although many had willingly sold their fields to Sri City, attracted by attractive compensation packages at the time, they now express a sense of loss and nostalgia. Their attachment to the land, which had sustained their families for generations, remains strong. Some residents mentioned that, despite the financial gains, they miss the traditional lifestyle and agricultural practices that once defined their way of life. This highlights the complex and multifaceted impact of industrialization on rural communities, emphasizing the need for sensitive and inclusive development approaches that balance economic growth with cultural preservation.

Conclusion

The data suggests that women in Sri City, influenced by the industrialization of the area, are more empowered across several indicators compared to those in Tada Mandal villages. Higher education levels, greater economic participation, increased asset ownership, and lower levels of domestic violence reflect a more favorable environment for women's empowerment in Sri City. However, challenges such as limited freedom to spend their own money still persist, indicating that further efforts are needed to fully realize the potential benefits of industrialization for women's empowerment.

The study reveals significant differences in women's empowerment between villages within Sri City and those in Tada Mandal. Women in Sri City demonstrate higher levels of education, employment, asset ownership, and financial independence compared to their counterparts in Tada Mandal. These differences highlight the substantial benefits of industrialization and economic growth facilitated by Sri City.

However, it is essential to recognize that the positive effects of Sri City's development extend beyond its immediate boundaries. The industrial activities and economic growth in Sri City have had a beneficial impact on the surrounding mandals. While Tada Mandal does not exhibit the same level of transformation, the economic opportunities and infrastructural improvements resulting from Sri City's development have contributed to some positive changes in nearby areas.

This broader impact underscores the value of continued investment in industrial zones, as they not only drive localized economic growth but also enhance the socio-economic conditions of surrounding regions. Thus, while disparities in empowerment indicators exist, the overall positive influence of Sri City's development on its neighboring mandals should be acknowledged and leveraged for further regional growth and upliftment.

Recommendations:

Employment generation has been on the forefront at Sri City, and a good number of people are employed in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs. However if educational institutions at college level are set up by the government in this area, employment rate in skilled category could be increased.

Micro-Entrepreneurship Training:

The government should provide training to women in micro-entrepreneurship, helping them start cottage industries.

Incubation Centers:

Incubation centers focusing on women-led innovation and product development could be established in the villages.

Women's Skill Development Cell:

Sri City can establish few more dedicated training center for upgrading the skills of women in nearby villages.

Health Assessment for Women:

Sri City, in collaboration with local universities, should conduct an in-depth assessment of anemia and other health issues among adolescent girls and women in these villages.

References:

- [1] Alina Sorgner (2021) Gender and Industrialization: Developments and Trends in the Context of Developing Countries, IZA institute of labor economics, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://docs.iza.org/dp14160.pdf
- [2] Kabeer, N. (2001). "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment." *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435-464
- [3] Kishor, S. & Gupta, K. (2004). "Women's Empowerment in India and Its States: Evidence from the NFHS." , *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(7), 694-712.
- [4] Malhotra, A. & Schuler, S.R. (2005). "Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development." , *World Development*, 33(9), 1075-1095.