

Factors Affecting Participation of Woman in Household Decision Making: Implication for Family Welfare and Agriculture Development

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Introduction

Status and role of women are linked to the cultural practices and social system of the country. Women contribute a significant part of the GDP of a country, yet, they are not treated at par with men in many aspects of life. India ranks 132 out of 187 countries on the gender inequality index—lower than Pakistan (123), according to the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report 2013. In India in spite of six decades of development, rural women continue in the grip of economic dependence, social neglect and political ignorance, preventing them from attaining their due place of society. Though women in rural India participate in economic activities they have little role in decision making particularly in matters related to agriculture and financial matters. Policies on women's empowerment exist at the national, state, and local levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation. However, there are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level. In this paper we have examined the factors which affect women's participation in decision making in different spheres at the household level on the basis of a field study in Muzaffarnagar district in India.

Review of literature: Several studies conducted in India and abroad suggested that in order to increase the role of farm woman in decision making for agricultural production, dairy and other allied activities of technical nature, it is necessary to equip them with latest information so that they can play a vital role in decision making in the family (Puri 1971, Maria Mies et. 1986, Shobha, 1987, Sethi 1991, Wasnik 2006, Kaur 2008, Khalida Jamali 2009, D. *Devendra* & at.el, 2010).

Women in age group of 36-45 years as compared to younger women and belonging to small farms and agricultural labour took decision on important matters as they earn cash income and had control over resources (Jyothi et al, 1999, Punia et al (1991). Division of labour within the household reflected the pattern of authority structure. Women perform a greater part of domestic work and took care of children. They were intensely involved with the maintenance of household. The fact remains that female workers contribute significantly to household income across all farm sizes and their earnings are found crucial for landless and small farm households Yet, the status of female agricultural workers in decision making remains very poor (Sethi 1991). Female agricultural workers contribute significantly to household economy, but they lack education, health and other support services and often do not have access to

economic resources. (Tuteja 2000).The major decision makers in agricultural activities are men even though women perform more agricultural related activities than men. Even they are not consulted at the time of purchase of animals and change of crops (Nishu Bala, 2010).

The traditional role of women as a home works remained unaltered. Decision making pattern regarding farm affairs revealed it to be more or less male domain. Farm women showed low level of participation in household decision making (Hussain and et. al, 2011). A more comprehensive strategy can enable women to access community resources, to challenge traditional norms and to access economic resources. This will lead the women to be more autonomous in decision making in the due course (Acharya and et. al, 2010). The household socio-economic factors that encouraged high women contributions to farm decision making were their number of years of formal education and farming experience, financial contributions to household farming activities, number of hours spent in the farm, and farm size A. (Enete and Amusa ,2010).

Empowerment of women educationally and financially (giving them more access to resources) and awareness of men on gender issues should be intensified and given utmost priority in the study area and the country at large if the clamour to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs 1 and 3- i.e. reduce poverty by half and ensure gender equity by 2015) is anything to go by (Oluwatayo, 2009, Pervaiz, and et. al 2012).Rural women in Bangladesh belong to the most deprived section of the society facing adverse conditions in terms of social oppression and economic inequality, a visible majority of them being extremely poor (Parveen, and Leonhäuser ,2001). Women are less likely than men to own land or livestock, adopt new technologies, use credit or other financial services, or receive education or extension advice. In some cases, women do not even control the use of their own time (FAO, 2010-11). Very few studies on decision-making at the household level have been conducted in countries of the Near East region. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to make conclusive statements regarding who makes decisions and in which areas. However, since family structures for the majority of the households in the region are male-headed and patriarchal, one could infer that men generally control decision-making, although in many situations, decisions are often made jointly (as in Morocco, for example, where 75% of women surveyed consulted with men prior to attending extension meetings) (FAO,2000).

Women's autonomy in decision making is associated with her ethnicity, deprivation level, urban/rural classification, education, and number of living children (Kabeer N, 2004).Considering this scenario; this paper investigates the nature and extent of rural women's empowerment and factors influencing it. The paper further outlines a strategic framework for enhancing rural women's empowerment. Evidence from other developing countries showed that women's age and family structure are the strongest determinants of women's authority in decision making.

Data Source and Methodology

The study seeks to examine the role and participation of women of the cultivating households in decision making and to examine the socio-economic factors which determine female participation in decision making in household activities.

The paper is based on a field study in 2006-07 (Agricultural year) in the agriculturally progressive western region of Uttar Pradesh. A multi-stage random sampling design has been used for the selection of the sample households. In the first stage one district from Western region of U.P., namely, Muzaffarnagar was selected purposely keeping the cropping pattern in mind. It is predominantly sugarcane growing district. In the second stage two blocks were purposely selected from district on the same criterion. In the third stage, two villages have been randomly selected from the selected blocks. In the final stage we selected 30 cultivating households randomly for field survey from each village representing the different size classes of land holdings, namely, marginal, small, medium and large cultivators. Thus, our total sample consists of 120 farm households. The study will particularly focus on the western region of Uttar Pradesh. The region has been selected, as it is a prosperous agricultural region, which is referred to as the food and sugar basket of Uttar Pradesh. This region contributes about 45 per cent of all food grain production and nearly 60 per cent of sugar production in the state. At the same time studies show that the status of women continues to be relatively poor in the region. Census data also show a very low level of female work participation in this region, which appears to be a serious underestimate since women have been participation in various farm operations and upkeep of livestock in the region traditionally. With decline in size of holding the participation of household women in agricultural operation has also increased.

Information from the selected households was collected with the help of detailed survey schedule. Data on various aspects of socio-economic conditions of the households, their income levels, cropping pattern, female participation in agricultural and allied activities and domestic work and other related dimensions was collected personally by the researcher with the help of the detailed structured schedule. Information was collected from the head of the household and his wife or daughter in law as required. Data was processed using the SPSS and STATA packages. Multiple regression analysis has been used to examine the determinants of female participation in household decisions.

Hypotheses of the Study

Women's decision making power is expected to be higher in small farmers' household as compared to large farm households. There is positive relationship between decision making power of women and age

of the women and status of women in the family. Level of education also positively affect the decision making power of women. Higher work participation has a favorable impact on the status of women in the family and their role in decision-making.

Participation in Decision Making On Different Aspects

(1) Participation in Decision Making in Domestic Activities

Our survey revealed that farm women in the study region play a significant role in decision making related to domestic matters (Table 1). Around 51 per cent women said that family members mostly agree with them in decisions related to domestic affairs. Around 6 percent women stated that they have taken final decision in these matters and 26 percent women said that male members did not agree much with her decisions. Generally, in matters like decoration of house, purchase of domestic goods, making of chulla/chakki, etc. it is the women of the household who take the main decisions. But in matters related to construction of new house, renovation of old house or whitewashing of house, in less than 50 percent cases decision is taken with consent of female members of the house. The extent of participation of women in case of matters related to education of children, going child school's functions and others women and child development programmes was not so high.

Table 1: Participation in Decision Making By Women in Domestic/Child Related Activities

Type of Activity	No Participation	Only Opinion Asked	To Some extent	To a large extent	Final Decision	Total
Purchase of Food Items	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	10 (8.33)	102 (85.00)	8 (6.67)	120 (100.00)
Buying Domestic Goods	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	112 (93.33)	8 (6.67)	120 (100.00)
Home Decoration	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	8 (6.67)	104 (86.67)	8 (6.67)	120 (100.00)
New House Construction	1 (0.83)	6 (5.00)	64 (53.33)	43 (35.83)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Renovation of Old House	1 (0.83)	5 (4.17)	56 (46.67)	51 (42.50)	7 (5.83)	120 (100.00)
Education of Children	2 (1.67)	19 (15.83)	55 (45.83)	38 (31.67)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Child/Women Development Programmes	0 (0.00)	39 (32.50)	56 (46.67)	19 (15.83)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Going to children's School Functions	0 (0.00)	88 (73.33)	6 (5.00)	20 (16.67)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Total	4 (0.56)	30 (15.52)	193 (26.67)	450 (50.94)	43 (5.73)	960 (100.00)

Source: Based on primary data

(2) Participation in Decision Making in Money Related Matters

Participation of women is much less in money related matters. Only one third women respondents said that their advice is listened to in money related matters such as buying and sale of different item, taking debt for domestic needs, and expenditure on different item and insurance and investment matters (Table 2). Another one third respondents said that they are consulted to some extent. Only 5 percent women take decision independently on these matters. These women belong to families in which women are head of the family or the male member is working outside the village.

Table 2: Participation in Decision Making of Women in Money Related Matters

Money Related Matters	No Participation	Only Opinion Asked	To Some extent	To a large extent	Final Decision	Total
Buying and Sale of Different Item	0 (0.00)	24 (20.00)	40 (33.33)	50 (41.67)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Taking Debt for Domestic Needs	0 (0.00)	33 (27.50)	47 (39.17)	34 (28.33)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Expenditure on Different Item	0 (0.00)	38 (31.67)	25 (20.83)	51 (42.50)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Giving Loans	6 (5.00)	46 (38.33)	35 (29.17)	27 (22.50)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Saving and Investment	16 (13.33)	32 (26.67)	41 (34.17)	25 (20.83)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Total	22 (3.67)	173 (28.83)	188 (31.33)	187 (31.17)	30 (5.00)	600 (100.00)

Source: Based on primary data

(3) Participation in Decision Making in Agriculture Related Matters

Table 3 shows the participation of women in decision making in agricultural related matters such as the purchase of agricultural implements, seeds, fertilizers and insecticides. Mostly decision in agriculture related matters are taken by male members. Less than one third women respondents said that their opinion is given weight in these matters. About 31 percent respondents said that they do not participate in decision making in these matters. Another 34 percent said that they are merely informed or consulted to some extent. However, in case of buying or selling of animals the participation of women in decision making is significant as mostly they take care of domestic animals.

Table 3: Participation in Decision Making in Agriculture Related Matters

Agricultural Related Matters	No Participation	Only Opinion Asked	To Some extent	To a large extent	Final Decision	Total
Purchase of Machinery	68 (56.67)	12 (10.00)	12 (10.00)	22 (18.33)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Purchase and sale of Animals	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	39 (32.50)	75 (62.50)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)

Purchase and Sale of Land	2 (1.67)	58 (48.33)	16 (13.33)	38 (31.67)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Sale of Agricultural Output	17 (14.17)	39 (32.50)	20 (16.67)	38 (31.67)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Type of Seed Sowing	69 (57.50)	12 (10.00)	11 (9.17)	22 (18.33)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Use Fertilizer	69 (57.50)	13 (10.83)	10 (8.33)	22 (18.33)	6 (5.00)	120 (100.00)
Total	225 (31.25)	134 (18.61)	108 (15.00)	217 (30.14)	36 (5.00)	720 (100.00)

Source: Calculation is based on primary data

(4) Freedom of Women to Go Outside Home

We probed the issue further by asking the extent of freedom of movement for different purposes. The responses are summarized in Table 4. More than 50 percent women said that they have to take permission to go to hospital, visit relatives, and attend social function or to go to market. However, nearly 32 percent women responded that they just inform family elders while going out. Thus, women enjoy limited autonomy in deciding about their movement outside home. However, the degree of freedom also depends upon the age of women and her position in family. Restrictions on movements are greater for young daughters and daughter-in-laws as compared to elderly women.

Table 4: Distributions of Female Respondents According to Freedom to Go Outside Home by Purpose of Visit

Purpose of Visit	Have To Obey	Have to Take Permission	Have to Inform Only	Can Go Out As they Wish	Total
Go to Hospital/Doctor	1 (0.83)	71 (59.17)	44 (36.67)	4 (3.33)	120 (100.00)
Go to Social Function	7 (5.83)	73 (60.83)	39 (32.50)	1 (0.83)	120 (100.00)
Purchase something for Herself	7 (5.83)	74 (61.67)	38 (31.67)	1 (0.83)	120 (100.00)
Go to Market	1 (0.83)	72 (60.00)	44 (36.67)	3 (2.50)	120 (100.00)
Go Outside Village For Work	1 (0.83)	74 (61.67)	42 (35.00)	3 (2.50)	120 (100.00)
Total	17 (2.83)	364 (60.67)	207 (34.50)	12 (2.00)	600 (100.00)

Source: Based on primary data

(5) Factors Affecting Decision Making Power of Women

There are many factors which affect the decision making power of women such as age of women, size of the family, size of land holdings, women's participation in agricultural and other work, etc. Household decision making was associated with the size of land holding and age of the women. Women's decision

making power is expected to be higher in small farmers' household as compared to large farm households. If a woman is aged or head of family as grandmother, mother-in-law, mother, her advice is taken, but daughter-in-law or daughter are not expected to exercise independent decision making. Size of family and type of family also affect the women decision making power. In nuclear families men and women jointly take decision but in joint family decision are taken mostly taken by male head of household. Level of education also affects women decision making power. If woman is educated and she is economically active in any work then her decision making power is higher as compared to illiterate or non working women.

Decision Making Index (DMI)

To analyze women's decision making power we have constructed a Decision Making Index (DMI). The index covers 34 types of activities on which women were asked to indicate the extent of their participation in decision making. Women with no participation in the decision making were given zero score. Score of one was given if women were only informed about decision. A score of two score was given if women's opinion was given some weight. A score of three was given if women participated in decision making and a score of four was given if the women took decisions independently.

The Decision Making Index is computed as follows: Decision making score obtained by a woman / maximum possible score of farm women * 100

The DMI score was grouped as low (0-40), medium (40-70) and high (70-100) based on range of DMI score. The details of the results are presented in Table 5. It is observed from the table that more than 70 percent farm women fall in the medium category in decision making index (DMI Score 41 to 70). Only 20.8 percent farm women were in the high category of DMI (DMI score 70-100).

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by Decision Making Index

DMI Score	Muzffarnagar
Low (0-40)	5(4.17)
Medium (41-70)	90(75.00)
High (71-100)	25(20.83)
Total	120(100.00)

Source: Based on primary data

Nine determinants of decision making power were selected for analysis, namely, family size, head of the family, age of women, education level of women, migration status of husband, work status of women, caste, farm size and annual family income. The influence of these variables on the decision making power of women was analyzed with the help of correlation and regression analysis.

Regression Analysis: Regression analysis confirms our findings (Table 6). Thus, age and Person days spent on agriculture are found to have a strong positive impact on DMI, while family income has a negative impact. Caste, status of women in family and education has an expected positive impact on DMI, but regression coefficients are not significant. Size of family also has a negative impact, but not statistically significant. The value of R square is 0.28. This indicates that the factors determining women participation in decision making are quite complex and depend upon a number of socio-economic factors including traditional social and cultural values.

Table 6: Linear Regression between DMI and Socio-Economic Variables Dependent Variable=Decision Making Index (DMI)

Independent Variable	Coefficient	Std. Err.	T value	P>t
Constant	20.292890	7.016450	2.890	0.004
Age	0.640798	0.090154	6.110***	0.000
Caste	2.199857	2.029740	1.080	0.280
Head of the Family	1.602343	1.171908	1.570*	0.173
Education	0.821884	0.582760	1.410	0.160
Size of family	-0.506255	0.381336	-1.330	0.186
Household Income	-0.000013	0.000006	-2.310**	0.022
Spending Man days in Ag.	0.006194	0.001291	5.800**	0.000

No. of observations=120, F (7, 232) =14.37, Adj R-squared=0.3814

Conclusion

To conclude, it appears that women in the study area do not enjoy a high degree of autonomy in decision making in the family in spite of their significant contribution to economic activities. Only in purely domestic matters like decoration of house, purchase of domestic goods, making of chulla/chakki, marriage of children, etc. Women are given freedom to take their own decisions. But in matters related to children's education and occupation and money related matters they enjoy limited freedom. The movement of women outside home is also restricted. Thus, the patriarchic forms of decision making and dominance over women still continue in the study area. These attitudes have to undergo a change before women are able to fully enjoy the autonomy as an individual. Education and improvement in their economic independence will help in increasing women's involvement in decision-making in family.

There is no doubt that women are in many cases more constrained as compared to men in their access to productive resources, such as land, credit, or information. These problems are severe and should not be downplayed. Female empowerment can yield positive spillover effects for other household members. This effect is well documented for various regions and different social contexts particularly for children who benefit in terms of health, nutrition, and education. It has been observed that increased male

incomes and dominance in the family often leads to conspicuous consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and other goods. In contrast, increased female incomes and high decision making power leads to lower fertility levels, better family health and higher nutritional level for the family members etc. On the other hand Women play a vital role as agricultural producers and as agents of food and nutritional security. Gender equalities leads to more food being grown, more income being earned, and lower levels of poverty and food security. Gender equality is important in its own right. Development is a process of expanding freedoms equally for all people-male and female. Closing the gap in well-being between males and females is as much a part of development as is reducing income poverty. Greater gender equality also enhances economic efficiency and improves other development outcomes.

Government agencies working in the field of agricultural and rural development should consciously focus on women workers as a special category. They should be provided proper training in agriculture and animal husbandry to improve their efficiency and knowledge. Steps are to be taken to ensure the access of rural women to agricultural and livestock extension services and support mechanisms and facilities.

Suggestions & Policy Recommendations

As our study has shown women's status in cultivating households remains low in all social, economic, and political indicators. This will require a change in the patriarchal values and concerted efforts by the civil society and the government for empowerment of women. We would like to make the following suggestions for the betterment of women folk:

One of the most important measures to empower the rural women would be to give them ownership right on land along with their husbands, which should be duly recorded in land records. This will not only make them economically empowered, but will also help them to get credit for productive work. Government agencies working in the field of agricultural and rural development should consciously focus on women workers as a special category. They should be provided proper training in agriculture and animal husbandry to improve their efficiency and knowledge. Steps are to be taken to ensure the access of rural women to agricultural and livestock extension services and support mechanisms and facilities. Women in female headed households and women with disability should be provided credit on soft terms by banks and other financial institutions for agriculture and livestock, setting up their own business, house building, etc. Education programme focusing on adult rural women should be undertaken to make them literate and improve their knowledge base to discharge their economic and domestic duties efficiently. Women should be provided larger representation in programmes dealing with rural and agricultural development so that they can pay greater attention to women. Programmes should be developed exclusively for women to build leadership skills for managing agricultural community based development activities.

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