

Review Article

Empowering Women to Combat Drug and Alcohol Issues through Participation in Local Self-Governance: A Study

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Abstract

Women's empowerment and participation in governance are critical for sustainable development and inclusive governance, particularly in addressing drug and alcohol issues. Decentralisation of governance at the rural level, introduced by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1993 and supplemented by state legislatures, serves as an effective and crucial indicator leading to inclusive governance. This system provides greater opportunities for women to participate in decision-making, particularly through reservations for women in local self-governance. This study aims to understand the concept of Women's empowerment in local self-governance and determine the relationship between participation and Women's empowerment, with a specific focus on addressing drug and alcohol issues. Using a descriptive research design, the study explores the concept of Women's empowerment through document reviews and data collected from documentary sources, reports, and legislative documents, including an intensive search across a range of online databases. Findings reveal that participation and empowerment are inseparably linked; they are distinct yet interdependent, giving each other meaning and purpose. The active involvement of women in local self-governance has enabled them to employ innovative approaches to generate, sustain, and implement alternative methods to combat drug and alcohol issues. Empowering women through their participation in policy making and implementing policies to combat drug and alcohol issues at local level leads to the evolution of a sustainable society.

Keywords: Alcohol addiction; Women's empowerment; Participation; Local self-governance; Decentralization

Introduction

Women's empowerment has been increasingly prioritized in contemporary global development agendas, as it is closely associated with various development outcomes, including addressing critical issues such as alcohol and drug abuse. Achieving gender equality and Women's empowerment is the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-5) to be accomplished by 2030 [1]. Although considerable literature has emerged on theorizing, operationalizing, and conceptualizing the concept of Women's empowerment,

any general definition of Women's empowerment is absent [2]. The concept has been subject to varying definitions among researchers and authorities. Mishra and Tripathi's framework of empowerment comprises the indicators of "evidence, sources, and settings" while Kabeer's view incorporates the elements of "resources, agency, and achievement" [3,4]. Meanwhile, the World Bank's definition adopts a "rights, resources, and voice" approach. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) assesses gender disparities across 3 fundamental human development dimensions: Reproductive health, empowerment, and economic standing. The Women's Political Empowerment Index (WPEI) from the Varieties of Democracy Project (V-Dem) provides information about women's "civil liberties, civil society participation, and political participation," conceptualized as a latent trait constructed from several indicators [5].

Women's equal status in every sphere is linked to the country's progress and development [6]. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution guarantees equality before the law. Similarly, Article 15 (3) authorizes states to make special provisions for women and children, while Article 16 ensures equality of opportunity in the matters of employment. These provisions under the Indian Constitution ensure the empowerment of women. Certain Directive Principles of State Policies ensure women's economic empowerment; Article 39 (a) mandates the state to direct its policy toward ensuring that all citizens, men and women alike, have the right to an adequate means of subsistence and a decent standard of living, while Article 39 (d) guarantees men and women equal pay for equal work. Furthermore, Article 42 provides for fair and humane working conditions and

maternity leave. As part of fundamental duties, Article 51 (e) requires all Indians to uphold peace and a sense of brotherhood and to refrain from acts that demean the dignity of women.

The increasing number of women in public life necessitates active political participation, which encompasses more than just the exercise of voting rights and entails engagement in decision-making processes, power-sharing, and involvement at the policy-making level. To ensure political empowerment, Article 243 D (3) and (4) of the Indian Constitution stipulates that a minimum of one-third of the total seats to be filled through direct election in each Panchayat, including seats reserved for women from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Such seats shall be allotted by rotation to different constituencies within a Panchayat, with not less than 1/3rd of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level [7].

The measurement of Women's empowerment typically encompasses indicators such as autonomy, control over resources, workforce participation, and self-esteem. The existing body of research on empowerment has provided limited coverage of its multidimensional nature, specifically concerning resources, agency, and outcomes. Most research and UNDP indices assessing Women's empowerment focus on examining discrete variables such as self-esteem, agency and outcomes in isolation rather than integrating them within a comprehensive study. This study aims to understand Women's empowerment in local self-governance and determine the relationship between participation and Women's empowerment, with particular attention to addressing alcohol and drug issues. It is based on secondary data collected from published literature on the subject. For the study, data has been collected from documentary sources, reports, and legislative documents, including an intensive search through various online databases for analysis and interpretation. In selecting relevant literature for the study, emphasis was placed on recently published articles and reports. The interconnection between participation and empowerment has been observed with a specific focus on women's role in addressing alcohol and drug issues.

Theoretical Framework

Empowerment

The popular meaning of empowerment is to make someone powerful, enable the weak to be strong, enhance one's self-image, be self-confident, raise a voice against injustice and oppression, and help someone fight for her rights [8]. Empowerment processes arise as a consequence of an interactive dynamic, which is subject to varying degrees of negotiation between the capacities of an individual, group, or community and the opportunities made available by the physical and socio-cultural environments in which they navigate their existence [9]. Empowerment refers to decision-making power, freedom of choice, and access to facilities. Empowerment means expanding people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability

was previously denied to them [10]. Empowerment is multidimensional and refers to the expansion of freedom of choice and action in all spheres (social, economic, and political) to shape one's life. It also implies control over resources and decisions [11]. Further, empowerment is defined as "the process of gaining control over one's own life while supporting and facilitating others' control over their lives" [12]. Goodrich describes empowerment as "a benevolent but unilateral transaction in which one person enhances another's ability to feel competent and take action, that is, enhances another's power-to, which has 4 main dimensions: Economic, social, psychological, and political [13,14].

The empowerment theory generally refers to the construct that connects strengths, individual competence, and proactive behaviours on a social basis and social change [15]. It connects the well-being of individuals with a larger social, economic, and political environment. "Empowerment-oriented" intervention aimed at improving living standards, solving problems, allowing individuals to develop knowledge and skills, and involving professionals as partners [16]. A few authors have proposed conceptual models of the empowerment process [17]. Kabear's conceptual models delineate 3 distinct components of empowerment, including agency, resources, and achievements. The availability of resources plays a crucial role in empowering women to exercise their autonomy, while agency pertains to their capacity to take action based on their choices [18]. Agency can be defined as the "ability to define one's goals and act on them." These activities can encompass a range of economic, social, and political dimensions that exhibit variations within different situations. However, resources are pre-conditions and achievement as outcomes, and the agency serves as the intermediary process that connects these 2 components, although it is worth noting that well-being outcomes and resources can also influence the agency itself [19]. Changing ideas about women's role in society is a transformational process that may develop over decades, whereas increasing educational attainment for women can happen more quickly [20].

Participation

Participation is an inclusive development approach that acknowledges the necessity of engaging marginalised elements of society in the formulation and execution of policies about their welfare. The strengthening of women's participation in all spheres of life has become a significant issue in development. It cannot be fully achieved without the active participation of women at the decision-making level in society [21]. Participation as an end in itself focuses on participation as a process in which people are directly involved in shaping, deciding, and taking part in the development process from a bottom-up perspective [22]. The development objective pertains to a secondary phase, wherein the emergence of direct engagement or active involvement from individuals fosters the development of their confidence and competence. In this situation, participation becomes a process of achieving greater

individual fulfilment, personal development, self-awareness, and some immediate satisfaction [23]. Participation refers to individuals' collaborative and ongoing endeavours in establishing objectives, consolidating resources, and undertaking initiatives to enhance their quality of life. The term 'participation' encompasses many actions citizens undertake to engage in the functioning of administration. The term 'taking part' encompasses several levels, ranging from macro to micro-regions, and can involve different types of participation, such as advising, decision-making, and implementation.

Women's empowerment

"The term 'Empower' means to give lawful power or authority to act". Women's empowerment means making women self-dependent, giving them freedom and access to opportunities [24]. Such empowerment is imperative that women no longer endure delays in achieving equality and empowerment within society. Women's empowerment is enhancing their position in the power structure of society [25]. It facilitates the realisation of their complete capabilities and strengthens their ability to negotiate in various spheres of their lives. Women's empowerment can serve as a means to address several challenges women encounter, including but not limited to exploitation, gender discrimination, and gender-based violence. Women's empowerment emancipates women from the age-old culture of submission and subjugation to the patriarchal forces as well as enables them to raise their voices to fight against exploitation, injustice, violence, and abuse done to them [26]. Empowerment of women is the process of awareness and capacity building that facilitates women for greater participation, access to greater decision-making power and control, and transformation from powerless to powerful [27]. In other words, Women's empowerment is a process that intends to provide an optimum opportunity for women to participate in the decision-making process, enhance their choices, improve capacity building, and facilitate their presence in representative and legislative bodies, employment, and access to resources [28].

According to Hossain, "Gender Equality" and "Women's empowerment" have emerged as prominent and widely discussed topics within the development field. Unless women are involved in the decision-making and policy-making process at all state levels, changes in women's political and, to some extent, social and economic status will continue to be marginal [29]. The term refers to improving women's conditions in every sphere of life. However, it indicates the overall development of the drawback classes of society to bring them into an advanced situation, almost at the same level, to make women capable of organising themselves to enhance their self-reliance, affirming their self-determining right to make choices and charge for resources [30]. These capabilities will help them take on challenges and break their subordinate position in society. Beijing Conference (1995) identified specific quantitative and qualitative indicators of Women's empowerment [31].

As per the United Nations Development Programme

(UNDP), the achievement of inclusive development and poverty reduction is contingent upon the active involvement of all societal segments in generating opportunities, equitably distributing developmental advantages, and engaging in decision-making processes. Inclusive development is a framework that aims to incorporate the involvement of marginalised and excluded groups within the development process, so granting them a role as stakeholders. Decentralisation aligns with an inclusive development framework to facilitate the formulation of localised plans for various activities, ensuring the active involvement of all segments of society. This is often achieved through representative bodies such as the Gram Sabha in India. Decentralisation is known to support democratic governance characterised by representation, accountability, transparency, and accessibility to the public, hence fostering inclusive growth. This technique has been implemented in several countries globally to enhance governance and the provision of services [32]. The endorsement of descriptive representation is increasingly prevalent in international declarations concerning women. For example, the Beijing Platform (1995) for action stated, "Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account." The protocol on gender and development was accepted by the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) in 2008 also advocates for women's participation in both the public and private sectors to achieve a 50% representation. This was to be accomplished by the implementation of affirmative action measures [33].

Women's Participation in Local Self Governance

The involvement of women in mainstream political action holds significant consequences for the wider domain of governance within any given country. The active involvement of women in local governance is not only a fundamental human right but also facilitates the fulfilment of various other human rights. The inclusion of women in political processes and their ability to influence decision-making about essential services, economic progress, and social equity are pivotal elements in addressing and reshaping systemic inequality based on caste, class, and gender. These aspects are crucial in empowering women to exercise their inherent rights. Political involvement necessitates the establishment of mechanisms to ensure that both state and non-state actors are held accountable for upholding and valuing women's equal political voice and advancement. The aforementioned necessitates a reconfiguration of power dynamics, both within the structures of governance and within the social milieu of women. Women's political empowerment encompasses the progressive development of women's abilities, resulting in enhanced opportunities, autonomy, and engagement in making societal decisions [34].

The individual chosen through a formal voting process to hold a position of authority is expected to establish a

conducive atmosphere for the local community, engage in Gram Sabha gatherings, pose inquiries, engage in dialogue, and express their viewpoints. Based on statistical data provided by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, it is evident that women actively engage in Gramme Sabha meetings. However, women remain reluctant to speak with authorities regarding their concerns or developmental initiatives. Gender inequality can often serve as an obstacle for individuals in effectively expressing their perspectives. The comprehensive assessment of effective participation extends beyond mere statistical analysis of meeting attendance. It necessitates a thorough evaluation of elected representatives, encompassing their ability to articulate ideas, willingness to engage in debates, commitment to addressing community concerns, and overall proficiency in problem-solving. They demonstrate greater efficacy when they successfully mobilize the community around diverse developmental matters, hence fostering awareness among individuals [35].

The rules about reserving 33% of seats for women in local self-government institutions in Panchayats and Municipalities, as introduced by the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Indian Constitution, have resulted in a significant societal transformation. The inclusion of women in grassroots politics in India has undergone significant development. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts have been essential in facilitating the inclusion of women in political domains. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act holds significant importance in the historical context of Indian women's involvement in establishing democratic institutions at the local level. The implementation of reservation policies in Panchayats has facilitated the gradual dismantling of old gender, caste, and class roles and hierarchies. However, it is important to acknowledge that this transformative process is both protracted and arduous. Women's political empowerment and equal representation in all decision-making institutions are critical inputs in their struggle for freedom from patriarchal subjugation [36].

Drugs and Alcohol Issues in India

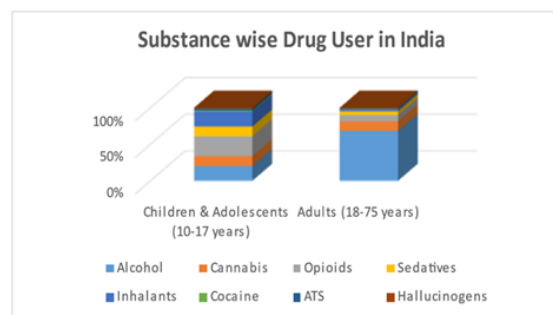
Abuse of drugs and other substances is a major problem today. Substance abuse is a global epidemic that affects every region. There has been a dramatic increase in drug abuse, which is having a negative impact on the country's physical and social health. As a result, it affects public health in many ways. In recent years, drug misuse among India's youth has reached crisis proportions. Substance misuse has become more common because of the stress and pressure of modern living. Individuals, their loved ones, and communities are all impacted by substance abuse and addiction [37].

The 2018 general population drug use study by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that drug usage among youth is still greater than among the elderly. However, with more conventional drug use, such as opium or khat, there have been reports of exceptions. The majority of studies indicate that the most vulnerable years

for beginning substance use are early to late adolescence (between the ages of 15 and 17) and that the peak use years for substances may occur between the ages of 18 and 25 [38]. Drug and alcohol abuse in India is a significant social and public health concern. The country faces a growing problem with the misuse of substances such as alcohol, cannabis, heroin, and synthetic drugs. This issue has wide-reaching implications for public health, economic stability, and social cohesion.

Children and adolescents (10 years-17 years)

Figure 1 presents an overview of substance use among children and adolescents aged 10 years-17 years. The highest reported substance use in this age group is for opioids, with 4 million users. Alcohol and inhalants each have 3 million users, indicating significant prevalence among young individuals. Cannabis and sedatives are used by 2 million children and adolescents each. Cocaine and hallucinogens have the lowest reported usage, with 200,000 users each, while 400,000 young people use ATS (Amphetamine-Type Stimulants).



Source: National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use in India, 2018

Figure 1: Substance wise drug user in India

Adults (18 years-75 years)

The data indicates the prevalence of substance use among adults aged 18 years to 75 years in a given population. Alcohol has the highest usage, with 151 million adults consuming it. Cannabis is the second most commonly used substance, with 29 million users. 19 million adults use opioids, while sedatives are used by 11 million. Inhalants have 6 million users, followed by 2 million users each for amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) and hallucinogens. Cocaine is the least used substance, with 1 million users.

Combating Drugs and Alcohol Issues

According to Article 47 of the Indian Constitution, the state shall work towards outlawing harmful substances like alcohol and drugs [39]. There are 2 main approaches to lowering the prevalence of drug abuse in the nation: Decreasing the availability of drugs and decreasing the demand for them. The NCB, under the MHA and the Department of Revenue, is responsible for implementing the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985 and the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1988, with the goal of reducing the availability of illicit drugs within the country [40,41]. Patient education, treatment, and rehabilitation are the focal points of the demand

reduction initiatives. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment oversees these initiatives, although the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare also plays a role to some extent.

The Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961; the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971; and the Convention against Illicit Trade in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988 are the 3 United Nations Conventions to which India is a signatory [42-44]. India, therefore, has an international obligation to reduce drug abuse, among other things. During its 20th Special Session in 1998, the United Nations General Assembly recognised demand reduction as a crucial component of drug control tactics. Education, therapy, rehabilitation, and social integration of drug-dependent individuals comprise the demand reduction method, which aims to prevent drug abuse.

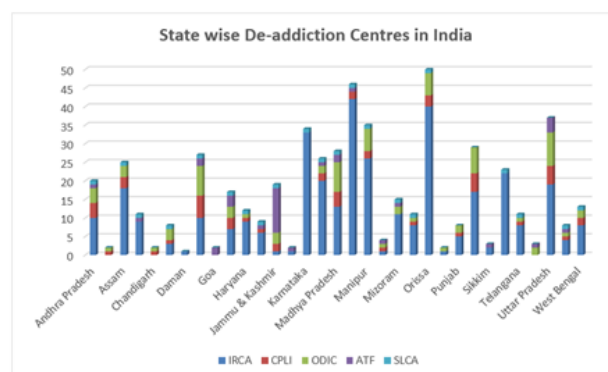
The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has developed and implemented the National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR) to address the growing issue of substance abuse among youth. This plan embodies the Government's commitment to sustained and coordinated action against this pressing problem [45]. One of the key initiatives under NAPDDR is the *Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan* (NMBA), launched in 272 of the most vulnerable districts. Through this campaign, a massive community outreach effort is underway, involving more than 8,000 youth volunteers. To date, over 24 million people have been reached through various activities, including over 9.2 million youth and 2.96 million women who have actively participated in spreading the message against substance use. Around 4,000 youth organizations, including *Yuva Mandals*, *NYKS* and *NSS Volunteers*, and *Youth Clubs*, have joined the *Abhiyaan*. More than 1.3 million students nationwide have been engaged through events, competitions, and sessions in over 6,000 schools [46].

Social media plays a crucial role in amplifying the NMBA's message online. Dedicated handles on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide daily updates, while an Android mobile application captures real-time data of on-ground activities, enhancing coordination and effectiveness. The Ministry supports 355 Integrated Rehabilitation Centres for Addicts (IRCA), which offer comprehensive services such as preventive education, awareness generation, motivational counseling, detoxification/de-addiction, aftercare, and social reintegration. Special de-addiction centers for women and children are also supported, recognizing their unique needs. Further, 53 Community-based Peer-led Intervention (CPLI) Centres focus on vulnerable and at-risk children and adolescents. Peer educators engage these young individuals in awareness generation and life skill activities. Additionally, 78 Outreach and Drop-In Centres (ODICs) provide safe spaces for treatment and rehabilitation, including screening, assessment, counseling, and referral services. The Ministry has established 36 Addiction Treatment Facilities (ATFs) in government hospitals, implemented through AIIMS,

New Delhi. Financial support is also provided for setting up District De-Addiction Centres (DDACs), which offer comprehensive services similar to IRCA, ODICs, and CPLIs, focusing on early prevention, education, demand reduction, and rehabilitation [47].

To enhance accessibility, the Ministry has geo-tagged GIA institutions providing counseling, treatment, and rehabilitation services. A toll-free helpline for de-addiction (14446) offers primary counseling and immediate assistance to individuals seeking help. Through its autonomous body, the National Institute of Social Defence (NISD), and collaborating agencies like SCERTs and Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, the Ministry conducts regular awareness and sensitization sessions for students, teachers, and parents, ensuring a comprehensive approach to tackling substance abuse. The Government's multifaceted approach under the NAPDDR, including community outreach, support for rehabilitation centers, and the use of technology and social media, reflects its commitment to reducing substance abuse and supporting affected individuals and communities across India.

The graph illustrates the distribution of various facilities across different states in India (Figure 2). It includes data for Integrated Rehabilitation Centres for Addicts (IRCA), Counselling and Peer-Led Interventions (CPLI), Outreach and Drop-In Centres (ODIC), Addiction Treatment Facilities (ATF), and Specialised Livelihood Counselling and Awareness Centres (SLCA). Andhra Pradesh has a total of 20 facilities, comprising 10 IRCA, 4 CPLI, 4 ODIC, 1 ATF, and 1 SLCA. Assam stands out with 25 facilities, while Delhi has 27 facilities. States like Bihar, Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh, and Goa have fewer facilities, with totals ranging from 2 to 11. Notably, Karnataka has a significant number of facilities, totalling 34, with 33 being IRCA. Maharashtra leads with 46 facilities, including 42 IRCA. Manipur follows closely with 35 facilities. States like Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura have fewer facilities, with totals ranging from 3 to 15. Uttar Pradesh has 37 facilities, and West Bengal has 13. Overall, the data reveals that Maharashtra and Karnataka have the highest number of facilities, whereas Daman, Arunachal Pradesh, and Chandigarh have the least. The grand total across all states is 543 facilities, with 355 IRCA, 53 CPLI, 78 ODIC, 36 ATF, and 21 SLCA.



Source: Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment, 2022.

Figure 2: State-wise number of de-addiction centers in India

Role of Women Representative to Combat Drugs and Alcohol Distress

In Haryana, women are taking a stand against the increasing consumption of alcohol in their villages, pressuring the government to shut down liquor vends. This movement is notably strong in Rohtak and Sonapat districts, led by 2 dynamic women who are also their village sarpanch. In Bhaini Bharon village, Rohtak, sarpanch Darshna Devi, 48, has formed an all-women anti-liquor committee committed to combating alcoholism. This proactive stance by women representatives illustrates the dimensions of Women's empowerment [48]. Firstly, it highlights personal development, as these women exhibit self-confidence and challenge internalized oppression by taking leadership roles. Secondly, it demonstrates relational development, where women like Darshna Devi negotiate and influence the nature of community relationships and decisions regarding alcohol consumption. Thirdly, it showcases collective development through their involvement in local political structures and their collective action against alcohol abuse. By forming committees and leading protests, these women not only combat the adverse effects of alcohol but also strengthen their communities through cooperation and solidarity. When these women are part of local self-governance, they can handle socio-legal issues, such as drugs and alcohol, in a more conducive manner [49].

Women representatives play a pivotal role in combating drugs and alcohol in their communities, as seen in initiatives across Haryana. "Women in the village are unanimous on the issue-that liquor has been a major factor behind the disintegration of many families," emphasized Darshna. In response, actions like imposing fines on liquor sellers and protesting the opening of new liquor vends demonstrate their proactive stance. For instance, in Phurlak village, women locked a newly opened liquor vend and demanded its relocation, serving an ultimatum for closure within a week. Similarly, in Assandh town, residents protested against a liquor vend near a girls' school, advocating for its closure [50].

Participation and empowerment are integral to the nation's socio-political development, especially through women's involvement in decision-making processes affecting their lives [51]. Empowerment involves raising awareness among women to be politically active, economically productive, and capable of engaging in informed discussions on relevant issues [52]. Various forms of participation, including individual and community, are essential for empowerment, enabling women to influence and shape decisions [53]. Effective participation requires not just presence but active engagement, articulation of issues, and efforts towards resolution, reflecting a commitment to constituents' interests [54].

Thus, the role of women representatives in combatting drugs and alcohol is crucially linked to their empowerment and active participation in local governance [55]. By

leveraging their positions, these representatives empower communities to address socio-legal issues effectively and foster positive change. Schemes initiated by the state government at the panchayat level to control drug and alcohol abuse are crucial in combating the above issue. Here are some notable ones:

1. In Kerala, the Vimukthi Mission engages Panchayats in comprehensive efforts aimed at preventing substance abuse. This initiative encourages local self-government bodies to play a proactive role by conducting awareness campaigns and community engagement activities. Panchayats are tasked with monitoring and reporting drug-related activities within their jurisdictions, emphasizing the importance of grassroots involvement in tackling substance abuse issues. Through these coordinated efforts, the Vimukthi Mission aims to create a more vigilant and supportive environment where communities actively combat the challenges posed by drug abuse [56].
2. In Punjab, the Buddy Program aims to tackle the issue of drug abuse by actively engaging Panchayats with schools and communities. This initiative includes comprehensive awareness campaigns to educate about the harmful effects of drugs. Moreover, it involves training sessions designed specifically for Panchayat members, empowering them to act as vigilant community watchdogs against substance abuse. By fostering collaboration between local governance and grassroots efforts, the program strives to create a supportive environment focused on prevention and intervention in combating drug misuse across the state [57].
3. In Tamil Nadu, Village Vigilance Committees play a crucial role in addressing issues related to drugs and alcohol within local communities. These committees are formed by Panchayats to actively monitor and promptly report any suspicious activities associated with substance abuse. They organize frequent awareness campaigns to educate residents about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Additionally, the committees collaborate closely with local law enforcement agencies to ensure swift action against offenders and to maintain community safety. Through these proactive measures, the committees aim to foster a vigilant and informed community that is resilient against the threats posed by substance misuse [58].

Discussion

The reservation of women in local self-governance indeed ensures their presence and increases their influence in decision-making. The involvement of women in local governance is significant, with Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) constituting 45.6% of the total Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) representatives in India, amounting to 14,53,973 (Report on Finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions). At the local level, state governments are expected to assign responsibility for the

effective implementation and supervision of the program to an appropriate body. This could be the Gram Panchayat, Municipality, or Corporation, depending on the specific context. The Panchayat Raj Institutions, being the closest form of government to the people, play a critical role in this process. They are best positioned to understand the local context and needs, mobilize community resources, and ensure that the program is implemented in a culturally appropriate and effective manner. Issues of alcoholism and drug abuse can be effectively addressed with the help of the institution of local self-government.

The participation of women can manifest in several forms, including direct and indirect involvement, as well as official and informal engagements. The subject matter can encompass political, social, or administrative aspects, particularly in addressing critical issues such as drug and alcohol abuse. The involvement of women in Local Self Governance can manifest in several ways. The term "women's participation in development" encompasses a range of actions that demonstrate women's engagement in processes and administration, including their involvement in policy formation, program planning, implementation, and assessment of policies and programs aimed at benefiting development target groups.

The government sought to establish an institutional framework to facilitate and encourage widespread engagement and involvement. Local governance and community development programs were introduced mainly to solicit women's participation in government development administration [59]. Women's involvement in village development activities signifies a sustainable society [60]. An Integrated Rehabilitation Centre for Addicts (IRCA) should be established in a village if there is a significant incidence of alcoholism and drug abuse within the village and its surrounding areas and there is a recognized need for rehabilitation of affected individuals. The IRCA can be set up provided an eligible NGO is willing to locate the project in an Adarsh Gram or if the Gram Panchayat is willing to establish and manage the center.

Female members have the potential to make a greater contribution towards meeting the fundamental requirements of the local population, such as housing, housing improvement, access to clean drinking water sanitation facilities, and addressing drug and alcohol abuse. They play an active role in fulfilling the local people's basic needs and providing employment opportunities to the public. However, the mere inclusion and involvement of women in local governing institutions does not necessarily ensure that the concerns of women and the underlying socioeconomic inequities will be acknowledged and effectively addressed by Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The research findings revealed that women were actively engaged in efforts to improve the socioeconomic conditions of marginalized groups in society, such as Scheduled Castes, minorities, families living below the poverty line, and widows. Additionally, women played a significant role in promoting activities related to the development and well-

being of children and addressing drug and alcohol issues within their communities.

The involvement of the community at large in executing the scheme is the key to its effective implementation. Community participation assists the government authorities in improving the social, economic, and cultural life in rural areas and in addressing drug and alcohol issues. To effectively address issues such as alcoholism and drug abuse at the local level, it is crucial that awareness programs are tailored to the local culture and conducted in the local language. Utilizing audio-visual aids such as overhead projectors (OHPs), slides, CDs, PowerPoint presentations, films, etc., along with innovative methods like street plays, puppet shows, seminars, and group discussions, can greatly enhance the impact of these programs. Involving respected and credible individuals like Panchayat leaders is essential to fostering community engagement and trust.

Based on the ground experience of working in panchayats, there is a continued need for effective capacity building among members of Panchayat in order to deal with social and economic problems in society [61]. This will facilitate their ability to address drug and alcohol issues at the Panchayat level. The local government serves as an initial platform since it nurtures and develops individuals into future leaders [62].

Establishing a comprehensive development plan for empowering women through training is required. This training should aim to cultivate political, administrative, financial, legislative, and interpersonal proficiencies while instilling the necessary self-assurance to enhance the efficacy of professional responsibilities. It is imperative to undertake thorough feedback and assessment processes. To facilitate the capacity-building of women leaders. Gender sensitivity training should be mandatory for all members, including the political representatives and bureaucracy, and incorporate human rights, domestic violence, sexual harassment, gender relations, egalitarian attitudes, and strategies for addressing drug and alcohol issues [63,64].

Conclusion

Participation of women in local self-government serves as a nursery for cultivating women's leadership at the local level of government. The participation of women is crucial for empowering and mobilizing them at the grassroots level, enabling them to have a greater voice in the decision-making process and to address critical issues such as drug and alcohol abuse. Women, being the most affected section due to alcohol and drug abuse, would find their involvement helpful in ensuring the demand reduction and supply reduction of alcohol and drugs. Women must be confident, understand their roles, and be able to make decisions if society allows them to participate fully. To achieve effective and genuine empowerment of women through participation in local self-governance, institutions at the sub-divisional level provide periodic training and acquaint women with new policies and programs for the development of their areas. Such training should also address strategies for combating

drug and alcohol issues, which disproportionately affect women and their communities. Addressing alcoholism and drug issues through quality participation of women in local self-governance ensures not only their empowerment but also the well-being of the entire community. Empowered, educated, and aware women leaders can drive impactful change and foster healthier, more resilient societies at the grassroots level.

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Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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