



AN ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTION OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS ON WOMEN'S FREE MOBILITY OVER SPACE IN ASANSOL DURGAPUR PLANNING AREA (ADPA), WEST BENGAL

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Abstract: Mobility can be defined from various perspectives but from geographical view point we can define mobility as the movement that people undertake over space for fulfilling their various requirements of life which can be any requirement related to their social, economic or cultural needs. Over the years, freedom of movement has become one of the most important pre-requisites for development. For accessing anything like basic education or workplace one needs to have freedom of movement. However, freedom of movement varies over space, time and even across genders. It has been noted that male members of the society enjoy a lot of freedom of movement in comparison to their female counterparts. There are various factors that govern mobility of women. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyze the perception of the community members with regards to women's free mobility. In the developing countries specially, women face various restrictions on their free movement. Hence, this study has been conducted in Asansol Durgapur Planning Area (ADPA), in West Bengal where one can prominently see urban, sub-urban and rural areas. This work is based on primary survey which has been done by conducting focused group discussions, in-depth interviews and questionnaire-based surveys. Results reveal that freedom of movement of women varies over space due to the differences in the perception of the community members on the issue of women's mobility.

Keywords: Mobility, space, focused group discussions, development, community members

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 WHAT IS MOBILITY?

Mobility can be defined from various perspectives. From the geographical view point we can define mobility as the movement that people undertake over space for fulfilling their various requirements of life (Magdalena, 2006). However, since the last quarter of the 20th century the concept of mobility has undergone several changes in the backdrop of neo-liberal globalization (Kotz, 2000). High mobility implies a high level of freedom of choice which in turn is regarded as a precondition for self-decision on the types of activities to participate, hence a connection between freedom and mobility can very easily be established (Houseman, 1979). Over the years it has been observed from various research works that mobility has a considerable role to play in every sphere of the society and women in particular are often victims of restricted mobility.

1.2 WOMEN AND MOBILITY

Over the years, the concept of mobility has made its presence felt in the context of economics, history, society, culture, travel behavior and movement in understanding the creation of identities, empowerment and the circulation of all these over space and time. It has been witnessed that differences exist to a considerable extent in terms of physical mobility patterns across class, caste and gender dimensions. Due to certain socio-biological advantages mainly physiological as well as the patriarchal social structure enjoyed by men, traditionally, the male sections of the human societies enjoy a considerably greater mobile life than their women counterparts (Akyelken, 2013).

1.3 WOMEN, MOBILITY AND SPACE

There seems to exist differences in mobility in general and women's mobility in particular over space and often these differences amplify in the developing countries. Mobility of women are impeded from an early age due to several patriarchal constraints (Porter, 2011). Along with the physical characteristics of a region, the social characteristics and views of the society play an important role to a considerable extent in governing women's mobility. The views of the society are given a lot of

importance in the developing countries as far as women’s outdoor activities are concerned, hence evaluating the perception of the community members on women’s mobility plays a significant role to a considerable extent.

The present study broadly aims to uncover the perception of the community members on women’s mobility over space i.e., over urban, sub-urban and rural areas. Hence to serve the purpose, the Asansol Durgapur Planning Area (ADPA) under the district of Paschim Bardhaman, West Bengal, India has been chosen as the study area for this present study.

2. OBJECTIVES

In this research paper, emphasis has been laid on the following issues.

- I. Understanding the perception of the community members with regards to free mobility of women in accessing various commonly required services across the urban, sub-urban and rural areas.
- II. Assessing the perception of the community members regarding the role of independence and education of women in the societal development.
- III. Comparing the perception of the community members across the urban, sub-urban and rural areas.
- IV. Forwarding relevant suggestions for betterment of perception of community members.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study area for this research work was first delineated and Asansol-Durgapur Planning Area (ADPA) which comprises of urban, sub-urban and rural areas was selected as this area seemed to be beneficial to a certain extent for meeting the objectives of this study. ADPA, is an area of high importance to a considerable extent in Eastern India; it is an important part of the state of West Bengal in India.

For the primary survey, Focus Group Discussion, In-depth personal interviews and Questionnaire based survey was conducted. Focus group discussion has been conducted among men, women and girls of various ages and profession. From each of the selected areas, men of all ages, adolescent girls, married women (both housewife and working women) and women aged above 45 years were included in the discussion. In the rural areas the panchayat pradhans rendered a lot of help in conducting the focused group discussion. However, separate groups were made for the discussion- one was made including the men, another with married women, third one with adolescent girls and the last group comprised of the old women. During the survey in some of the villages, the elders of the family were initially reluctant in letting the women of their families speak in their absence though they themselves cooperated during the discussion. In-depth interviews of the members of the panchayat raj institutions helped in the survey by filling up the questionnaire which further helped in this study.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The mobility of women plays a significant role to a considerable extent in determining development of women and their status in the society. In order to assess the perception of the community members, the degree of approval of the community members were taken on. The respondents were asked to give their degree of approval for women going out for various types of purposes like for going for their career related needs, recreation, healthcare, for household related outdoor activities and sanitation. The degree of approval was based on three levels, approved, moderately approved and disapproved. Approve implies where the respondents readily approved of women’s outdoor activities irrespective of the reason or purpose for which she is going out, moderate approval implied that with the imposition of certain restrictions they approve of women’s outdoor activities and disapproval implied that they totally disapproved of women’s outdoor activities. Moreover, during the survey, it came to light that the degree of approval on women’s mobility varies according to the type of work or services for which a woman needs to go out.

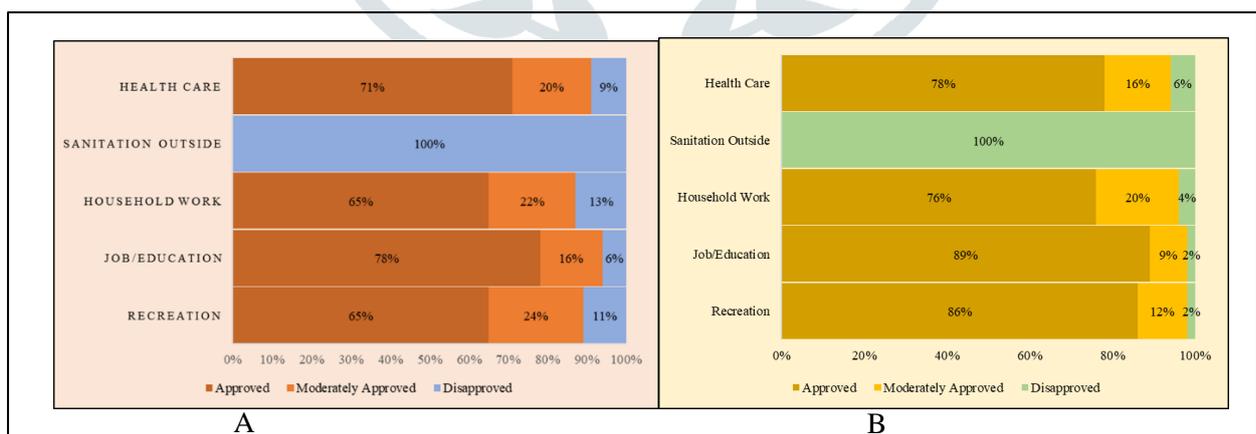


Fig 1: Perception Chart showing Degree of Approval of the respondents on women going out for various types of outdoor activities, A: Asansol Municipal Corporation(AMC), B: Durgapur Municipal Corporation (DMC), Data Source: Data Source: Primary Survey Conducted during December 2016 to February 2019

Asansol Municipal Corporation (AMC) and Durgapur Municipal Corporation (DMC) represents the urban area for the purpose of this survey. In the urban areas and sub-urban areas, all the respondents disapproved of sanitation outside for all irrespective of the gender. They various welfare and awareness programmes of the government seems to have played a crucial role to a certain extent in making people aware of the ill effects of sanitation outside. Moreover, in the urban areas, with the impact of urbanization and globalisation, people have become more aware of the unhygiene associated with improper sanitation and, in almost all the households there is presence of indoor bathrooms. However, in the rural areas, due to the absense of washrooms within the houses, few families are compelled to efficate outside. Due to the financial problem few families are unable to build washrooms within

the houses. With the government help, most of houses has been able to build proper washrooms for themselves. Only a negligible 3% of the respondents who are financially not very developed are deprived of proper sanitation facilities.

The degree of approval on women going out for accessing healthcare activities like morning/evening walks, gyms, yoga classes etc. shows that more than 70% of the respondents approved of women going out for accessing health care services (Fig 1). A surprising fact is, majority of the respondents who moderately approved and disapproved of women going out for various health care activities were women themselves. During the survey, the surveyor felt that since most of the women both working women and home makers were so much involed and share the majority of the burden of household works, hence they are left with very little time for their own self care activities. Hence, approval of the family members has little or no role to play in women going out for their health care activities. Most of the women suffer from time poverty, so allocating time for their own self care activities seemed to be very luxurious for them. Many were of the opinion that only if any health related issue arises then it is justifiable to indulge in health care activities. Sarmistha Ghosh, a resident of AMC, who is a school teacher said that being a working woman and a mother of two children, she has a lot of professional work as well as domestic work hence she opined that it is very difficult for her to allocate time exclusively for her own healthcare needs.

In the sub-urban areas, about 65% of the respondents were completely in favour of women going out for their own healthcare activities whereas about 21% moderately approved of women going out for healthcare needs and 14% of the respondents disapproved of women going out for healthcare needs (Fig 2). Like the urban areas, in the sub-urban areas also most of the respondents who attached moderate approval and disapproval to women going out for health care needs were women themselves. Most of them cited time poverty as the prime reason for not being able to allocate much time for their healthcare necessities. Apart from time poverty, many also felt that it was not necessary for women to attach so much importance for just maintaining their health. This same reason was also cited by the rural respondents (almost 33%) who disapproved of women going out exclusively for health care needs. During the in-depth interviews many of the rural respondents opined that since women in the rural areas already regularly does a lot of outdoor activities like washing clothes in nearby pond, fetching water etc. hence they do not need to separately allocate time for health care needs (Fig 2). The rural areas lying in close proximity of the urban areas have been influenced by the impact of urbanization and globalization and have become aware of the positive outcomes of regular health care activities. Hence, a significant proportion of rural respondents also approved of women going out for health care needs. But a significant aspect to be noted is that mere approval does not necessarily mean that women are going actually been able to go out for health care needs. It means that there is hardly any restriction imposed on them for going out for health care needs.

So, across the urban, sub-urban and rural areas, majority of the women respondents disapproved and moderately approved of women going out for their health care needs. But in the rural areas to some certain extent differences in the attitudes of the community members in letting women go out for their own healthcare needs can be noticed.

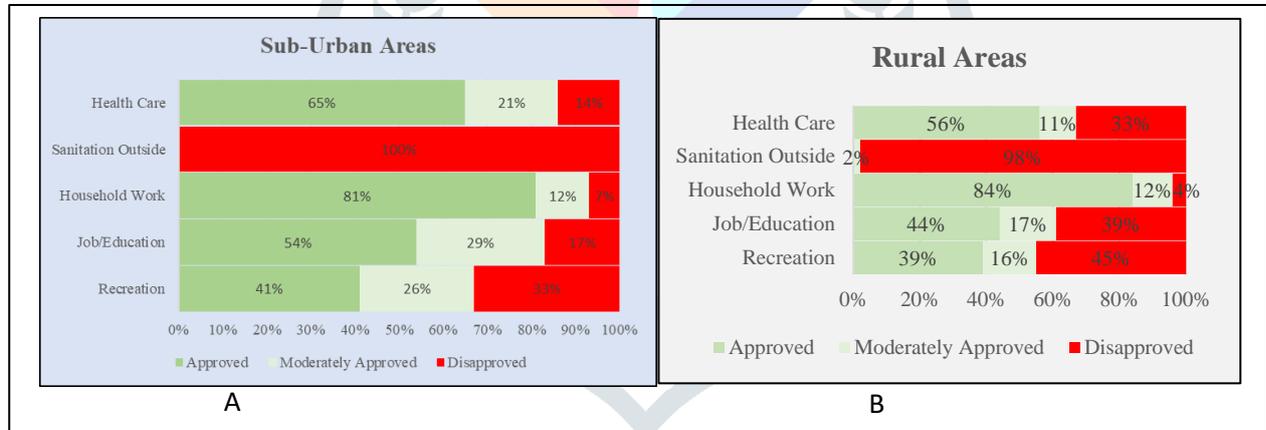


Fig 2: Perception Chart showing Degree of Approval of the respondents on women going out for various types of outdoor activities in the A. Sub-Urban Areas, B. Rural Areas, Data Source: Primary Survey Conducted during December 2016 to February 2019

In urban areas, approximately 70% of the respondents completely approved of women going out for performing outdoor household related activities (see Figure 1). They include dropping children at school or other institutions, picking them up after lessons, visiting banks, shopping etc. Most respondents suggested that the male family members take an active part in household activities which are to be performed outdoors. With the proportion of nuclear families increasing in urban areas, the bulk of household work increasingly falls on women, hence in most of the households, indoor activities are mostly the women’s task while outdoor work is done by the men; yet the work pressure happens to be greater for women. A significant proportion of respondents disapproved and moderately approved of women going out for household works. In their opinion, women already have a lot of household pressure and should not be charged with an additional burden. In urban areas a significant proportion of women are employed to earn an additional income, hence the outdoor household related activities must be shared the male family members.

In the sub-urban areas and rural areas, according to about 80% of the respondents were of the opinion that outdoor household activities has to be done by the women (Fig 2). Most of them in the sub-urban areas cited that since men of the households have to be go out for their occupational needs early in the morning hence it is not possible for them to help in the household related works. In the rural areas most of the outdoor household related activities were limited to fetching drinking water, washing clothes and utensils in the nearby source of water etc hence women are expected to do all these works.

In the urban areas, about 80% of the respondents completely approved of women going out for their career needs be it for education or for job (Fig 1). According to Rajat Bose, a resident of Asansol Municipal Corporation, with the rising cost of living it becomes very important for women also to contribute to the finances of the household and hence they should also be given a chance to

work. The increasing literacy rate of women in the urban areas show that the number of girls pursuing education is on the rise. However, about 54% of the respondents of the sub-urban areas completely approved of women going out for their career needs while about 44% of the respondents of the rural areas approved of it (Fig 2). In the rural areas about 39% of the respondents disapproved of women going out for their career needs. According to Swapna Barui, a women aged 65 years, a woman's primary work is to look after the household needs and if she goes out for her career then it would imply that she will neglect her family. Another male respondent was of the opinion that ultimately a woman has to look after the family, hence only basic education is needed for a woman which is needed for getting her married. However, in the sub-urban areas, those who moderately approved and disapproved of woman going out career needs were of the opinion that if a woman fulfils her household works then she can go out for her own works be it education or work.

In the urban areas an average of 75% of the respondents approved of women going out for their own recreation (Fig 1). In AMC, about 65% of the respondents approved of women going out for their own recreation while the degree of approval is about 86% for DMC. In AMC, majority of the respondents who disapproved of women going out their own recreation turned out to be women only. The reason for the disapproval was mainly that since many were working women so they were of the view that for their works they need to stay out of their homes away from their children so they do not want to spend additional time away from the children. In both the urban and the sub-urban areas, recreation for women meant going out for window shopping in a nearby mall or market, watching a movie, meeting old friend etc. In the sub-urban and the rural areas, about 33% and 45% of the respondents respectively disapproved of women going out for their own recreation (Fig 2).

In the rural areas, recreation for women were mainly confined to women going out to their neighbour's house within the village and that too once they have completed all their household responsibilities. In course of the interaction it was found that most of people disapproving or moderately approving women going out recreation held the view that there is no requirement of recreation for women. In the sub-urban areas, lying in close proximity of the urban areas, the degree of approval turned out to be on the higher side but those sub-urban centres which are gradually being influenced by urbanization, the respondents were not very open minded about women going out for their own recreation. One of the respondent, named Susanta Ghosh, a 45 year old married man with two daughters felt that woman going out for recreation meant inviting unnecessary attention from unwanted people hence it is irrational for women going out for recreation as there are many recreational options in home like sewing, cooking a new dish, watching television etc.

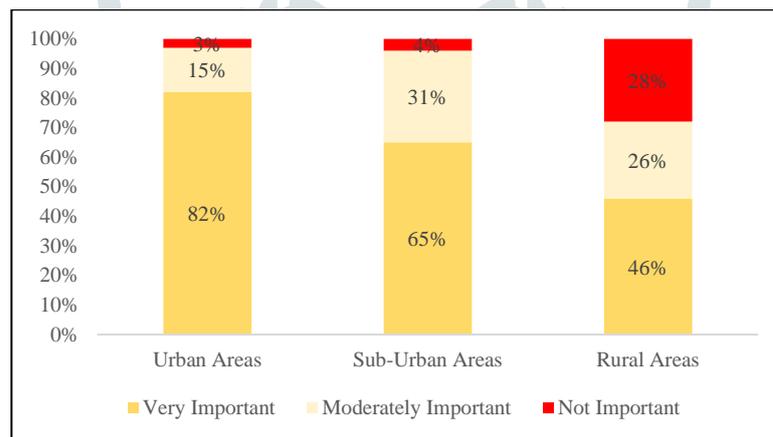


Fig 3: Role of Education of Women in Social Development
Data Source: Primary Survey Conducted during December 2016 to February 2019

Concerning the role of education and the independence of women in social development, respondents attributed them considerable importance for social development. They were asked to indicate the level of importance between very important, moderately important, and not important, very important implying that they agreed completely that education and independence of women are equally important for social development. Those who attached moderate importance to education and independence of women in social development agreed to some extent women's education is important as the mothers need to have a basic level of education for imparting basic knowledge to the children and helping them in their school homeworks, but that independence of women is not important for social development. Certain respondents expressed the opinion that women's education and independence played no role in social development

For 82% of the respondents in urban ADPA, the education of women is extremely important for social development, while 15% considered it moderately important and a small minority of 3% opposed this view (Figure 3). For the majority, education in general and for women in particular plays a very crucial role in societal development. According to Rina Bose, a resident of DMC and a school teacher, education of women is very important even if the woman is not working because the children usually receive their preliminary education from their mothers, and properly educated mothers will ensure that the children will be imparted with the family values and the living style as they usually spend most of their early years with the mothers. Moreover, education will help women to understand what is right and what is wrong and act accordingly, and it provides decision making power. An educated woman will be aware of the various rights and governmental schemes available for her which will further help to reduce the gap between males and females [the gender gap]. In the urban areas, the minority of respondents (female education as only of moderate or no importance) were mainly women above 65 years of age and a man with an orthodox mentality

In the sub-urban and rural areas about 65% and 46% of the respondents respectively responded that the role of education of women is very important for social development (Fig 3). The respondents of the sub-urban areas lying close to the urban centres attached a

lot of importance to the role of women’s education in social development. In the rural areas, about 28% of the respondents were of the view that there is no role of education of women in social development. Many of the rural respondents and few of the sub-urban respondents were under the notion that a basic level of education of women is required for getting her married off to prospective grooms. The respondents who stressed that it is very important for women to be education for social development as it has been noted across ADPA that the areas where the literacy of women are on the higher side, there development is also gradually creeping in.

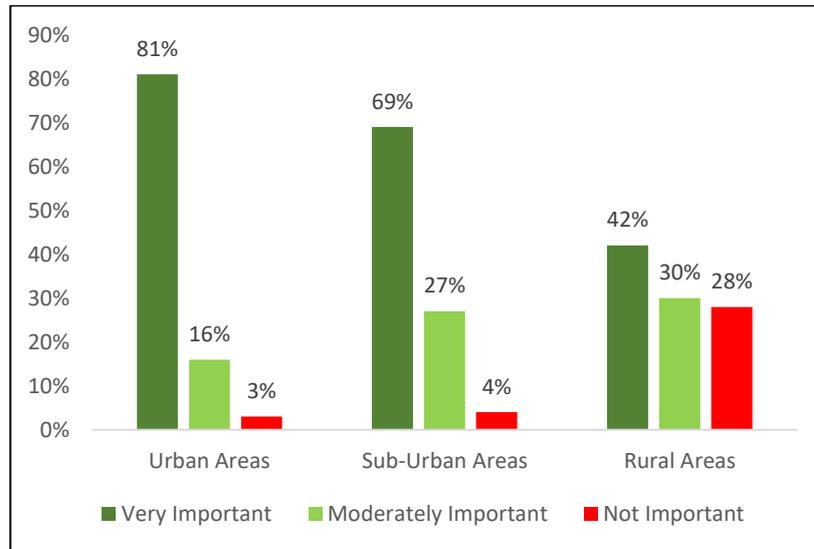


Fig 4: Role of Independence of Women in Social Development, Data Source: Primary Survey Conducted during December 2016 to February 2019

The results of the survey among urban, sub-urban and rural populations in ADPA demonstrate that women require a certain degree of independence to contribute to social development (81%, 69%, and 42% respectively; Figure 4). Independence is particularly important when accessing basic services like education or health care, where dependence on someone all the time is not practical. Lack of proper independence (to go out of their households independently) is an obstacle to access various services on behalf of their family.

In many households, the education of girls is stopped where no household member can accompany them to school. Worst in this respect are rural areas where 28% of all respondents denied the role of independence of women in social development (Figure 4). They held the view that allowing women to be indepent will result in their ignoring their household duties and venture out all the time. In the urban and the sub-urban context, only a narrow minority (3% and 4%) did not see a benefit of female independence for social development (Figure 4). The majority of these respondents were aged above 55 and mainly persons who still held on to the old views that a woman’s duty is to concentrate on her household and children. Many cited security concerns as reason for restricting women’s independence.

5. CONCLUSION

Urbanization and globalization plays a key role in developing and modernizing the mindset of the residents. In ADPA, gradually with the progress of industrialization, the urbanization has also developed a lot which can be seen from the increase in the urban population over the years (Fig 5).

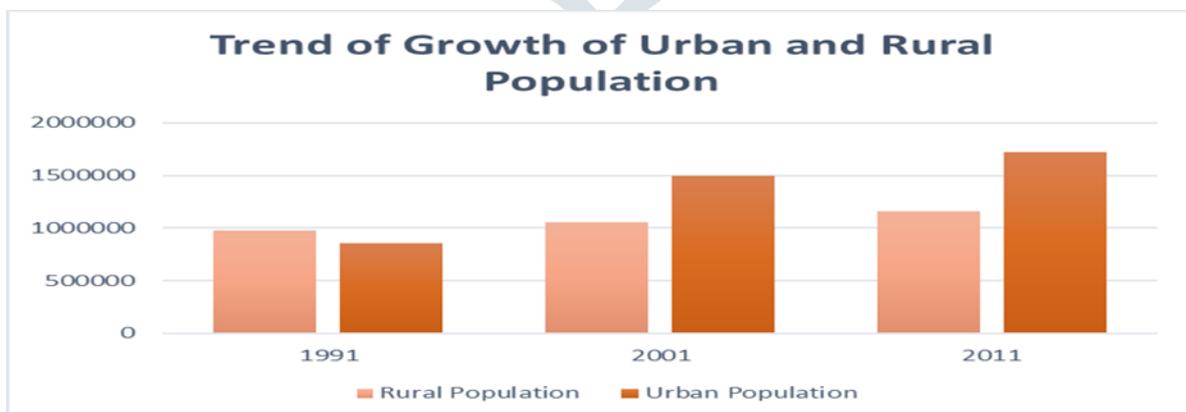


Fig 5: Showing the trend of growth of Urban and Rural Population in ADPA, Data Source: Census of India, 1991, 2001 and 2011

In the urban areas of ADPA, under the influence of urbanization and globaization, the mentality of the residents seems to be quite broad and liberal as is evident from the perception survey. Only a few respondents who are in the old aged they still uphold the traditional conservative views of the society. The sub-urban areas, which lie in close proximity of AMC and DMC, like Chittaranjan, Hindusthan Cables town etc. the respondents are gradually being influenced by the urban areas nearby and that is

being reflected in the perception survey. From the perception survey it is quite evident that the respondents still need to broaden their mindset as far as their perception with regards to women is concerned because for development to take place, elevation of the condition of women is of utmost significance. However, many of the rural respondents were scared to bring about changes in their mentality being scared by the judgemental views of the society. In many places even in these days women are considered as flagbearers of the family's honour, hence a lot of restrictions are imposed in an attempt to protect them.

As far as mobility of women is concerned, in the urban areas, most of the respondents did not pose any restriction in the free movement of the women with regards to their access to various facilities. However, with regards to recreation of women, mainly the women themselves disapproved or moderately approved of it. The women of the urban areas cited that they suffer from time poverty as they have to balance between their household works and professional life and are left with very little time for recreation. Those women who have children at home stated that in general they suffer from time poverty due to various responsibilities, so whatever little time they are left with they intend to spend that with their children. In the rural areas, the reason for disapproval on outdoor activities of women were mainly restricted to the fact that women should primarily focus on their household work. Moreover, another primary reason for imposing various restrictions on the free mobility of women across the urban, sub-urban and rural areas is safety and security reasons which is much more severe in the rural areas. Lack of proper transportation and communication facilities in most of the rural areas and in some of the sub-urban areas played a key role in obstructing women's mobility. Women's mobility has been given a lot of importance since, freedom of movement ensures access to various types of services that are required for upliftment in the society.

It can be concluded that gradually the mentality and perception of residents across ADPA are improving and becoming liberal with the urban and some sub-urban areas leading in this aspect. However, in the urban areas, as a result of the influence of urbanization and globalization, the people possess a liberal mentality which is reflected in the perception survey. In the sub-urban and rural areas, the influence of the various governmental schemes like Kanyashree, Sabala, Sabuj Sathi etc. has played important role in elevating the mentality of the people and will gradually play important role in elevating the status of women.

6. SUGGESTIONS

Keeping in mind the governmental norms the following suggestions can be used for broadening the mentality of the community members and improving the status of women in ADPA.

- Extensive awareness programs should be conducted in regular intervals for making people aware about the role of women in development of a society.
- Programs should be undertaken for making women across the urban, sub-urban and rural areas aware about the various policies of the government available for them.
- The condition of safety and security for women has to be improved so that citing security reasons women do not face any restrictions from their families.
- Provisions of proper trainings must be made available for women so that they become self-sufficient in accessing the various schemes meant for their upliftment.
- Women need to be made aware of their rights through widespread and frequent campaigning.
- Stringent policies must be taken to see that the women centric schemes are being implemented properly and timely.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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