

# **Gender Inequality in Energy Access : Role of Gender Stereotypes in Energy Poverty Resulting in Deterioration of Women's Health**

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***Abstract :** Lack of household electrification and energy access in rural areas creates energy-poverty and directly impacts the lives of rural women. Still the rural women relies on fossil fuels, kerosene lamps and firewood which create indoor air pollution, disproportionately affecting the health and physical status of the women. Social and economic development is hindered by energy poverty especially for women as they play a key role in daily household activities and providing energy resources to the families and bear most of the burden of biomass collection. Women in rural areas thus have to suffer from respiratory illness to eye damages while men only are considered to be in central framework of being the bread earners. From being the fuel managers to gathering biomass for energy, culturally driven gender norms and discrimination still exists. Thus, the objective is to identify the established links between energy access, women and gender implications and why women have to bear the consequences of unavailability of proper energy access resulting into gender-based violence.*

**Keywords :** Women, energy access, gender, rural areas, biomass

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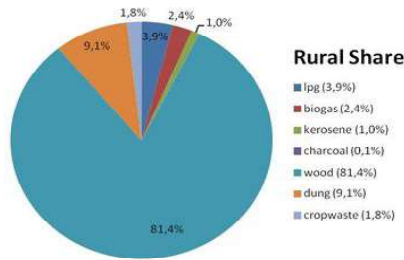
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**Introduction**

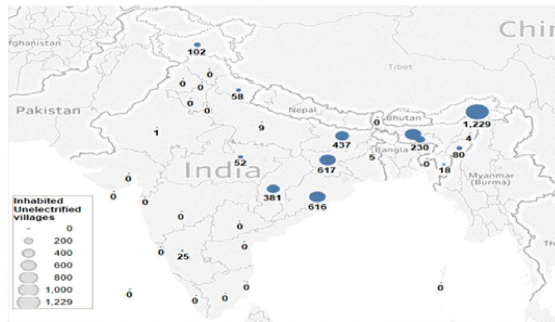
Energy access which almost touches every sphere of our daily life is one of the major challenges faced by the country. It plays an important role in daily household chores such as cooking, heating and lighting. Energy sector’s demand is rapidly increasing in infrastructure, agriculture, household and commercial sectors as well. According to census 2011, out of India’s population of 1.21 billion, 396 million that accounts for 44.7% rural population does not have proper access to electricity and still depends over firewood for cooking. Electricity to all must be seen as a meant to better lifestyle, healthcare, livelihood and women empowerment.



Source: WHO Household Energy Database 2010

As per NSSO, 2007 (national sample survey organization), 90% of rural households do not use environment-friendly and clean a cooking fuels and 45% of them do not have access to electricity. For urban area, the corresponding figures are 33% and 7.8% respectively.

Over 4,000 Villages Remain Un-Electrified, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand At Bottom



Data published by ministry of power, May 16, 2017 state that 73% of the 18,452 villages were identified those who need electrification and only 8% of these villages had all their households electrified. Several states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Nagaland and Uttar Pradesh reported to have more than 50% of their rural households properly electrified. Millennium Development Goals did not crystallize energy access, in September 2010 but Ban Ki Moon; Nations Secretary General launched the target of universal energy access by 2030. The importance of energy access as described by him involves poverty reduction. Despite of the fact that government of India has committed to supply electricity to every village household by 2018 this seems to be a big challenge as nearly two-third of country's households still depends upon charcoal, dung-cake, firewood cooking, agricultural residue etc. Lack of access to energy will result into low productivity, negative health impacts, and reproductive burdens. Launch of Ujjawala Yojana by PM Narendra Modi substantially involves access to LPG connections to women in order to improve their health efficiency. This may be treated as a major step to improve the health of mainly the rural women as well as their quality of life. Energy access will help in better access to education, health, lighting, mechanical power which will lead to income generating activities for women and poverty alleviation. To talk about the modern technology, off-grid electrification and using decentralized power generations and mini grids are used to in rural areas to allow low monthly tariff per household. The Uttarakhand Power Corporation Limited strategies to provide solar energy to thirteen remote villages that lie near the border of China as they even don't have basic access to energy, education and health care services. Gender equality is included in the Sustainable Development Goals and is also recognized as one of the important human right. Energy access plays a vital role in the lives of Indian women especially in rural areas. From collecting of firewood to water and fuel collectors; the energy related obstacles plays an important role women's health related issues. Protection and safety issues are also related to the women as security is associated with collection and burning of fossil fuels woods, sever health issues caused by indoor air pollution as it affects pre-natal mortality and delivery complications. Energy access -Gender based failures of the accountability process is majorly because of the less power of women in political as well as social constituencies and co-existing of patriarchal society does not give proper rights to women as individual duty holders. The major issues is also the time involved in gathering biomass for energy as women being the household-workers; travel and collects these resources for their homes irrespective of their

health issues which raises to a question that why always females go out and fetch for fulfilling the stomachs of their families and not men? Women in India are the primary users of unhygienic stoves, fuel & wood as they are the main managers of household work. They play a vital role in distribution and energy production. Therefore, they should be included energy plans and policy making decisions. Thus, access to energy will make a huge difference in their health qualities to time consuming roles. The use of kerosene stoves and LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) can comparatively help them in gaining a better and healthier life. Reduced drudgery and improved access to power for cooking, lighting, productive and household services can positively affect women's health, education, nutrition and economic and social opportunities.



## **Literature Review**

Experiencing energy poverty comes with lot severe consequences. Women and girls are often responsible for collecting fossil fuels and indoor pollution from the use of cooking stoves results in severe health hazards. Energy access: Reliable, access to clean and affordable energy services for cooking, lighting, heating, communications and productive uses (Pachauri and Spreng 2003). Women carry greater loads compared to men and due to lack of proper nutritional necessities they more often faint or acquire severe skin diseases. People with less availability of energy access face more health risks, heavier work, less productive and are poorer than those of proper energy access (Piccolotti and Taillant 2010). As most of

their time is spend in fetching biomass, they often end up in restrained political and social interactions, no educational facilities, and no additional earnings and less productivity. While both poor women and poor men suffer from energy poverty, women are disproportionately affected, as their access to energy resources and benefits is further curtailed by unequal power relations (Kohlin et al 2011). In 2010, the UN Advisory Group on Energy and Climate Change (AGECC) ensured about two goals: reduce energy intensity globally through energy efficiency measures and ensuring universal access to modern energy services. Subsequently, the UN Secretary General declared 2012 as the International Year for Sustainable Energy for All. Women's energy needs are given less priority then of men and are excluded form energy practices and formulating policies (Cecelski and CRGGE 2006). In Practical Action 2009, there is an evidence that the biggest challenge is providing energy to the underprivileged especially women. Social institutions already formed, developed a structure of norms and rules that produce unequal societal relations such as class, caste, age and mainly gender-biasness. Even women's knowledge about the informal sector and creating a neutral budgeting for the entire family was negligible. Interventions mostly failed to realize the energy rights of the women in early 1970s. None of the policy was able to recognize the amount of labor practice and support their needs and energy rights (Cecelski and CRGGE 2006).

### **Objective of the Study**

There is a lack of recognition of women's energy needs and rights. Also, women face severe health issues due to unavailability of energy access. Thus, this paper highlights the gender-specific interventions to improve the energy access for women especially in rural areas which results into improvement in their health and developing better livelihood opportunities. The main objective is to strengthen the role of women in adoption of gender equilibrium approach towards improving energy access in lieu with better health improvements.

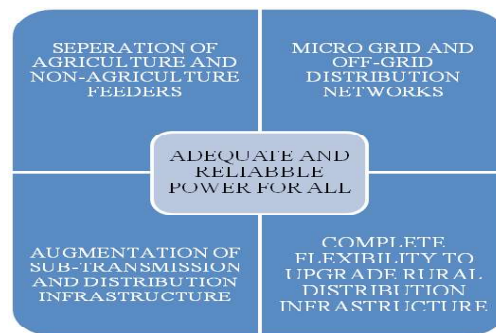
### **Research Methodology**

Secondary data was collected using the newspapers, articles, national and international journals. The main goal of the research was to know how improvement in energy access can improve the health of the rural women.

### **Analysis and Findings**

Energy access should just not aim at creating interventions to improve the

availability of resources but should focus on the health related risks faced by the rural women and develop a pyramid which could promote better and different platform for their empowerment. Electrification of health facilities can help in improvement of mother and child care in rural health clinics. Due to the environmental damages and wrong lifestyle, more of the hospital delivery has increased. Many governments have provided low charged deliveries in the hospitals (government). Thus, the rural women will feel more safe and comfortable in this setting which could only happen if there is proper energy access involved. The ability to refrigerate medicines and vaccines will give more advantage to the easy access to health care services. Women in mainly smoky environment which is a result of cooking from fuels and firewood and majorly from kerosene lamps can suffer from lungs failure, heart diseases and long term respiratory problems. Thus, open fire and mud hearths should be replaced to better charcoal stoves and if possible to LPG. Modern energy access technologies should be introduced to these women for diagnosis and treatment of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and treating non-communicable diseases. Reliable energy services can help in improving work of health workers. Energy access particularly has a positive impact on the reception of women in schools. Mainly in public places as it gives families more confidence that their daughters will be safe. While safety concerns always revolve around women in going out due to unavailability of energy access, it leads to worse educational outcomes. The government should incentivize the solar lightning in rural areas as it not only help in high productivity but reduces health hazards by replacing the kerosene lamps.



Solar mini and micro grid; solar lightning solutions can alone provide basic benefits of community television, powering fans and energy access in health centers during emergencies. The need of the hour is solar powered water treatment which could help the women in a broader aspect from reducing the time and load of fetching water to health benefits. But these techniques are quite expensive hence, government can subsidize them for the rural areas as it may benefit the masses. Many of the advantage of energy access lies in creating livelihood opportunities for women and creating their life easier through better health, more time and reducing women drudgery.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Studies confirm the energy access- Empowerment of women is necessary important for sustainable development. Basic necessities like LPG connections, power and lightning are still a dream for rural women. It is thus directly proportional to access to health, education, environment protection and creation of livelihood and opportunities for rural women. From eye-irritation problems to respiratory illness, the lack of energy access has a direct impact on mental, emotional and economic access to women. Energy access can improve the household activities' productivity and create better job opportunities for women. Rather than women who have to walk miles to fetch wood and fossil fuels to create a source of light, it's the same duty for men to equally participate for the family's welfare. Demand for light can create a supply for increased women's time thus resulting into better health, safety and economic savings. It can help in reducing gender-based violence during transport and fuel collection. Gender mainstreaming can be done for programs related to energy access and its policies. Low cost based technologies should be introduced even the solar energy should be provided in a low cost to the rural women. Energy access thus plays an important role even in running small scale business like beauty parlors, tailoring, flour mill which are generally run by the women. Women in energy jobs can help in improving the supply chain for effectiveness. Bioenergy can be used due to its easy availability and low cost. As beneficiaries there should be equal contribution from men and women to improve the gender-biased approach of energy access for rural women.

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