

**POWER WITHIN: EXPLORING CHANGING GENDER
ROLES AND POWER DYNAMIC IN THE
BANGLADESHI HOUSEHOLD**

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ABSTRACT

Women in most societies in the world have been relegated to a lower social position as compared to men. Their desires and choices have been undermined and their powers and capabilities have been suppressed. The discussions in this thesis have centred around women's identities, choices and desires and their linkages to power, capability, and empowerment. In this thesis I explore how interventions made by development programs that focus on gender empowerment affect lives of women within the private sphere, with a specific focus on developing a sense of 'power within' oneself. The focus is on if and how the process of empowerment endows the woman with a different awareness of the nature of gender roles and power dynamics within the household, of what entails violence, and what her rights are. This analysis is conducted in the context of the developing and patriarchal society of Bangladesh. This research study draws from various bodies of literature, including literature on women's empowerment, capability theory, family justice, patriarchy, social identities, and gender-based violence. One important gap that this research study will potentially seek to fill in is, in the discussion of the many variants of 'power within' and its link with the competing and even contradicting elements of freedom and control in the lives of women. The other examination of complex entanglement of concepts that is highlighted in this research, and is not discussed much in the literature, is that of empowerment and identity. The methodology adopted for this research is a qualitative, feminist research methodology. This methodology is also informed by symbolic interactionism. The data and evidence for this research were collected from primary sources i.e. the participants in the field. The participants for this research project were mainly drawn from a population of women in Bangladesh who are considered to be beneficiaries of one or more development interventions. The data was collected during two one-month periods:

November, 2018 and February, 2019. In this thesis, exploring the linkages between power, empowerment, oppression, agency, identity, and consciousness, has led to many conundrums and complexities in the understanding of ‘power within’ to be brought forth. Some of the contributions to the idea of empowerment of women made in this research are the following: empowerment is achieved through the continuous, daily and very ordinary actions of the women; empowerment is relational and there is no situation of abject powerlessness just as there is no situation of absolute power; empowerment is enhanced through inter-generational interventions; and, the establishment of their own independent identities of individuals is intrinsically linked with their definition of empowerment. I found that reflections on their identities, awareness of the injustices done to women daily, and consciousness of the unfair devaluation of women in their society are the true indicators of ‘power within’ these women. The findings from this research may not only inform policies focusing on women’s empowerment or gender-based violence but also contribute to the designing, implementation, and assessment of development and empowerment interventions.