

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

Factors Effect on Women Autonomy and Decision-Making Power within the Household in Rural Communities

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ABSTRACT

Problem Statements: This study was designed to examine women's autonomy and decision-making power among rural women within their household in Bangladesh. By custom a patriarchal social system exists in Bangladesh. Like other patriarchal societies, in Bangladesh, men have greater power in family decision simply by virtue of being men. Hence, women decision-making power is limited to the patriarchal ideology especially in rural societies. **Approach:** The study examines women positions in the family with regard to their role in the intra-family decision-making, their degree of control over some selected items. The study argued that women decision making power is positively associated with their educational level, employment, income and other socio-economic variables. The objectives of this research are (a) to examine women autonomy and decision-making power at the household level; (b) to identify the factors that effect on women autonomy and decision-making power at household. **Results:** The results showed that respondent's educational attainment ($r = 0.47$; $p < 0.01$), occupation ($r = 0.61$; $p < 0.01$) and income ($r = 0.60$; $p < 0.01$) were positively related to women decision-making power at household level. A multiple linear regression analysis was carried out and the results revealed that education, occupation, income and gender-based awareness had a significant influence on women's decision-making power. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed the overall significant of the linear regression model with F-test ($p < 0.001$) for considerable adjustment of the model with the regression coefficient (R square) of 51.6. **Conclusion:** The results suggest that education, occupation, income and gender-based awareness have significant effect in explaining the variance in household decision-making power. Overall, women education, income, occupation, gender-based awareness has a significant effect on household decision-making.

Key words: Patriarchal societies; Gender –based awareness; Decision-making power; Education; Employment; Income

Introduction

In developing countries, women play a vital role to the welfare of the family. They are basically viewed as the potential mothers and homemakers. Hence, decision-making power of women within the family has been looked upon as one of the important factors which may effect on well-being of the family (Safilios, 1983). The importance of husband-wife decision making is well acknowledged by researchers (Davis and Rigaux 1974; Kassarijian 1982; Corfman 1991). It has been noted that women active participation at all levels of decision making is important in order to achieve equality and peace in family as well as the country (Mahmuda, 2008). Despite the importance women participation in family decision-making, in third world countries, especially Bangladesh and Pakistan women decision-making power is limited to some extent (Saira, *et al* 2005; Sultana, 2010). It is documented that due to some extent decision-power making power is not limited to cultural setting (Rodman, 1972. Like other patriarchal societies, in Bangladeshi society, men have greater power and authority in household decision-making simply by virtue of being men and therefore 'head' of the family (Schuler *et*

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al., 1996; Sultana, 2010). In Bangladesh, both decision-making powers and economic control are vested in the hands of men as the household authority. Women are particularly unlikely to make independent decisions related to freedom of mobility, buying or selling of real estate, fertility control, children's education, on the greatest say in children's marriage.

However, it has noted that decision making process is generally influenced by the level of knowledge (Muzamil, 2008). The present study argued that women decision making power is positively associated with their educational level, employment, income and other socio-economic variables. This approach is supported by various theories. The article deal with one dimension of women's power: their say in family-decision making process. Hence power is determined as the indicator and this particular dimension as part of women's gaining (or losing) access to and control over material resources, intellectual resources and ideological resources. Blood and Wolfe (1960) developed first developed "theory of resources" which indicates that husband wife decision-making power depends upon the resources. Resources refer to income, educational attainment and occupation. This theory also indicates that women decision-making power may increase when her resources increase. Various theories supported this view that in a family if a person has more resources he/she will have more power to exercise in decision-making within the family (Safflios-Rothschild, 1969; Lamouse, 1969; Lupri, 1969; Kandel and Lesser, 1972).

Denise and Gerald (1972) further tested Blood and Wolf's theory of resources in family decision-making power through survey research among Danish and American families. The research showed that wife's employment whether fulltime or part-time play an important role to increase her decision-making power in family. However, the present study is undertaken to analyze women autonomy and decision-making power among rural women within the household. The research attempts to identify the factors that effect on the level of women decision-making power in family. Research on this issue in Bangladesh is still incipient. The study of women's autonomy and decision-making power within the household in rural Bangladesh is still being limited. This research seeks to contribute in finding out the socio-demographic influence on rural women's autonomy and power in Bangladesh. The particular strength of this work is the use of quantitative methods to the study with a large number of respondents.

Objective of the Study:

The objectives of this study are 1) to examine women autonomy and decision-making power at household level and 2) to determine the factors that might affect women's decision-making power at the household level.

Materials and Methods

Research design:

The study is based on primary information. The paper uses structured survey data from the selected study areas. The findings presented in this study are based on survey research by the researcher in three villages in north region of Bangladesh. One-shot cross-sectional survey research design was employed in this article. The research was a non-probability sampling. The survey included questions related to background of the respondent such as age, education, income, employment, religious status, and number of children, children's educational status, respondents' decision-making power and autonomy within their household. Independent variables of this study are educational status, occupation, income, age, religious status, number of children and children's educational status. The respondents were categorized according to the level of education they received. These categorizes included: 'illiterate', 'can sign only', 'able to sign and read', 'primary', 'secondary', 'higher secondary' and 'graduate level of education'. For better understanding the category of 'can sign only' and 'sign and read only' are combined into a category of 'basic education' Status of employment is referred to as respondent's current occupation, what type of occupation she is involved in. These were categorized into three levels: housewife, self-employed and full-time employed. Similarly, income was referred to as the total income that respondent earns by herself in a month. It should be noted that the respondent can earn through full-time employment, self-employment or in other ways but all wages were considered as the respondent's income in this study. Age of the women were between the ages of 18 and 60; these age ranges was chosen so that, by Bangladeshi law, women who were aged eighteen and above are considered as adult and are expected to be able to make decisions by themselves. As the religious status, both Hindu and Muslim women were considered in this study.

Data Analysis:

Multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to determine the significant influence of the independent variables on the level of women’s decision-making process. The decision-making power of fifteen variables by the respondents was quantified as the index. The index is defined with the actual positive responses by the respondents towards the decision-making power divided by the highest positive responses. As an example a respondent might have the ability to make the highest score (saying yes=1, otherwise no=0) of 15 from fifteen variables with the positive response towards the decision-making power. The actual score of the variables (decision-making power) was varied from 0 to 15 for each respondent.

Results and Discussion

This study examines the factors (particularly the independent variables) that might affect women’s decision-making power at the household level. In order to examine the overall influence of the independent variables on women’s decision-making power, the study developed a multiple regression model. The decision-making power index (DMPI) was determined to evaluate the multiple linear regression model applying all independent variables which is as follows:

$$DMPI = \frac{\text{Actual score of the level of awareness for each respondent}}{\text{Highest score for each respondent}} \times 100$$

Where,

DMPI= Decision-making power index as the level of empowerment.

The selected independent variables were age, religious status, education, income, occupation, children's education, gender-based inequalities and *Purdah*-related norms. Considering ten independent variables in the multiple linear regression models is presented for perception of the decision-making process as follows:

$$Y (DMPI) = B_0 + B_1 * X_1 + B_2 * X_2 + B_3 * X_3 + B_4 * X_4 + B_5 * X_5 + B_6 * X_6 + B_7 * X_7 + B_8 * X_8 + B_9 * X_9 + B_{10} * X_{10}$$

Where,

B₀= the intercept constant

B₁-B₁₀ = Coefficient of each independent variables

X₁= Age

X₂= Religious status

X₃= Education

X₄= Occupation

X₅= Income

X₆= Total number of children

X₇= Son's dummy education

X₈= Daughter's dummy education

Discussion:

The study examines the factors (particularly the independent variables) that might affect women's decision-making power at the household level. A multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to determine the factors that significantly effects on the level of decision-making power. The results of regression analysis are presented in Table 1. Among ten independent variables four items were significant at two different levels namely: education, occupation, income and gender-based inequalities. These variables significantly affected the variation on the level of decision-making power as well as empowerment. The regression model was found to be significant at two levels: p<0.001 and p<0.05. Among the four independent variables, education, occupation and gender-based inequalities were highly significant at p<0.001. Only respondent's income was significant at p<0.05. The regression coefficient (R square) value was found to be 0.513 which indicates about 51.3 percent of the independent variables were validated in the model. The other variables namely: total number of children, son's educational status, daughter's educational status and *Purdah* were insignificant because t-values and p-values of these variables were shown in the higher level (Table 1). The analysis of variance (ANOVA) from the linear multiple regression shown in Table 8.2 indicated the overall

significant of the model by the F-value which was 34.5 ($P < 0.001$).

However, it can be seen from the findings of the model that women's education has a significant effect on the level of their decision-making power at household level. David (2006) conducted a study on husband-wife innovative consumer decision making. The author hypothesized that a wife will have more influence over the choices perceived to be made by her husband than will he. Education appeared to play a significantly ($p < 0.01$) positive role in raising women's perceptions in decision-making power. Various studies supported the view that educated women are more capable of obtaining a gainful job and it turns, the making an economic contribution to her family (Safilos-Rothschild, 1969; Yavas *et al.*, 1994; Opela 1996).

Similarly, income was found to be significant in the regression model at $p < 0.05$. However, it can be said that there is a strong relationship between education and income. In Bangladesh, better-educated women are more capable of obtaining a gainful job than those who are less-educated. Women's economic contribution to the household makes more it evident for themselves and for their husbands that they should have a say in how the money is spent. In Bangladesh, many studies (Petchesky, 2000; Hadi, 2000) argued that the participation of women in economic activities and their ability to contribute financially to the family can significantly increase their role in the household decision-making process. In a recent study, Mahmuda (2008) stated that income through micro-credit programmes have significant impact in empowering the rural women in Bangladesh.

Gender-based awareness was found to be significant in the regression model at $p < 0.001$. To examine the overall influence of independent variables on respondent's decision-making power, gender-based awareness was entered in the model. However, the results showed that gender-based awareness has a great influence on women's decision-making power. In the results, significant differences were observed among different educational levels of respondent and clearly indicated that well-educated respondents tended to have less gender ideology than the illiterate and low educational level of respondents. In the literature review, many authors (Spiro, 1983; Cassidy *et al.*, 1996; Case *et al.*, 1989; Hobcraft, 1993; Farkas, 1976; Coverman, 1985) supported with this statement that woman who have a lower level of education are more likely to follow the traditional ideology in Bangladesh.

Table 1: The coefficients, t-test, and p-values from regression analysis for decision-making power

Independent variables	Coefficients (Beta)	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
Constant	19.910	3.646	0.000
Age	0.749	1.374	0.170
Religion status	-0.966	-0.310	0.757
Educational status	3.003	5.469	0.000*
Occupation	10.435	6.207	0.000*
Respondent income	2.015	3.056	0.002*
Total number of children	-1.001	-0.463	0.644
Son's dummy education	-1.691	-0.558	0.577
Daughter's dummy education	-0.734	-0.367	0.714

Significant levels: * $p < 0.01$

Table 2: ANOVA for the multiple regression analysis

	Sum of Squares	Degree of freedom	Mean Square	F-value	Sig. (p-value)
Regression	73523.525	10	7352.352	32.025	0.000
Residual	75533.535	329	229.585		
Total	149057.060	339			

R-square: 0.493

Conclusion:

For a happy family, both husband and wife's equal participation in family decision-making are necessary. In rural Bangladesh women decision-making powers are limited to patriarchal ideology. Although in Bangladesh women generally possess low decision making power, resources (Education, occupation, income) effect on women decision-making power in this country. In this context the present research explored the variables that significantly contribute to explaining the variation of the family decision-making pattern of husbands and wives in family. The results of multiple regression analyses in the wives' model showed that education and employment were found to have a positive effect on wives' involvement in family decision-making. The research showed that education, occupation, incomes have significant effect in explaining the variance in household decision-making power. Women's educational attainment, occupation and income were positively related to their decision-making power.

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